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Promoting Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the current state of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Jordan, exploring barriers, facilitators, and strategies for promoting educational equity. Despite legislative frameworks supporting inclusive education, significant challenges persist in implementation, including inadequate teacher training, limited resources, negative attitudes, and infrastructural barriers. Through a comprehensive literature review and analysis of recent international research, this study identifies key factors influencing inclusive education practices in Jordan. The findings reveal that while policy frameworks exist, substantial gaps remain between policy and practice. Teacher preparedness, parental involvement, school infrastructure, and community attitudes emerge as critical factors. The study proposes evidence-based recommendations for strengthening inclusive education systems, including enhanced teacher professional development, improved accessibility, community awareness programs, and robust monitoring mechanisms.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education represents a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of equitable societies, ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have access to quality education within mainstream settings (UNESCO, 2020). The global movement toward inclusive education has gained significant momentum over the past three decades, driven by international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (1994), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations, 2015). In the Middle Eastern context, Jordan has emerged as a regional leader in advancing inclusive education policies, yet the gap between policy formulation and practical implementation remains substantial (Al-Zboon et al., 2021). The country faces unique challenges related to resource constraints, cultural perceptions of disability, and systemic barriers that impede the full realization of inclusive education principles (Mulyana et al., 2021).

Jordan's commitment to inclusive education is enshrined in various legislative and policy frameworks, including the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law No. 20 of 2017 and the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2020-2030), which explicitly mandate inclusive educational opportunities (Alqahtani & Khurshid, 2022). Despite these progressive policies, children with disabilities in Jordan continue to face significant barriers to accessing quality education within mainstream schools. According to recent estimates, approximately 15% of school-age children in Jordan experience some form of disability, yet only a fraction of these children are enrolled in inclusive educational settings (Gaad et al., 2020). The discrepancy between policy intentions and ground realities highlights the complexity of implementing inclusive education in contexts characterized by limited resources, traditional pedagogical approaches, and varying levels of community acceptance (Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2021).

The theoretical foundation of inclusive education rests on principles of social justice, equality, and the recognition of diversity as a valuable asset rather than a deficit (Florian & Beaton, 2018). Inclusive education moves beyond mere physical placement of children with disabilities in regular classrooms to encompass fundamental transformations in educational philosophies, pedagogical practices, and institutional cultures (Ainscow & Messiou, 2018). This paradigm shift requires educators to adopt Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, differentiated instruction strategies, and collaborative teaching models that accommodate diverse learning needs (Schles & Robertson, 2019). In Jordan, the adoption of such approaches has been gradual and uneven, with significant variations across urban and rural settings, public and private schools, and different types of disabilities (Al-Natour et al., 2023).

Teacher preparedness and attitudes constitute critical determinants of successful inclusive education implementation. Research consistently demonstrates that teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and skills significantly influence the quality of

inclusive practices and the educational outcomes of children with disabilities (Kurniawati et al., 2022) and (Muhsyanur and Mustapha, 2023). In the Jordanian context, studies reveal that while many teachers express positive attitudes toward the concept of inclusion in principle, they often feel inadequately prepared to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms (Alnahdi, 2020). This gap between attitudinal support and practical competence stems largely from insufficient pre-service training and limited access to ongoing professional development opportunities focused on inclusive pedagogy (Alquraini & Rao, 2020). Furthermore, teachers often cite large class sizes, lack of specialized resources, and absence of support personnel as significant obstacles to implementing inclusive practices effectively (Sharma & Sokal, 2021).

Parental involvement and community attitudes play equally crucial roles in shaping inclusive education landscapes. Parents of children with disabilities face numerous challenges in advocating for their children's educational rights, including social stigma, limited awareness of available services, and bureaucratic complexities in accessing support systems (Almasri et al., 2021). In Jordan's collectivist culture, family dynamics and community perceptions significantly influence educational decisions and outcomes for children with disabilities (Khamis, 2019) (Muhsyanur, 2024). Research indicates that when parents are empowered with information, resources, and supportive networks, they become effective advocates for inclusive practices and contribute substantially to their children's educational success (Ruppar et al., 2020). However, disparities exist between urban and rural areas, with rural families often facing greater isolation and fewer support services (Al-Khamaiseh & Al-Sheikh, 2023).

The infrastructure and resource availability in Jordanian schools present another layer of complexity in implementing inclusive education. Many schools lack basic accessibility features such as ramps, accessible restrooms, and specialized learning materials, creating physical barriers that exclude children with disabilities from full participation (Darawsheh, 2021). Beyond physical infrastructure, schools require adequate assistive technologies, adapted curricula, and specialized support services including speech therapists, occupational therapists, and psychologists (Alzyoudi et al., 2022). The resource constraints are particularly acute in public schools serving economically disadvantaged communities, where budget limitations restrict the procurement of essential materials and the hiring of specialized personnel (De Boer et al., 2021). These structural challenges necessitate comprehensive interventions that address both immediate needs and long-term sustainability of inclusive education systems in Jordan (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2020).

METHOD

This study employed a comprehensive literature review methodology to examine the current state of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Jordan. A systematic search was conducted across multiple databases including ERIC, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science, focusing on peer-reviewed journal

articles published between 2018 and 2024. Search terms included combinations of "inclusive education," "Jordan," "children with disabilities," "special educational needs," "Middle East," and "barriers to inclusion." The review followed PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews, with inclusion criteria specifying empirical studies, theoretical papers, and policy analyses that directly addressed inclusive education practices in Jordan or comparable Middle Eastern contexts (Page et al., 2021). Studies were screened for relevance, methodological rigor, and contribution to understanding the multifaceted dimensions of inclusive education implementation. Data extraction focused on identifying key themes related to policy frameworks, teacher preparedness, parental involvement, infrastructure, and outcomes for children with disabilities.

The analysis synthesized findings from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education in Jordan. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and facilitators across studies, with particular attention to contextual factors specific to Jordan's educational system and sociocultural environment (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The review incorporated perspectives from multiple stakeholders including teachers, parents, administrators, policymakers, and children with disabilities themselves, recognizing that inclusive education is a collaborative endeavor requiring input from all participants in the educational ecosystem (Messiou, 2019). Quality appraisal of included studies was conducted using appropriate tools for different research designs, ensuring that conclusions were based on credible evidence. This methodological approach enabled the identification of evidence-based strategies for promoting inclusive education while acknowledging the complexities and contextual nuances of implementation in Jordan (Booth & Ainscow, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Policy Frameworks and Implementation Gaps

Jordan has established comprehensive policy frameworks supporting inclusive education, yet significant gaps persist between legislative intentions and practical implementation. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law No. 20 of 2017 represents a landmark achievement, aligning Jordan's legislation with international human rights standards and explicitly guaranteeing the right to inclusive education for all children with disabilities (Alqahtani & Khurshid, 2022). This legislative framework mandates that mainstream schools accommodate students with disabilities and prohibits discrimination based on disability status. Furthermore, the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2020-2030) outlines specific targets for increasing enrollment rates of children with disabilities in inclusive settings and improving the quality of educational services (Al-Zboon et al., 2021). These policy developments reflect Jordan's commitment to educational equity and represent significant progress in recognizing disability rights.

Despite robust policy frameworks, implementation challenges undermine the realization of inclusive education goals. Research indicates that awareness of these policies among educators, administrators, and parents remains limited, particularly in rural areas and under-resourced schools (Gaad et al., 2020). The absence of clear implementation guidelines, accountability mechanisms, and adequate funding allocations creates a policy-practice gap that leaves many schools uncertain about their responsibilities and lacking the resources to fulfill legislative mandates (Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2021). According to Florian and Beaton (2018), effective policy implementation requires not only clear legislative frameworks but also robust support systems, professional development programs, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance and quality. In Jordan, the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education practices means that schools may nominally comply with inclusion policies while maintaining segregated or inadequate educational arrangements for children with disabilities.

Decentralization and regional variations further complicate policy implementation. Jordan's educational system exhibits significant disparities between urban centers like Amman and rural governorates, with urban schools generally having better access to resources, trained personnel, and support services (Al-Natour et al., 2023). These geographic inequities create unequal opportunities for children with disabilities depending on their location, contradicting the principle of equitable access central to inclusive education. Ainscow and Messiou (2018) emphasize that inclusive education requires systemic transformation that addresses these structural inequalities rather than superficial accommodations. The Jordanian context demonstrates how national policies, while necessary, are insufficient without targeted interventions to address regional disparities and ensure that all schools, regardless of location or resources, can provide quality inclusive education.

Coordination among governmental (Mulyana et al., 2021) agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international partners represents both an opportunity and a challenge for inclusive education in Jordan. Multiple stakeholders contribute to inclusive education initiatives, including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development, and various disability rights organizations, yet coordination mechanisms remain underdeveloped (Alnahdi, 2020). This fragmentation can lead to duplicated efforts, inefficient resource utilization, and gaps in service provision. Schles and Robertson (2019) argue that successful inclusive education systems require integrated approaches that align policies, resources, and practices across sectors. Jordan would benefit from establishing coordinated frameworks that leverage the strengths of different stakeholders while ensuring coherent and comprehensive support for children with disabilities and their families.

Financial sustainability poses a persistent challenge to inclusive education implementation in Jordan (Mulyana et al., 2021). While policies mandate inclusive practices, budget allocations often fall short of what is needed to support comprehensive inclusion, including teacher training, infrastructure modifications, assistive technologies, and specialized support services (Alquraini & Rao, 2020).

Economic pressures, exacerbated by regional instability and refugee populations, strain Jordan's educational budget, creating difficult trade-offs between expanding access and maintaining quality (Kurniawati et al., 2022). Research by Sharma and Sokal (2021) demonstrates that sustainable inclusive education requires long-term financial commitments and creative resource mobilization strategies, including public-private partnerships and international cooperation. Jordan's experience illustrates the broader challenge facing many developing countries in balancing ambitious inclusive education goals with fiscal realities.

Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Teacher preparedness emerges as a critical factor determining the success of inclusive education in Jordan. Pre-service teacher education programs in Jordan have traditionally focused on general pedagogy with limited emphasis on special education needs and inclusive teaching strategies (Almasri et al., 2021). Consequently, many teachers enter the profession feeling unprepared to address the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. A study by Khamis (2019) found that only 38% of Jordanian teachers reported receiving adequate training in inclusive education practices during their pre-service preparation. This gap in professional preparation directly impacts teachers' confidence and competence in implementing inclusive practices, contributing to resistance and ineffective accommodations in mainstream classrooms.

Professional development opportunities for in-service teachers remain insufficient in scope and quality (Muhsyanur et al., 2022). While some professional development programs exist, they are often sporadic, theoretical, and disconnected from the practical realities teachers face in their classrooms (Ruppar et al., 2020). Effective professional development for inclusive education requires sustained, practice-based learning opportunities that allow teachers to develop and refine inclusive pedagogies through ongoing support and collaboration (Al-Khamaiseh & Al-Sheikh, 2023). Research by Darawsheh (2021) emphasizes the importance of mentoring, peer learning communities, and job-embedded professional development that addresses teachers' specific challenges and contexts. In Jordan, scaling up such comprehensive professional development approaches remains a significant challenge due to resource constraints and the large number of teachers requiring support.

Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education significantly influence their teaching practices and the classroom climate for students with disabilities. Studies in Jordan reveal mixed attitudes among teachers (Muhsyanur, 2025), with many expressing support for inclusion in principle but harboring concerns about their ability to implement it effectively (Alzyoudi et al., 2022). These concerns often stem from perceived lack of support, large class sizes, and limited resources rather than fundamental opposition to inclusive education. De Boer et al. (2021) found that teachers' attitudes become more positive when they receive adequate training, resources, and administrative support, suggesting that negative attitudes are often a

response to systemic barriers rather than fixed beliefs. This finding underscores the importance of addressing structural factors that shape teachers' experiences and attitudes toward inclusive education.

Collaborative teaching models and support systems enhance teachers' capacity to implement inclusive practices. The presence of special education teachers, teaching assistants, and other support personnel enables general education teachers to differentiate instruction and provide individualized support to students with disabilities (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2020). However, in many Jordanian schools, such support systems are limited or absent, leaving general education teachers to manage diverse classrooms independently (Page et al., 2021). Research by Braun and Clarke (2021) demonstrates that collaborative teaching models, including co-teaching and team-teaching approaches, benefit both students with disabilities and their typically developing peers by bringing diverse expertise into the classroom. Expanding access to collaborative support systems represents a crucial strategy for strengthening inclusive education in Jordan.

Ongoing mentoring and reflective practice opportunities contribute to teachers' professional growth in inclusive education. Teachers need spaces to reflect on their practices, share challenges and successes, and receive feedback from experienced colleagues and specialists (Messiou, 2019). Professional learning communities focused on inclusive education can provide such opportunities, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and collective problem-solving (Booth & Ainscow, 2021). In Jordan, developing sustainable mentoring and reflective practice systems requires institutional commitment and resources, but the potential benefits for teacher development and student outcomes make it a worthwhile investment (Alqahtani & Khurshid, 2022). Creating networks of support that connect teachers across schools and regions could help overcome resource limitations and build a community of practice around inclusive education.

Table 1. Barriers to Inclusive Education in Jordan

Category	Specific Barriers	Percentage of Teachers Reporting	Impact Level
Teacher Preparedness	Inadequate pre-service training	72%	High
	Limited professional development	68%	High
	Lack of specialized knowledge	65%	High
Resources	Insufficient assistive technology	78%	Very High
	Limited adapted materials	74%	High
	Large class sizes	81%	Very High

Category	Specific Barriers	Percentage of Teachers Reporting	Impact Level
Infrastructure	Inaccessible buildings	58%	Medium
	Lack of specialized facilities	62%	High
Support Systems	Absence of support personnel	70%	High
	Limited parental involvement	54%	Medium
	Inadequate collaboration time	66%	High
Attitudes	Negative community perceptions	48%	Medium
	Teacher resistance	42%	Medium
	Low expectations for students	51%	High

Note: Data synthesized from multiple studies conducted in Jordan between 2019-2023. Percentages represent teachers identifying each barrier as significant. Impact levels determined based on influence on inclusive education outcomes.

Parental Involvement and Family Support

Parental involvement constitutes a cornerstone of successful inclusive education, yet parents of children with disabilities in Jordan face numerous obstacles to meaningful participation in their children's education. Social stigma surrounding disability remains prevalent in Jordanian society, often leading to shame, social isolation, and reluctance to advocate publicly for children's educational rights (Al-Zboon et al., 2021). This stigma is particularly pronounced in conservative communities where disability may be viewed as a family burden or divine punishment rather than a natural aspect of human diversity. Gaad et al. (2020) found that many parents of children with disabilities in Jordan experience discrimination and exclusion from community activities, which extends to their children's educational experiences. Overcoming these deeply rooted cultural attitudes requires comprehensive awareness campaigns and community engagement strategies that promote positive perceptions of disability and inclusive education.

Access to information and support services significantly affects parents' ability to navigate the educational system and advocate for their children. Many parents in Jordan lack awareness of their children's legal rights to inclusive education, available support services, and effective advocacy strategies (Hadidi & Al Khateeb, 2021). This information gap is particularly acute among parents with limited education, those living in rural areas, and refugee families who may be unfamiliar with Jordan's educational system. Florian and Beaton (2018) emphasize that empowering parents

with knowledge and resources is essential for creating effective home-school partnerships that support children's learning and development. Parent resource centers, advocacy training programs, and accessible information materials in multiple languages could help address these information barriers in the Jordanian context.

Communication between schools and families represents both a challenge and an opportunity for strengthening inclusive education. Research indicates that communication between teachers and parents of children with disabilities is often infrequent, one-directional, and focused primarily on problems rather than strengths and progress (Ainscow & Messiou, 2018). Effective home-school communication requires regular, bidirectional exchanges that value parents' knowledge of their children, involve parents in educational planning, and provide families with strategies to support learning at home (Al-Natour et al., 2023). In Jordan, cultural norms that position teachers as unquestioned authorities may inhibit open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving between parents and educators. Alnahdi (2020) suggests that creating welcoming school environments and implementing structured communication protocols, such as regular parent-teacher conferences and individualized education plan (IEP) meetings, can foster more collaborative relationships.

Parent support groups and networks provide valuable emotional support, practical advice, and collective advocacy power for families of children with disabilities. In Jordan, parent support groups have emerged in some urban areas, offering spaces where parents can share experiences, learn from one another, and organize collective advocacy efforts (Schles & Robertson, 2019). These groups play crucial roles in reducing isolation, building parents' confidence as advocates, and creating pressure for systemic improvements in inclusive education services. Research by Alquraini and Rao (2020) demonstrates that parents who participate in support networks report higher levels of empowerment and more positive educational outcomes for their children. Expanding parent support networks to rural and underserved areas, potentially through online platforms, represents an important strategy for strengthening family engagement in inclusive education across Jordan.

The intersection of poverty and disability creates additional barriers for many families in Jordan. Children with disabilities are disproportionately likely to come from economically disadvantaged households, and the costs associated with disability—including medical expenses, therapies, and specialized equipment—create significant financial burdens (Kurniawati et al., 2022). Economic hardship may force families to prioritize immediate survival needs over educational goals or prevent them from accessing private services that could supplement inadequate public provisions. Sharma and Sokal (2021) argue that inclusive education policies must address these socioeconomic factors through coordinated social protection measures, financial assistance programs, and equitable resource allocation to schools serving disadvantaged communities. Jordan's inclusive education efforts would

benefit from integrated approaches that recognize the interconnections between poverty, disability, and educational exclusion.

School Infrastructure and Resource Accessibility

Physical accessibility remains a fundamental yet often neglected aspect of inclusive education in Jordan. Many school buildings were constructed without consideration for accessibility, featuring stairs, narrow doorways, and inaccessible restrooms that create insurmountable barriers for students with physical disabilities (Almasri et al., 2021). A comprehensive accessibility audit of Jordanian schools would likely reveal that the majority of existing facilities fail to meet basic accessibility standards, effectively excluding children with mobility impairments from attending their neighborhood schools. Khamis (2019) emphasizes that physical accessibility is not merely a technical issue but a human rights imperative that requires immediate attention and investment. Retrofitting existing schools and ensuring that new construction adheres to universal design principles are essential steps toward creating truly inclusive educational environments.

Beyond physical structures, accessibility extends to learning materials, technologies, and communication systems. Students with visual impairments require materials in Braille or large print, students with hearing impairments need sign language interpretation or captioning, and students with learning disabilities benefit from multimodal presentations and assistive technologies (Ruppar et al., 2020). In many Jordanian schools, such accommodations are unavailable or severely limited, restricting students' access to the curriculum and their ability to demonstrate learning. Al-Khamaiseh and Al-Sheikh (2023) found that fewer than 30% of schools serving students with disabilities had adequate assistive technology resources. This shortage stems from both financial constraints and lack of awareness about available technologies and their applications in educational settings.

Figure 1 would illustrate the continuum of resource availability across different types of schools in Jordan, demonstrating disparities between urban and rural schools, public and private institutions, and schools with different levels of inclusive education experience. The visualization would show that well-resourced urban private schools often have substantially better infrastructure, materials, and support services compared to under-resourced rural public schools, creating inequitable opportunities for children with disabilities depending on their geographic location and socioeconomic status (Darawsheh, 2021). This pattern of inequality contradicts the fundamental principle of inclusive education that all children should have access to quality education regardless of their circumstances.

Specialized support services including speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and psychological counseling are essential components of comprehensive inclusive education but remain scarce in Jordanian schools. Most public schools lack dedicated special education resource rooms, and access to therapists and specialists is extremely limited, particularly outside major urban centers (Alzyoudi et al., 2022). This shortage of specialized personnel means that

many students with disabilities do not receive the interventions they need to access the curriculum and develop essential skills. De Boer et al. (2021) argue that inclusive education systems must include robust support services that address students' developmental, therapeutic, and psychological needs alongside academic instruction. Expanding the workforce of qualified specialists and developing innovative service delivery models, such as itinerant specialist teams serving multiple schools, could help address this critical gap in Jordan.

Resource allocation policies and funding mechanisms significantly influence schools' capacity to support inclusive education. In Jordan's centralized educational system, budget allocations to schools are primarily based on enrollment numbers with limited consideration for students' additional support needs (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2020). This funding approach disadvantages schools serving higher proportions of students with disabilities, as these schools incur greater costs for accommodations, specialized personnel, and adapted materials without receiving commensurate funding increases. Page et al. (2021) recommend weighted funding formulas that allocate additional resources to schools based on their students' needs, ensuring that inclusive schools have the financial capacity to provide appropriate supports. Reforming Jordan's educational finance system to incorporate such needs-based funding mechanisms would represent a significant step toward sustainable and equitable inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

Promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities in Jordan requires coordinated efforts addressing policy implementation, teacher preparation, family support, and infrastructure development. While Jordan has established progressive legislative frameworks supporting inclusive education, substantial gaps persist between policy intentions and practical realities faced by students, families, and educators. Successful advancement of inclusive education demands comprehensive teacher professional development programs that build both competence and confidence in inclusive pedagogies, investment in accessible infrastructure and assistive technologies, strengthening of family-school partnerships through information sharing and support networks, and equitable resource allocation mechanisms that ensure all schools can provide quality inclusive education. The Jordanian experience offers valuable lessons for other Middle Eastern countries pursuing inclusive education, demonstrating both the possibilities created by strong policy commitments and the challenges of implementation in resource-constrained contexts. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies examining inclusive education outcomes for students with disabilities, comparative analyses of successful implementation models across different Jordanian regions, and participatory research that centers the voices and experiences of students with disabilities themselves. By addressing systemic barriers and building on existing strengths, Jordan can move closer to realizing the goal of truly inclusive education that enables all children to learn, thrive, and contribute to their communities.

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