

Inclusion and Society: Concept, Forms and Perspectives

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Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the right of children with special needs to education and active participation in life through school inclusion, which is based on integrating students with special needs into inclusive classrooms within regular schools, or fully integrating them with their peers. The goal is to achieve the principle of equal opportunity for all, enabling them to become active members of their community, strengthening their sense of belonging, and preparing them to develop their abilities to achieve self-reliance.

Keywords: Inclusion / Social Inclusion.

Introduction:

Although we see or interact with many people with special needs in our country, neighborhoods, or families and even though each of us has special needs of our own people with disabilities are not truly integrated into our social lives, nor do they participate adequately in daily life activities. The harsh reality is that they remain marginalized and isolated in a manner that contradicts moral and religious values, violates human and civil rights, and conflicts with the law and constitution.

The topic of inclusion has recently received significant and growing attention; however, opinions regarding its necessity, feasibility, and implementation remain divided. Society still needs to translate this interest into concrete commitments and practical plans.

In this research paper, we address inclusion and society in terms of its concept, forms, and perspectives, presenting both supporting and opposing viewpoints, as well as its benefits and the social implications that result from it.

Inclusion

1. Concept of Inclusion

Terminologically, inclusion means educating children with disabilities in regular schools alongside their non-disabled peers, where both groups are taught by the same teacher.

In some countries, inclusion is viewed as opening special classes for students with disabilities within regular schools. (Lewis & Doorlag, 1987)

Many researchers have defined inclusion; among these definitions:

- **Hesitart** defines inclusion as the social or educational integration of children with disabilities with their non-disabled peers in regular classrooms, to provide opportunities for participation in various life situations.

- **Kaufman (1978)** defines inclusion as one of the modern trends in special education that aims to place children with disabilities—who are capable of benefiting together with non-disabled children in regular classrooms, through organized and well-planned educational design that clearly defines the responsibilities of those teaching both groups. (‘Essam, 2007, p. 207)

2. Scholars’ Views on Inclusion

Researchers have differing opinions on inclusion, dividing them into supporters, opponents, and neutrals:

2.1 Supporters:

They advocate for inclusion, emphasizing its role in changing teachers’, students’, and society’s attitudes, and in ending the isolation of children with disabilities—which often causes stigma, feelings of inferiority, and psychological harm to the child, their family, school, and society as a whole.

2.2 Opponents:

They strongly oppose inclusion, arguing that educating children with disabilities is better in specialized schools, where professionals are available, providing stability and reassurance—conditions difficult to achieve in regular schools.

2.3 Neutrals:

They take a middle position, suggesting that some disabilities are too severe to allow inclusion in regular classrooms, such as severe intellectual disabilities or complete blindness.

However, they believe that children with mild or moderate disabilities can be successfully integrated. (Habayeb & Abdullah, 2005, p.19)

3. Forms of Inclusion

3.1 Spatial Inclusion:

It refers to a situation where a special education institution shares the same building with a regular school but maintains separate curricula, training methods, and teaching staff, although both may share the same administration. (Al-Samadi, 2010, p.9)

3.2 Educational or Academic Inclusion:

It refers to the participation of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in the same school under the same educational supervision and within the same study program, though curricula and teaching methods may differ according to students’ needs.

3.3 Social Inclusion:

This means that students with disabilities live, learn, and work alongside their non-disabled peers. It is also called functional inclusion and aims to provide opportunities for social interaction and normal life experiences among all individuals. (Lynch et al., 1999, p.81)

3.4 Functional Inclusion:

It involves minimizing the gap between students with disabilities and their peers by using the same tools, materials, and curricula (or parts of them).

3.5 Community Inclusion:

This type focuses on integrating individuals with disabilities into society after they have been rehabilitated and trained to work and rely on themselves to meet their needs. (‘Essam, 2007, p.209)

4. Advantages and Objectives of Inclusion

4.1 Advantages:

The importance of inclusion programs lies in several advantages, including:

- Changing the social perception of disability from negative to positive by recognizing the child with a disability and seeking practical solutions through inclusion programs.
- Addressing the increasing number of children with disabilities in developing societies and the shortage of special education institutions.
- The evolution of philosophical and educational thought supporting the integration of children with disabilities into regular schools.
- The emergence of laws and legislations demanding equal health, psychological, educational, and social rights for children with disabilities as for their non-disabled peers. (Abu Qamar & Hamdan, 2006, p.6)

4.2 Objectives:

The goals of inclusion are as follows:

- **Reducing the negative effects** associated with disability by increasing the student's self-confidence through attending a regular school and eliminating the social stigma.
- **Providing appropriate learning opportunities** that promote classroom interaction between students with and without disabilities, enhancing true learning for both groups. This classroom interaction also increases **social interaction** and acceptance of students with disabilities.
- **Changing negative attitudes** toward disability and special needs, as inclusion programs reveal the **talents and creativity** of students with disabilities.
- **Reducing economic burdens** associated with establishing and maintaining specialized institutions for special education. (*Al-Qamish & Al-Sa'ida, 2008*)

5. Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclusion

5.1 Advantages:

Inclusion has many positive outcomes, such as:

- Providing children with opportunities for healthy social, academic, and emotional development.
- Encouraging self-fulfillment and fostering positive social relationships.
- Changing family and teacher attitudes toward children with disabilities from negative to positive.
- Reducing economic costs.
- Eliminating stigma for the child and family.
- Reducing social and psychological differences among children.
- Expanding access to educational services, particularly inclusive education.
- Building a more inclusive society where everyone belongs. (Khadir, 1995)

5.2 Disadvantages:

However, inclusion may have some negative effects, including:

Effects on parents:

- Constant reminders of their child's disability compared to other children.
- Loss of shared interests with parents of non-disabled children in school programs.
- Additional responsibilities related to their child's social and educational adaptation.
- The possibility that support services provided in preschool programs are insufficient for the child's and family's needs.
- The issue of shared stigma, where relatives of a stigmatized person also experience social stigma. (Macmillan, 1976)

Chapter Two: Inclusion And Society

1. Definition of Social Inclusion

Social inclusion refers to integrating individuals with disabilities into social life. This process appears in two main forms:

- Vocational inclusion, which involves integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce by providing them with appropriate job opportunities so they can become productive members of society and gain social acceptance.
- Residential or community inclusion, which means integrating individuals with disabilities into regular housing and residential communities after they have received professional and social rehabilitation, enabling them to live independently and be accepted by their peers. (Al-Rousan, 1998)

Integrating people with disabilities into society means allowing them to participate in all types of social activities contributing effectively to them while benefiting fully from available services.

This means that young children with special needs should attend local nurseries and kindergartens with neighborhood children; students with special needs should attend schools close to their homes with their peers, share recreational activities, and play together.

Adults with special needs should work in professions suited to their abilities alongside other citizens, benefit from social and health services, and live fully integrated, dignified lives within their communities.

Inclusion is thus a philosophy based on equality, where all individuals deserve respect and appreciation. People with disabilities must be given the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of community life. (Kabesh, p.4)

2. Requirements for Promoting Inclusion in Society

Achieving inclusion in society requires:

- Revising and enforcing laws and regulations across various community sectors to facilitate inclusion and ensure a stable, effective government policy that supports it.
- Adapting physical environments to make facilities, public spaces, and services accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Improving public attitudes to support inclusion and eliminate social barriers.
- Developing curricula, teaching methods, training tools, and cultural programs that address the diverse needs of all citizens.
- Training professionals in various sectors to work efficiently with persons with disabilities and their peers in inclusive settings.
- Providing strong support systems through qualified specialized centers.
- Careful selection and evaluation of children who can benefit from inclusion programs.
- Involving families by training and educating parents about their roles in supporting inclusion.
- Encouraging peers to participate in supporting children with disabilities in inclusive environments. (Kabesh, p.8)

3. Difficulties and Challenges Facing Inclusion

Inclusion faces several obstacles that hinder its implementation and expansion, requiring targeted interventions. The most significant challenges include:

- Negative social attitudes toward inclusion, stemming from the belief that persons with disabilities cannot be full citizens capable of fulfilling social roles. These attitudes arise from a lack of faith in their abilities and an absence of recognition of their rights.

- Shortage of trained professionals capable of implementing inclusion in schools, training centers, workplaces, and service institutions. Many professionals have only worked with people with disabilities in segregated settings and lack experience in inclusive environments.
- Unfit social and physical environments, where infrastructure, transportation, and public facilities are not accessible. Poorly designed streets, stairs, and buildings hinder participation, making daily life difficult even for non-disabled individuals.
- Neglect by policymakers, who often fail to prioritize inclusion due to limited resources, fear of change, or adherence to outdated systems based on isolation rather than empowerment. (Al-Ashqar, 2004, p.36)

4. Social Impacts of Inclusion Policies

The social outcomes of inclusion policies represent the true benefits anticipated by persons with disabilities, as they promote:

- Opportunities for interaction between non-disabled individuals and persons with disabilities, fostering empathy and cooperation.
- Voluntary and community work, as inclusion encourages civic participation and engagement through local associations and initiatives.
- Increased social adaptation for individuals with intellectual disabilities, reducing psychological and social problems caused by isolation.
- Correction of misconceptions about disability, promoting a cooperative vision of inclusion across all aspects of community life. (Al-Ashqar, 2003, p.5)

5. Benefits of Inclusion in Society

- Inclusion ensures the fundamental right of persons with disabilities to live dignified, full lives as citizens, protecting them from isolation, marginalization, and denial of rights.
- It provides real and practical opportunities for education, employment, and access to social services opportunities that cannot be efficiently provided through separate systems.
- Inclusion enables effective use of the abilities and potential of persons with disabilities for their own benefit, their families' well-being, and their community's development.
- It promotes the development of the broader community, enhancing the skills of individuals working with persons with disabilities and improving the quality of education, training, and social services overall. (Kabesh, p.9).

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