

Special Education in Jordan: Reality and Expectations

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Abstract

Students with special needs started to receive educational services in Jordan in the late 1960s. This paper shows a glance at the education systems in Jordan with its two branches, which are the general and special education. The history of Jordan and its demography were highlighted in order to put children's education in Jordan within its proper framework. Additionally, the education system, both public and private sectors, in Jordan was revised in detail. The most important issues relevant to current procedures and challenges facing the services provided to students with disabilities have been explored. Finally, propositions were presented in order to develop the present situation in the future.

Keywords: General education, special education, educational services in Jordan.

Introduction

The researcher will try to give a general overview about Jordan's education system and special education, in order to provide a backdrop for the area under discussion in the study. This part is distributed into two sectors. The first covers the general educational system of Jordan. The second focuses on the distinctive education essentials in Jordan.

Jordan is the homeland for some of human's oldest civilizations, like Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Pharoanic, Nabateans, and the civilizations of Greece and Rome. Recently, Jordan has been considered to be developing rapidly, with dearth resources. Jordan is roughly 60,000 square miles and is located in the center of Middle East. Jordan and its neighbouring countries are shown on the map in figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1: Map of Jordan (Source: http://urartuttravel.eu/jordan_symbols.html)

Jordan's population is around 6,249.0 million persons of which 3,221.1 million are males and 3,027.9 million females (DoS, 2011). Jordan is a sovereign Arab country and Amman is the capital. The Jordanian people are mostly Muslims and Arabic is the main mother tongue language.

General Education in Jordan

Recently, the educational system in Jordan was reassessed and re-thought in the Education Act of 1994. With regard to Education Act, it has been stipulated that education in Jordan should be built on a set of principles which are theism, human value, rights, and freedom, and all who seek a better life should acquire education by virtue of rights that are based on merits and constitutional rights.

In other words, the roots of the educational principles in Jordan have originated from Arabic Islamic culture. All Jordanians have a right to free public education in accordance with the Jordanian Constitution. In detail, the Jordanian Constitution stipulates free public education starting from 1st to 12th grade, whereas, nursery school and kindergarten are facultative (Al - Hassan, Obeidat, & Lansford, 2010). Furthermore, AlJabery & Zumberg (2008) reported that the Jordanian constitution asserts that education is and should be affordable to everybody, equally, irrespective of gender, language, ethnicity or religion.

Recently, the ministry of education in Jordan imposed teaching children at kindergarten as mandatory, but was limited, which led to the numbers of enrollments being low in comparison with other countries. This was for the reason of the high cost to build and maintain administration of KG schools on the one hand, and lack of alertness and interest of parents in the important values of pre-school education on other hand (MOE, 2012).

Nevertheless, the registration averages for students in elementary, middle and high schools are relatively high compared with other countries in the Middle East. This mentality stems from parents' realization of the importance of education in improving the good future for their children. Jordan put about 12% of its budget into education (MOE, 2012).

In 2011/2012 the number of schools in Jordan amounted to 6181 according to the statistics of the Ministry of Education (MOE). Moreover, there were 106403 teachers who provided educational services for around 1690172 students (MOE, 2012).

Additionally, schools in Jordan are divided into two types: public and private schools. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education the number of the schools in Jordan amounts to 6172. The Ministry of Education administered about 56% of them, whereas 40% were through private enterprises. Furthermore, The UNRWA administered about 3% of them, while the other governmental bodies managed 1%, like the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Social Development (MOE, 2012), as shown in figure 1.2.

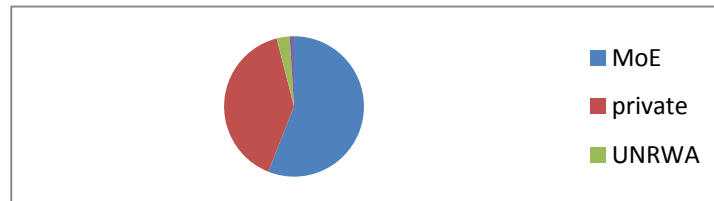


Figure 1.2: Distribution of schools, kindergarten and students by controlling authority 2011-2012.

Schools in Jordan

In Jordan the instructional system starts from Kindergarten to twelfth grade across three different stages, which are elementary, middle and high school. The elementary and middle schools cover from grades 1-10. The education in these grades is free and compulsory for all Jordanian students. At the end of the tenth grade the scores of the midterms of each student are combined and averaged to determine which secondary track (stream) students will carry on. There are two choices that good or bad scores dictate. The ones with good scores will go to college and those who have a low average will attend vocational schools. Usually, the students' academic achievements decide their destinations.

In other words, secondary phase (grades 11 and 12) is divided into two main streams, one being an academic stream. This stream ends with a government-designed educational examination called Tawjihi. The other is the applied (vocational) stream which consists of specialized vocational sequences and prepares students for work in the outside world (labour force) through internship programs, which are run by the Vocational Training Corporation and the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2008). Minorities enroll in the army or the marine.

Higher Education

In 1951, Higher education began in Jordan: it has been evolving constantly since that time. The first public university in Jordan, The Jordan University, was established in 1962. Other Jordanian universities have been founded ever since. Since this time the Ministry of Higher Education has administered all of these universities (MOHE, 2009).

According to MOHE 2009 statistics, there were 219,277 undergraduate students, and 17,543 graduate students. In addition, there were 28,351 students in community public colleges (MOHE, 2009).

Glance at core knowledge inside the instructional systems

Education policies and goals in Jordan are to attain an inclusive harmony in pedagogical programmes and practices in the hope that students are prepared and supported with particular cognitive skills, appropriate traineeship and affirmative attitudes toward a better future in a knowledge-based world. The academic and personal management are core skills that compose a knowledge-based world. In the past there were two substantial facets which needed to evolve: human activity and thought (MOE, 2008).

However, due to modern developments which were conducted in the world King Abdullah II decided Jordan would turn into an international technology centre in the area. For this reason, a modern vision for education was initiated by the MOE in Jordan. In this context, the MoE has started evolving thorough planning strategies that are based on scientific method and approaches, universal preferable experiences, effective employment modern technology, and enhancement of social involvement. This reform activity in instructional systems expects that it provides for each learner the experience of mastery, and depends on human-beings efforts to participate in the community in a significant manner (MOE, 2008).

Based on the vision of King Abdullah II, learners in Jordan are educated in the essential knowledge and proficiencies to work and elaborate their endeavour for the human world.

Special education needs in Jordan

In the late of the 19th century, learning for exceptional children started in Jordan by the local churches at that time. It was clear that these services were mainly focused on people who were visually impaired and deaf - those who had disabilities which were obviously physical instead of related to learning (Hadidi, 1998).

In 1979, the first national survey of exceptional people was conducted in Jordan. Over 18,000 people with disabilities were determined, and in 1996 this number increased up to 55,000. The most predominant classes were physical disability and hearing impairment, 60% and 19% respectively (Hadidi, 1998).

This can be attributed to the increment of population, and also due to injuries of civil wars and other natural disasters (Turmusani, 1999). However, Hadidi (1998) explained that this report excluded many cases of disability like behaviour disorders and learning difficulties. This returns to main reasons, which were because numerous parents abstained on given exact information on the one hand, and on the other there was a lack of reference made to particular categories.

In a similar vein, Turmusani (1999) emphasised that predominantly these surveys comprised open-ended questions and socio-cultural values played a part in defining disability in the answers by individuals of a family. In fact, cultural and social views are considered as an important aspect in the social lives of Jordanian people; families usually camouflage and hide disability because they do not want to be associated with the stigma of disabilities. As a result families of the disabled were overwhelmed with the feeling of shame; hence most Jordanian

families did not report disabilities, fearing scrutiny and shame which in return affects the accuracy of the disabilities numbers.

According to Jordanian statistics, the number of people who were determined to have disabilities amounted to 62.986 in 2004 (Al-Zyoud, 2011). However, considerable doubt still existed in distinguishing disabilities in young children, such as there were 8-12% of children in normal schools who have learning difficulties. Later, discovered information such as this was not considered after the last survey so the statistics are still vague (UNICEF, 2007).

In the late 1970s, many efforts were taken towards exploration and improvement of special education. University of Jordan has started paying attention to special needs through focusing especially on measurement and assessment of children with difficulties. In 1996 the University of Jordan graduated the first regiment of special education teachers. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Jordanian researchers developed a version of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale according to the Jordanian environment. At the same period a lots of tests were developed in order to evaluate and measure certain children's abilities with general and specific learning difficulties. (Al-Roussan, 1996). As a result of this attention, an increasingly amount of people with special needs has paid the government to build interest in educating them in many public schools. However, under the constitution of Jordan, everyone has a right to a free public education. Educational policies in Jordan were obliged to focus on the necessities of basic and comprehensive services for students with learning difficulties.

In the late 1960's, primary services towards special education in Jordan began. At the same time, the people who are Deaf, Blind and mentally retarded students started receiving treatment services through the establishment of the first institution for them in Jordan. In 1979 the government instituted the first its initiative, founded by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) in order to be accountable for:

1. Providing educational, vocational, rehabilitation, and services for the disabled through organizations, schools, and special classes under the direct management of the Ministry of education.
2. Implementing rehabilitation engagement program.
3. Delivering burden-free amenities and tax exemptions for the disabled and institutions that provide services to the disabled (MSD, 2005).

In 1993, a law for the Well-being of Disabled People was approved and passed. The law states the viewpoint of the government of Jordan for the treatment of students with disabilities. The law stems from Arab-Islamic values, the constitution, the Laws of Human Rights, and the International disability act. Consequently, the MoE founded a department of special education and social services in order to:

1. Satisfy the needs of students with learning difficulties and special needs.
2. Incorporate students with special needs within the regular schools.

Develop the teachers' competence who work with students with special needs (Al-Zyoud, 2011).

The MoE started to work for children with special needs by establishing resources rooms in the regular schools. The special education needs teachers offered special educational services for these students for a period of time each day (Al-Natour, AlKhamra, & Al-Smadi, 2008). In 2012, there were more than 16,360 students with learning difficulties. who were offered special educational services for them, where they were distributed on 831 resource rooms at regular schools across Jordan (MOE, 2012). The MoE suggests that 20-25 students with learning difficulties will be served in these rooms. Additionally, in 1994 the remedial education department was founded by the MoE which is accountable for training special educational needs teachers.

In 2000 The MoE established a diagnosis unit in order to provide diagnostic services for talented students or those with special needs. Moreover, it offered educational services, and the development of programs used. In 2010 the MoE established two specialist departments in order to provide similar assistance. In July 2010 the MoE also established a department of special education impairments combined with a department of talent in Jordan (MOE, 2012). It is worth mentioning that the first specialist department which offered educational services for these categories has worked on transferring many cases from the MoSD to the MoE, which will contribute to increasing the inclusion rate.

Summing up, special education need facilities in Jordan are provided by many foundations:

- Providing educational services for these categories of students is the responsibility of the MoE and the MoSD by the Jordanian constitution.
- UNRWA provides educational services for Palestinian refugee children in several camps. UNRWA runs nine centres of special education, ten classes for deaf students and, fifteen resource rooms for students with difficulties.
- Support for teachers with training programs and workshops by The Queen Alia Fund for Voluntary Social Work, and it also assists in developing of scales to help students with difficulties and special needs.
- The private foundations, including international voluntary organisations like European and American institutions which assist Refugees, Jordanian students, and private schools (Al-Zyoud, 2011).

Future challenges

In fact, there are many challenges and obstacles which are facing the special education services sector in Jordan. Great endeavours are being considered to overcome these obstacles. Nevertheless, these endeavours are still in need of more work and attention in the future by strategy plans.

AlJabery and Zumberg (2008) conducted a study in Jordan around the challenges with special education needs, which they concluded are:

- Financial: there is a lack of funds which is leading to weakness of services that should be offered to these students.
- Practices and instructional: most of the centres in Jordan have limited resources that lead to impact on their ability to offer appropriate services. Furthermore, it also withdraws on education techniques, early intervention services, evaluation and diagnosis.
- Dearth of Information: there are no exact statistics on propagation or the proportion of individuals with special needs in Jordan that will be affected in future planning.
- Collaboration: Unfortunately, service providers aren't cooperating with each other properly. Although the Supreme Council for People with Disabilities was instituted in the early 1990s, it still needs to be controlled completely in order to coordinate between various service providers.

In 2008, the Department of General Statistics (DoS) conducted a statistical survey, where it was found that about 33,000 children were truant and working in Jordan, and interestingly, that 3,300 of them were aged 5-12 years (DoS, 2011). The main reason is poverty, which is leading these children to work in order to assist their families. Another reason is, which is no less important than the first, is insufficiency of the educational system in facing the education essentials of students with learning difficulties.

It is worth mentioning, that services in the public sector are not level with those in the private sector. On the contrary, the private sector distinguishes its better services due to the availability of funding on the one hand. Easiness of administrative procedures and the typical numbers of the students in each classroom contribute on the other hand.

In short, the efforts toward special education in Jordan have contributed significant development, though; many endeavours are still needed in this field which should be conducted, mainly in providing funds, raising awareness in society about disability, and involvement of teachers in training programs pre- and during service.

Propositions for developing the current services

AlJabery and Zumberg (2008) and Al-Zyoud (2011) reported that the following notes should be taken into account in order to develop these services, as below:

1. Providing financial support and finding alternative sources of finance in order to help existing centres by developing their services on the one hand and the foundation of advanced new centres in order to expand the circle of the services on the other hand.
2. The establishment of a central body including its function of supervision, regulation, and guidance in providing services to students with disabilities.

3. Expanding the service delivery system as well as giving more attention to educational issues that support inclusive school to integrate students with special needs into it.
4. Promote and support local communities to participate in the provision of services through various media, in order to increase public awareness, which will make a significant contribution to the reduction of the challenges facing special education services.
5. Set up a wide database to cover all the information on disability in Jordan in order to ease the accessibility by the decision-makers and professionals, researchers and others.

Conclusion

First, this article presents in-depth perception of reality pedagogical educational services both general and special education in Jordan. Second, the paper describes the most prominent obstacles and challenges which are faced in providing services to students and individuals with disabilities. Finally, propositions are offered to exceed these obstacles and challenges in order to develop and deliver of service for all students toward a better society in the future soon.

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