

The Review of International and National Efforts to Foster Inclusive Education: Implications for Preservice Teacher Education

Kapsayıcı Eğitimi Teşvik Edici Uluslararası ve Ulusal Çabaların İncelenmesi: Öğretmen Eğitimi Üzerine Çıkarımlar

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Abstract

Inclusion and diversity have recently been among the significant concerns of the countries, and education of all children equally with their physical, mental, emotional, and social diversities in inclusive settings are topical issues in many countries. This article aims to display the efforts to foster inclusion in international and national contexts and discuss the implications of these efforts. As the examined literature and current efforts indicated, inclusive education has flourished and been supported in recent years, especially in European and American schools, due to the efforts put in for about a century. As a natural reflection of these efforts, teacher education in many countries has also been reframed, considering the notion of inclusiveness. In Turkey, the issue of inclusion has been documented through regulations for many decades; however, only in recent years has worthwhile attention been given by policymakers, educational researchers, and practitioners.

Keywords: *Inclusion, diversity, inclusive education, special education.*

Öz

Kapsayıcılık ve farklılıklar; tüm çocukların fiziksel, zihinsel, duygusal ve sosyal farklılıklarıyla eşit şekilde eğitim görmesi son yıllarda ülkelerin gündeminde olan en mühim konular arasındadır. Bu makale, uluslararası ve ulusal bağlamlarda kapsayıcılığı -diğer bir ifadeyle kaynaştırmayı- teşvik etme konusunda atılan adımları incelemeyi ve bu çabaların sonuçlarını tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. İlgili alan yazın ve kaynaştırma konusunda yapılanlar incelendiğinde, kaynaştırmanın Avrupa ve Amerika okullarında yaklaşık bir asırdır gösterilen çabalar sayesinde daha etkili bir şekilde uygulanmaya başlandığı görülmektedir. Bu çabaların doğal bir yansıması olarak, birçok ülkede öğretmen eğitimi de kapsayıcılık çerçevesinde yeniden şekillendirilmiştir. Türkiye'de kaynaştırma, onlarca yıldır yönetmeliklerle desteklenmiştir; ancak, yalnızca son yıllarda politika yapıcılar, eğitim araştırmacıları ve uygulayıcılar tarafından konuya kayda değer bir ilgi gösterilmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Kaynaştırma, farklılıklar, kapsayıcı eğitim, özel eğitim.*

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Introduction

Every day more and more children with different characteristics are included in regular classrooms. Besides the children with disabilities, other children have differences concerning culture, language, ethnicity, race, familial background, religion, and even worldview. With the effects of multiculturalism, internationalism, globalism, and immigration, diversities are rising daily. Because all children have the right to education and should be equally provided regarding their needs and interests, inclusive education has become crucial for many countries. Educational researchers and policymakers have more often used inclusion and inclusive education. To understand the efforts for inclusion, it is essential to first look at the definitions. By the author of this paper, inclusion is described as including diverse types of students in the same educational setting and presenting equal learning opportunities regarding individual differences. Similarly, Dare and Nowicki (2018, p. 243) claimed that “in inclusive environments that support diversity, individualized support should be provided to students with unique learning needs, including students who have special needs.” Moran (2007) also specified that inclusion is related to human rights; respecting differences, providing equality, and social justice should be part of inclusive actions.

Moreover, for the inclusive educational setting, Connor and Cavendish (2020) stated that students with diverse and specific needs get an education with their peers in the regular classrooms “as the first placement option to be considered.” Lastly, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined inclusive education as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education (2005, p.13).” Looking at these definitions, we understand that teachers become the key players in the success of inclusive education. Teachers having a positive attitude towards inclusion make difference. Therefore, they need to be trained during preservice years to develop not only skills for teaching them but also positive attitudes for diversity of students.

On the other hand, inclusive actions are not only limited to teachers or teacher trainers. Still, all relevant stakeholders' proactive attempts and endeavors are required, including politicians, policymakers, teacher educators, parents, and other appropriate parties. In this respect, this paper aims to present the efforts and attempts taken in the international and national arena to foster the inclusion of diverse students and make implication for preservice teacher education to train inclusive teachers. Reviewing these efforts and implications for teacher education might shed light on the future steps for welcoming diversities.

Inclusion in the International Context

Knowing and understanding the efforts and actions concerning inclusion is crucial to better grasp the value put on the inclusion and evaluate whether those actions have been effectively practiced in real life. Therefore, the development of inclusion at an international level is summarized chronologically below to understand better how inclusive education has come to the agendas of many countries in the world. These shared efforts for spreading equity and social justice have provided a common ground for inclusion and affected, more or less, the approaches, regulations, and applications concerning inclusive education.

In 1924, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child emphasized children's rights. United Nations accepted the extended version of this declaration in 1959. In 1948,

the United Nations General Assembly was held in Paris, and the assembly announced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the declaration, Article 26 mentioned: "Everyone has the right to education." This statement might be accepted as reflecting the philosophy behind inclusion. Moreover, in 1960, UNESCO held the Convention against Discrimination in Education. The primary aim of the convention was to fight discrimination in education. The years from 1983 to 1992 were accepted as the Decade of Disabled Persons by the UN General Assembly as part of the World Programme for Action Concerning Disabled Persons formulated in 1982, the International Year of Disabled Persons (United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, n.d. & World Programme of Action, n.d.). In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child again presented children's rights and focused on the importance of their viewpoints and a non-discriminatory environment.

In the 1990s, several necessary steps were taken in terms of inclusion. In the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, the existence of individuals suffering from learning inequalities was emphasized, and the leading reasons causing learning inequalities among individuals were pointed out as poverty, gender, religious ideas, language, location, ethnicity, and disabilities. It was also highlighted: "In all nations, the disadvantaged children are the least likely to be ready for or enroll in, and the most likely to drop out of, learning programs (UNESCO, 1990, p.43)." Moreover, the World Declaration on Education for All was adopted at the conference, and the strategies and policies to improve education for all people were outlined (UNESCO, 1994a).

Then, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities were set out by the UN General Assembly in 1993 and comprised twenty-two rules about all phases of the lives of disabled people. Despite not being legally binding, these standard rules stood for the allegiance of the participating governments to step into action in terms of providing equal opportunities for the disabled. The sixth rule on education stated integrating students with disabilities people in inclusive classrooms and making their education part of the educational system. The law also mentioned providing education and supporting teachers (Standard Rules on the Equalization, n.d.). Following these rules, in 1994, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education was declared by UNESCO. Moran (2007, p.120) described the Statement as "the single most powerful influence at national and international level for stimulating change in respect of inclusive education." In the preface of the Statement, it was suggested:

Special needs education – an issue of equal concern to countries of the North and the South – cannot advance in isolation. It has to form part of an overall educational strategy and new social and economic policies. It calls for significant reform of the ordinary school (UNESCO, 1994b, p. iii).

To the Salamanca Statement, 92 governments and 25 international organizations signed up. The Statement highlighted the necessity of providing education for all children without looking at their physical, social, cultural, ethnic, economic, intellectual, or other characteristics at regular schools. The curricula of the common schools should consider this diversity and respond to children's individual learning needs. Concerning inclusive education, the following important points were mentioned:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and, ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (UNESCO, 1994b, p. viii).

More recently, another critical step towards inclusion was the Education for All Movement (EFA), which was started at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. In total, 164 governments promised to reach Education for All and meet six agreed educational goals by 2015 (Education for All Movement, n.d.). These goals were mainly related to meeting the educational needs of disadvantaged children, providing equal learning opportunities for all young people and adults, improving adult literacy by 50%, preventing gender discrepancies, and increasing the quality of education to succeed in especially literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills. In the forum, the Dakar Framework for Action was also adopted concerning the commitment of participating governments to achieve education for all goals (UNESCO, 2000).

Apart from these, on the international level, in 2006, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was held by United Nations to protect the rights and dignity of individuals with disabilities besides laying out the code of implementation (Convention on the Rights of Persons, n.d.). United Nations General Assembly accepted the treaty of the Convention in 2006, and it has now, as of February 2016, 160 signatories and 161 parties (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). European Union also approved it in 2010. Article 24 of the convention emphasizes that disabled people should be provided inclusive education at all levels through adequate individualized support. As an essential part of the convention, for the current study, also accentuates training and employing teachers and education professionals who are qualified for inclusive education at all levels.

When education in the US was examined, we see that education of special needs children and their inclusion are very recent issues, although special education programs existed before. These programs only became obligatory in 1975 with *the Education for All Handicapped Children Act*. The US National Council on Disability (National Council on Disability, 2000) described the situation at schools before the federal precautions were taken as follows:

...schools in America educate only one in five students with disabilities. More than 1 million students were excluded from public schools, and another 3.5 million did not receive appropriate services. Many states had laws excluding sure students, including those who were blind, deaf, or labeled "emotionally disturbed" or "mentally retarded." ...The likelihood of exclusion was greater for children with disabilities living in low-income, ethnic and racial minority, or rural communities (p.6).

Upon this scene, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was accepted by the US Congress when there were more than eight million children with disabilities. The act made the public schools offer equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities and granted federal funds to these schools. Evaluation of children with disabilities and parental involvement were also mentioned to formulate an inclusive plan for the education of those children like their non-disabled peers (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975).

In 1990, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was updated and accepted as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. The IDEA is "a United States federal law that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities (IDEA, n.d.)." The primary purpose of IDEA is to allow all students to access a free and suitable public education in the least restrictive environment. Furthermore, schools are to design and use Individualized Education Programs for school children with disabilities; participation of parents and teachers is emphasized, and appropriate assessment tools should be developed. The IDEA was revised and amended in 1997 and 2004. Final changes were

made in 2006, 2011, and 2013. Anderson and Cousik (2015, pp. 7-14) well summarized “the core tenets of IDEA” as follows: Parent and student participation in all decision making, due process, zero reject/child find, accessible and appropriate public education, non-discriminatory identification and evaluation, least restrictive environment, individualized education, transition services, related services, discipline, disability categories, response to intervention, and evidence-based practices.

Other significant developments concerning the education of people with disabilities were as follows: The Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, aiming to prevent discrimination based on disability, No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 to increase the academic performance of all children involving disabled, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009 providing 12.2 billion dollars for special education. Recently, in the USA, nearly 96% of students with disabilities have been attending regular schools. They are also supported by a qualified special education teacher at certain times in their school day. There are effectively-functioning centers, associations, or organizations to support special education, such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), which also provides “more in-depth information about special education and disability” (Anderson & Cousik, 2015) besides offering essential support for “improving the educational success of individuals with disabilities and gifts and talents” (CEC, n.d.). Moreover, it is emphasized by the US Department of Education: “having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom maximizes every child’s potential to learn (US Department of Education, 2010, p.2).” The definition of *highly qualified* involves having a bachelor’s degree, full licensure, and subject-area competence. Therefore, the preparation of teachers for the effective inclusion of children is underlined in the USA. Within this respect, the current study aims to examine how effective teachers are educated in schools of education to teach diverse types of students, including the ones with disabilities. As aforementioned, there is a need to consider on the effectiveness of these rules, declarations, acts and see their reflections in the educational context. Though they signify the given importance of inclusion and inclusive education on behalf of world countries, putting them into action is more essential for successful inclusion.

Special Education and Inclusion in Turkey

The constitution of the Republic of Turkey announces in Article 42 that “No one shall be deprived of the right of learning and education” and “the state shall provide scholarships and other means of assistance to enable students of merit lacking financial means to continue their education.” The law also includes the education of special-needs students: “the state shall take necessary measures to rehabilitate those in need of special training to render such people useful to society” (The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982). In these laws, people with disabilities are protected by the government throughout their education. In the Basic Law of National Education in Turkey, the Basic Principles of Turkish National Education are described, and the following principles are stated about equality, educational rights, and education for all (Basic Law of National Education, 1973):

- **Generality and Equality:** Educational institutions are open to all regardless of race, sex, or religion.
- **Needs of the Individuals and Society:** The services of Turkish education are arranged considering the needs of the individual and society.
- **Right to Basic Education:** Every Turkish citizen has the right to basic education.
- **Equal Opportunities and Facilities:** Everybody has equal educational opportunities, including women and men. Successful children with financial

difficulties are helped throughout their education. Necessary precautions are taken to educate the children with special needs and children in need of protection.

Turkey's education of students with disabilities dates back to 1921, when a private school for children with disabilities was founded in Izmir. This school was under the control of the Ministry of Health and Social Aid. In 1951, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) accepted to provide services for special education, and new schools were opened for special needs students (Melekoglu et al., 2009). However, in such schools, the children were excluded from their peers have special education. In 1955, the first Guidance and Research Center was opened to diagnose and guide children with disabilities and their families. Today, there are more than 200 centers in different regions of Turkey, and these centers also help schools conduct effective and efficient counseling and guidance services (MoNE, 1997). They are responsible for evaluating students' needs, interests, and abilities (Senel, 1998). Besides the foundation of the Guidance and Research Center, in the 1950s, several measures were also taken for the betterment of special education, such as inviting experts from the US and establishing a test and research bureau, the foundation of a special education teacher training program (Melekoglu et al., 2009). It should be noted that there were no trained professionals to provide special education in those years, and the first established special education teacher training department in Gazi University, open in the 1953-1954 academic year, was closed after a year.

In the 1980s, the General Directorate of Special Education, Guidance, and Counseling Services was founded as part of the Ministry of Education. Then, based on the constitution, the principles, and the international developments, as mentioned above, the inclusion of special needs children at regular schools was enacted by the Turkish government in 1983 with *the Law on Children that Need Special Education* (law no. 2916). This law aims to state the rules so that these children are provided education in line with the basic principles of Turkish National Education, have jobs, and adapt to their environment and society (MoNE, 1983). In this law, these children were included as follows: "Necessary measures are taken to educate children who need special education with their normal peers at regular schools opened for the education of normal children (p. 743)." This law became the starting point for inclusive education in Turkey, and it has been widely implemented together with the *Decree Law on Special Education* (No. 573), enacted in 1997. The law is vital as it highlights the importance of educating special students at regular schools, preparing individualized education plans, and parental involvement in inclusion (MoNE, 1997). In this law, inclusion is defined as the educational settings developed to provide interaction of the individuals who need special education with others and achieve the educational objectives at the highest level. Article 12 also mentions the inclusion of special needs people and instructional methods to be used as follows:

The education of special needs individuals is maintained with their peers at all types and levels of schools and institutions in line with the prepared individualized educational plan and appropriate methods and techniques.

Another critical and recent step towards inclusive education is the *Regulation on Special Education Services*, pronounced in 2000 with the recent changes made in 2012 (MoNE, 2012). In the regulation, the Ministry of Education reasserted the aims, principles, and definitions concerning special education and inclusion, responsibilities of teachers, individualized programs, and assessment of student achievement in inclusion. Lastly, in 2010, the General Directorate of Special Education, Guidance, and Counseling Services prepared a guide for managers, teachers, and parents. In this guide, special needs education and inclusive education were described in detail, including descriptions of

disability types, inclusion types (full, partial, and reverse), and practical and valuable suggestions for school managers, teachers, and families to successfully manage special education and inclusion (MoNE, 2010a).

As seen above, there have been essential attempts to provide successful inclusion at regular schools in Turkey. However, the principles and regulations have not always been practiced effectively due to a lack of enough resources, financial support, and educated experts in special education, although the number of children with disabilities enrolled in regular schools has increased (MoNE, 2010b). Although there is no exact number of all people with disabilities, according to the last statistics gathered nationwide by the Turkish Statistics Institution, more than 12% of the population were officially recorded as “disabled” and have specific disabilities (Engelliler Konfederasyonu, 2020). Moreover, National Education Statistics for the 2014-2015 academic year indicated 17.559.989 students at kindergarten, primary, lower and upper secondary school levels. Of these students, 259282 students have specific disabilities; and 183221 of these are enrolled in regular schools and have education in inclusive classrooms (MoNE, 2015). The percentage of included students might be pleasing, yet some children are disabled but not sent to school, so not been recorded. Still, there are ongoing efforts in Turkey and the international arena to improve opportunities for diverse types of students. Considering that teachers are the key players in the success of inclusive education, these efforts are sustained for training teachers who can teach diverse students effectively.

Implications for Teacher Education

In recent years, Special Education and Inclusive Education have been brought to the agenda in teacher training. For the training of Special Education teachers, there are Special Education teacher education programs under the Schools of Education at universities. Most of the undergraduate programs of teacher education – psychological counseling, elementary, early childhood, and Turkish language teaching programs – have a Special Education course as a compulsory course, and other programs such as English language teaching and secondary science and mathematics teaching have the course as an elective course in their programs (Higher Education Council, n.d.). Last, the Ministry of National Education emphasized teaching and working with students who need special education and responding to the needs of diverse types of students among the general competencies of all teachers (MoNE, 2008). However, the Education Reform Initiative on inclusion report concluded that, despite being a party to international treaties and having its own rules and regulations on inclusion, Turkey has not been successful enough to reflect these well-documented developments into its practices (Education Reform Initiative, 2011).

The existing studies indicate that teachers are vital and critical people for successful inclusion (Dare & Nowicki, 2018; Killoran et al., 2014; Moran, 2007). Therefore, the preparation of teachers through inclusive teacher education programs gains much more importance. Here, specific implications could be mentioned to make teacher education more inclusive based on the abovementioned efforts and reviewed literature. First of all, as the studies showed, a course added to teacher education on inclusion, special education practices, or how to teach diverse types of students could positively affect preservice teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion and increase their teaching skills (Gokdere, 2012). In such a course, preservice teachers could be presented with relevant theories, regulations, and practices. Teaching practicum with diverse types of students might also increase the self-efficacy of teachers (Connor & Cavendish, 2020; Whitaker & Valtiera, 2018). Field trips, school visits, teaching observations, visitors, experts, seminars,

workshops, and panels might be included in the curricula. The courses such as classroom management or educational psychology could be enriched by integrating real-life cases and role-playing, scenarios, and drama into relevant courses. When possible, educational researchers should also study the effect of these components on teacher candidates and teachers. Robinson (2017, p. 178) suggests that inclusive teacher education should have a research-based model to advance.

To sum up, the continuing efforts of nations and increasing numbers of research on inclusion and inclusive education bespeak the importance of fostering inclusiveness in all phases of life. As part of these efforts, the teacher education programs are also reconsidered in terms of their inclusiveness, and teachers who acquire essential knowledge and skills to teach diverse types of students are much more appreciated. This paper might contribute to the existing literature by thoroughly outlining what has been done to provide inclusive education. Besides, it might help teacher educators as practitioners and policymakers redesign their practices and teacher education programs accordingly to bring up more welcoming and inclusive teachers for diverse students in the 21st century. As also claimed by Connor and Cavendish (2020), "When a caring teacher provides them with what they need to learn, they feel supported and more confident to succeed academically (p. 306)."

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Yazar(lar)ın Beyanı

Araştırmacıların katkı oranı beyanı: Araştırmacı çalışmayı tek başına yürütmüştür, tüm katkı yazara aittir.

Etikkurul kararı: Bu makalede sunulan çalışma, derleme bir çalışması olduğundan, etik kurul iznine gerek duyulmamaktadır.

Çatışma beyanı: Araştırmada yazarın diğerkışı/kurum/kuruluşlarla herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

Destek ve teşekkür: Bu araştırma için herhangi bir kurumdan finansal destek alınmamıştır.