

The State of Special Needs in the Iraqi Higher Education Context

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Abstract—This paper delves into a comprehensive investigation of the current situation faced by students with special needs (SSNs) and learning disabilities (LDs) across various educational levels. It aims to shed light on the existing challenges experienced by these learners in primary, secondary, and higher education settings. To ensure the validity of the findings, this study adopts a multi-method approach that combines observation, interviews, and an extensive review of relevant literature in the field. By employing observational techniques, researchers closely observe the daily experiences of SSN students within educational environments. Interviews are conducted with students, teachers, and parents to gain valuable insights into their perspectives and understand the specific difficulties they encounter. In addition, the study thoroughly examines prior scholarly works and research papers related to SSN and LD, enhancing the breadth and depth of the investigation. Upon culmination, this paper presents a set of recommendations directed toward the teaching staff, administrative personnel, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. These suggestions aim to foster an inclusive and supportive educational ecosystem that caters to the unique needs of SSN students. They encompass strategies for curriculum development, teacher training, classroom accommodations, and administrative policies, which collectively contribute to enhancing the learning experience and overall well-being of SSN learners.

Keywords—Higher education, Inclusion, Learning disabilities, Special needs.

I. INTRODUCTION

At present, special need education is a global priority, and educators need to consider inclusion to provide every student with an appropriate education. One definition of inclusion is “Serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom, with appropriate in-class support,” as stated by Roach in 1995, cited in Bennett et al., 1997. According to Foreman in 2008, schools in a child’s local area should be capable of accommodating all students, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities. The philosophy of “Equity in Education” believes that every child has the right to a high-quality education. The significance of providing an appropriate education to all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, is emphasized at various international forums.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is somewhat seen as a block to the cycle that Iraq’s schooling system for understudies with extraordinary

instructive necessities and handicaps was recently overseen by the Service of Work and Parties (Minnesota Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938). According to Gaad (2004), the effectiveness of this dual management is in question as well as from a human rights perspective.

Iraq joined this global movement by enacting and amending a law to protect the rights of people with special needs. People with disabilities’ educational rights were to be governed by this law. The Ministry of Education in Iraq launched a new initiative to incorporate students with special needs (SSNs) into mainstream schools as a direct result of this. Schools did not even take into account students with disabilities before this law, and new regulations were created to oversee the country’s new system. Before this law was passed, schools only accepted students with less obvious disabilities such as learning disabilities (LD) and rejected students with specific disabilities such as Down syndrome and autism. In Iraq as a whole, there is very little research on special needs, let alone on inclusion as a practice. The

educational options available to students with disabilities were the subject of a few papers.

However, there are numerous improvements that need to be implemented to ensure that disabled students receive high-quality education and that the necessary support is available to help them reach their full potential (Zannrni, 2022a). This article discusses the challenges and issues faced by a country that aims to include all students in mainstream education systems after ratifying the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The focus will be on supporting disabled students in higher education, considering the existing laws and regulations. The article examines what can be done to effectively include these students and ensure their participation in decision-making while meeting their needs, as well as the management practices of higher education institutions. Finally, the article concludes with suggestions for future education and training.

III. METHOD

To assess the current status of SSNs in Iraqi higher education, a research methodology was chosen that is suitable for this purpose. Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) suggests that the qualitative approach adopted in this study is more descriptive and provides a comprehensive understanding of even the minutest details. Denzin and Lincoln (2004) state that the qualitative method is intended to offer a detailed and contextualized portrayal of an educational or social phenomenon. This approach was selected because inclusion is both a trend and a phenomenon. In addition, Devatak and Glazar (2010) contend that subjective techniques enable in-depth interviews with the subject under review to enhance the research.

To ensure the validity of the results when using a subjective approach, a triangulation of information-gathering strategies was employed. This included conducting semi-structured interviews, observing situations in real time, and researching the topic through various sources (Zannrni, 2022b). The term "triangulation" is defined as using two or more methods of data collection in the study of human behavior. Three semi-structured interviews, one conversation observation, and a survey of authentic reports from the Nour Foundation were used in this study. The observation method was also used to collect data, allowing for analysis of a situation while it was occurring. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the final method of data collection, as they allowed for questions to be adapted based on the situation at hand. To ensure dependability, semi-structured interviews were conducted either face to face or over the phone. Summary interviews were also conducted to focus on the most significant information, as interviewees often discussed multiple topics. Interviews were conducted after the observation to prevent any influence on the observation.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The most pressing issues regarding SSN in Iraqi higher education are as follows:

Giving unique requirements to understudies and staff in advanced education with training is fundamental. The cognitive development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky have been used in education for a long time. The mental development and learning processes of children have a significant impact on their abilities and learning processes. Instructors are better able to meet each student's individual needs when they have a deeper understanding of the cognitive development process.

Children are capable of self-regulation or the ability to think independently and solve problems without the assistance of others, as stated by Slavin (2003, p. 44). They do this by depending on pieces of information and counsel from peers who have previously embraced the ideal idea. Piaget believed that learning and knowledge develop after improvement.

On the other hand, Vygotsky was of the opinion that children learn through symbolism and history and that learning can begin before a child even develops (Slavin, pp. 30, 43). According to Vygotsky and Cole (1978), children value input from others as well as their own environment.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to teaching SSN; all things considered, experimenting with various learning strategies may be more beneficial to students with SEN. Government schools must therefore fully prepare themselves for inclusion. In addition, secondary schools must have a clearly defined plan for SSN enrollment in postsecondary education. In addition, the majority of students with SEN who enroll in postsecondary education require remedial instruction. These students have a lower likelihood of graduating with a degree or certificate than students who do not require remediation (Wirt et al., 2004).

Most of the speakers addressed uncovered that they had gotten no proper preparation in managing such understudies or educating them. In addition, they stated that showing techniques were established and that "experimentation" was the path to advancement due to successful stories; to deal with such students in the lecture hall, they kind of "played it by ear."

Some of the people who were surveyed said that they relied a lot on their students to "teach" them how to teach. As a specialist, I trust that by vigorously including understudies in the preparation and execution organizes, most of the members effectively finished the experience.

Staff gave proposals for future practice in light of interview information:

A smart board consultant must use the software for educational purposes. For the distribution of resources, a disability institution needs a communication system that works well. And enhances the smart board's operation's functionality. The switch from whiteboards to smart boards is absolutely necessary. The appropriate equipment is required in facilities for disabled individuals. Specialized training in accommodations, learning needs, and other disabilities must be provided. It is necessary to maintain ongoing communication with the faculty regarding the requirements of registered students. The establishment is obligated to conduct an assessment, submit modification

recommendations to advisors, and request feedback from students' advisors following these modifications. Through self-assurance, understudies should figure out how to advocate for themselves. The staff must be informed of the safety and health policy in the event of an emergency or evacuation.

Students who have LD may face various difficulties while moving from high school to college. These disabilities are often known as "hidden disabilities" because they are not physically visible and may not be immediately noticeable in typical social scenarios. As a consequence, the needs of such students are not as easily comprehended or embraced as those of students with more evident impairments, such as visual, hearing, or orthopedic disabilities, as pointed out by Janiga et al.'s references to Getzel and Gugerty in 1996 and 2002.

Due to the differences in education between secondary and postsecondary levels, students with LDs encounter difficulties. As Janiga and Costenbader (2002) cite Lerner (1997), college classes usually have fewer students and less interaction between teachers and students compared to high school. In addition, unlike high school where assignments are short term and frequently graded, college courses often involve long-term projects.

As college students enter a phase where they have more free time and less access to their usual support network of friends and family, their learning experience is impacted. Although all college students may find this transition challenging, those with LDs are particularly vulnerable to failure (Lerner, 1997). For these students, the process of self-evaluation, which includes assessing their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and values, becomes even more difficult, and decision-making can be both challenging and risky (Cummings et al., 2000; Janiga and Costenbader cited by Levinson et al., 2002).

As a result, students with LDs need help in choosing a career path and identifying the particular adjustments they need. In addition, they should learn how to advocate for themselves by effectively communicating their strengths and weaknesses to their professors to receive appropriate accommodations. However, it can be difficult to identify which students require these services. (Cummings et al., 2000 as cited in Janiga et al., 2002; Gajar, 1992 as cited in Janiga et al., 2002).

Before admission, the majority of students with disabilities are referred to postsecondary programs by their parents or by themselves; in any case, a critical number of understudies just report learning hardships whenever they start the school educational program (Gajar, 1992).

The understudies' liabilities likewise rely on how they pick their courses, select the right backings, and evaluate how very much mentioned facilities work. Students should be taught that they must maintain satisfactory academic and social performance to be admitted to postsecondary institutions. According to Shaw, Madaus, and Banerjee, it is, therefore, of the utmost importance for students to comprehend the particular nature of their disabilities as well as the associated legal rights and responsibilities.

The topic under investigation was whether school teachers and university professors held varying beliefs on teaching

SSNs or disabilities. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) argues that teachers' attitudes are pivotal in determining whether such students learn in regular classrooms or not. The participants in the study, who were teachers and advanced education speakers, expressed similar views to those mentioned by Stewart, using phrases such as "those difficult cases" and "the demanding different students in my lecture." Their approach seemed to focus more on the limitations of these students than on their abilities.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding the inclusion policy in Iraq's higher education, a few suggestions are made. The most significant issue is that of lecturers or instructors working with SSNs. To empower the included understudies to get into the educational program and improve their learning results, speakers should prepare for separation and alteration. They have no choice but to adopt the inclusion philosophy and not view it as a job that must be done. Reporting on the progress of the student who is included should be encouraged for better implementation of the individualized educational plan (IEP). In addition, universities and other institutions of higher education should receive sufficient funding to promote inclusion and provide lecturers and students with the resources they may need to succeed. Furthermore, the act of consideration should be improved with the accessibility of staff. Psychologists, speech therapists, teachers' aid, and resource room teachers are examples of such personnel. In addition, the nation does not have precise statistics on special needs. Advanced education will be more ready over the long haul in the event that it is more ready by knowing the number of youngsters that have exceptional necessities. Furthermore, it will empower better financing that is customized to their necessities. Last but not least, a national organization to oversee the provision of services for people with special needs is urgently required.

VI. CONCLUSION

Casey's (1994) research cited in Brusling and Pepin's (2003) study indicates that the custom curriculum was disregarded during the 20th century and then became isolated until the 1960s. While progress toward comprehensive tutoring seems feasible, according to Shalev et al. (2005), it cannot happen in a year, especially in a country where education has been isolated for a long time. Iraq, as a young nation with its own educational system, has supported the rights of persons with special needs policy, which has enabled the integration of special need students in mainstream schools. However, older students' needs must be considered before implementing inclusive education, despite the significant progress made in special needs services.

In conclusion, this study's various data collection methods (interview and observation) demonstrated that SSN acceptance in higher education is positively impacted by Iraq's personnel management system. How to handle those students has been permanently a main concern in the field

of education. However, it was not acknowledged at the university level. Because many lecturers and teachers in Iraq have not known about the issue of SN yet. Policymakers appear to be aware of it, but lecturers and educators are not. It was discovered that there were obstacles to inclusion in higher education. Attitudes toward inclusion continue to be influenced by cultural issues as well as the nature of the disability.

All social groups should benefit from awareness campaigns to change these attitudes. Family roles appeared to shift from non-participatory to partnership with higher education. However, by catering to SSNs and/or disabilities and meeting their needs, special need improvement improves students' learning outcomes. It was found that professional development was a big part of making inclusion work. To make consideration work in advanced education, leaders should give close consideration to preparing and giving particular advisors. A number of recommendations for improving special need services are made in the study. These suggestions pertain to improving the implementation of the special need policies outlined in federal law.

Training for lecturers and teachers must also be much more focused. To serve the included understudies, the country's colleges require specific specialists and advisors. IEPs must be implemented and monitored in higher education institutions as well as at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research level. Another area in which inclusion is essential is differentiation. Based on the individual requirements of the student, adaptation and modification are required.

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