



Educational Integration of People with Special Needs

- A Socio-Educational Reading –



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Abstract

The attention to individuals with special needs has become a crucial demand among the advancements and comprehensive development of modern societies, which are characterized by changes and evolutions in general life concepts, especially within the educational system. A modern trend has emerged, advocating for the inclusion of disabled individuals in regular schools and recognizing their rights to a normal school life alongside their non-disabled peers, moving away from the isolation system long adopted by special education. Within this context, the research paper aims to explore the school integration process for individuals with special needs by defining the concept of school integration, its goals, the expected benefits thereof, the essential conditions for successful integration, and combating the isolation of people with special needs.

Keywords

Integration;
School Integration;
People with Special Needs.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الدمج؛
الدمج المدرسي؛
ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة.

الدمج التعليمي لذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة- قراءة سوسيوتربوية - ملخص

لقد أصبح الاهتمام بالأفراد ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة مطلباً حاسماً بين التطورات والتنمية الشاملة للمجتمعات الحديثة، التي تتسم بتغيرات وتطورات في مفاهيم الحياة العامة، ولا سيما داخل النظام التعليمي. وقد ظهر اتجاه حديث يدعو إلى إدماج الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة في المدارس العادية والاعتراف بحقوقهم في حياة مدرسية عادية إلى جانب أقرانهم من غير المعوقين، والابتعاد عن نظام العزل الذي اعتمدته التعليم الخاص منذ فترة طويلة. وفي هذا السياق، تهدف الورقة البحثية إلى استكشاف عملية الإدماج المدرسي للأفراد ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة من خلال تحديد مفهوم الإدماج المدرسي، وأهدافه، والفوائد المتوقعة منه، والشروط الأساسية للإدماج الناجح، ومكافحة عزلة ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة.

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Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, various fields of special education witnessed many developments and achievements, especially in terms of schools, programs, and curricula. The perspective on individuals with special needs changed, and they were no longer seen as useless or ineffective in society. Instead, the focus shifted towards supporting them to be active parts of the community and facilitating their social participation for the development of society as a whole.

Some countries have adopted legislation that grants people with special needs rights and benefits to ensure their stability as active citizens. Scientists and researchers have dedicated their efforts to developing rehabilitation programs that help disabled individuals maximize their remaining potential. It is noteworthy that Carl Rogers, the proponent of humanistic theory in "Freedom to Learn," advocated for recognizing the importance of accepting the student as they are and starting from their needs, reflecting the significant importance of considering the needs of individuals with disabilities in family, educational, and social environments. There has been an increasing rejection of the educational isolation system for people with special needs, leading to a shift in special education towards integrating children with disabilities with their non-disabled peers in educational and social environments.

Therefore, the philosophy of integration aims for the participation and interaction of all children, both those with special needs and their non-disabled peers, where integration provides educational opportunities for all children with disabilities and creates opportunities for vital communication and interaction within the normal school life. It allows for better utilization of all actual, emotional, and sensory potentials, making them an inseparable part of society. This research paper addresses important aspects of the integration process, including:

1. Defining Concepts

1.1 School Integration

Linguistically, to integrate something into another thing means to insert it therein, and it is the opposite of exclusion and marginalization. It refers to an individual's attempt to overcome the barrier of entering into a group and this process depends on several factors that make it easy or difficult, partial or complete (Hamid & Ahmed, 1989, p. 11).

School integration means integrating children with special needs into regular classrooms with their peers who do not have disabilities, while providing special education services and the necessary support (Asal, 2012, p. 83).

It is clarified that this integration aims to achieve equality and full participation of these children in society, and to eliminate any discriminatory separation against them.

Zeinab Mohamed Shaqeer, indicates that integration also means the social and educational integration of children with special needs with regular children, and their participation in educational and social activities alongside their peers (Shaqeer, 2002, p. 98).

According to Sahar El Harshi, integration includes placing children with disabilities in regular schools, whether within the regular classroom or in special attached classrooms, with the provision of the necessary supportive services by a specialized team and making the necessary adjustments to facilitate their success and progress (Harshi, 2003, pp. 38-39).

Based on the previous concepts, educational integration is defined as a modern educational model that enables children with special needs to learn inside regular classrooms with their peers, emphasizing the provision of all necessary support to ensure effective classroom interaction and social and educational participation. This approach enhances the opportunities for this group to meet their diverse educational needs and helps in fully integrating them into the educational and social environment.

1.2 Concept of Individuals with Special Needs

An individual who, throughout their life or during a certain period, requires special treatment in order to grow, learn, train, or adapt to their daily, familial, occupational, or professional life requirements (Harshi, 2003). Individuals with special needs are characterized by unique needs that differ from other members of society. These needs may include special programs, services, teaching methods, specific approaches, devices, tools, or modifications required by their particular life circumstances (Boutros, 2009, p. 132).

2. Rationales for School Integration

Individuals with special needs have specific requirements that differ from other members of society, and these requirements may include special programs, services, educational methods, techniques, tools, or different modifications to suit their life circumstances (Fahmy & Hassan, 2010, pp. 226-227).

2.1 Social Rationales for Integration:

Integration enhances the society's acceptance of individuals with special needs with a positive outlook, which helps in reducing the development of negative attitudes like isolation and guilt. Integration provides opportunities for developing realistic social perceptions, based on recognizing the existence and rights of these children and seeking solutions for their integration.

2.2 Legal and Legislative Rationales:

International laws and legislations guarantee the rights of children with special needs to receive health, educational, and social care like their peers. In line with human rights, these laws emphasize respecting the human dignity of these individuals and protecting their rights, as the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education highlights the importance of providing educational opportunities for them (Al-Quraiti, 2001, p. 183).

2.3 Socio-psychological Rationales:

Children need to interact with others and face daily challenges. Depriving children with special needs of regular education deprives them of their right to belong to the society and participate in its building.

3. Forms of Integration

Integration comes in several forms, including:

3.1 Spatial Integration

This involves the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in recreational activities with their non-disabled peers, such as playing and parties.

3.2 Functional Integration

It involves the participation of children with special needs in the same educational programs as their non-disabled peers. These children remain in their regular classrooms, but they are provided with individualized instruction by a specialized teacher within the same classroom (Salama, 2012, p. 39).

3.3 Community Integration

Individuals with disabilities are integrated into the community after being rehabilitated to rely on themselves and meet their needs.

4. Goals of School Integration

The main goals of school integration include:

- Removing the stigma associated with individuals with special needs.
- Addressing the increase in the number of children with special needs.
- Reducing the economic costs associated with establishing special education institutions.
- Providing solutions to contemporary educational problems.

- Enabling regular students to understand and appreciate the challenges faced by their peers with disabilities.
- Modifying attitudes towards both children with special needs and regular children.
- Providing social interaction experiences, which increase the chances of social acceptance
- Providing appropriate educational opportunities for healthy academic, social, and psychological development (Al-Ashqar, 2003, p. 63).
- Expanding the range of educational opportunities for as many groups of individuals with special needs as possible.
- Reducing the economic costs associated with establishing and operating special education institutions.
- Enhancing the sense of self-achievement among children with special needs and increasing their motivation towards education and building healthy social relationships (Fahmy & Hassan, 2010, p. 225).

School integration goes beyond merely having children with special needs present in regular classrooms; it includes providing the necessary educational and psychological support to them, contributing to achieving integration and communication among all students.

Integration is also an effective tool for removing barriers and social stigmas associated with disability, and it enhances understanding and acceptance of diversity within the educational community and the wider society. Moreover, school integration helps in providing special education resources in a more economically efficient way, and it contributes to developing a sense of belonging and self-esteem among children with special needs.

In summary, school integration presents an educational model that recognizes the rights and abilities of all children and encourages the building of a more diverse and inclusive educational community.

5. The Importance of School Integration

The importance of school integration for children with disabilities lies in several aspects that contribute to their personal and social development, as follows:

- Development of cognition: Integration helps children understand and grasp the world around them better.
- Formation of friendships and a sense of belonging: Integration provides opportunities for children to form relationships and feel a sense of belonging to a group or community.
- Social role performance: Teaches children how to effectively participate in their families and communities as active members.
- Development of abilities and talents: Integration aids in the development of children's abilities, potentials, and talents, and supports them in compensating for any deficiencies.
- Learning discipline and responsibility: Children learn to adhere to rules and bear responsibilities.
- Communication and social interaction: Children learn how to communicate and interact effectively with others.
- Independence and livelihood: Prepares children to be able to rely on themselves and earn their living in the future.
- Eliminating the concept of isolation: Integration contributes to the elimination of the traditional isolation of disabled individuals and changes the negative societal views towards disability.
- Educating non-disabled children: Integration helps non-disabled children understand the potentials of disabled children and encourages positive interaction with them.

Thus, school integration benefits not only children with disabilities but also enhances understanding and coexistence among all students (Boutros, 2009, p. 35).

6. Benefits of School Integration

The benefits of school integration include educational, academic, and social aspects, benefiting not only children with special needs but also teachers and parents, as follows:

- Accommodating a larger number of students with disabilities: Integration allows for a greater number of students with disabilities to be included in the general educational environment.
- Reducing feelings of guilt among families: Integration helps reduce feelings of guilt and frustration among families of individuals with disabilities.
- Modifying societal attitudes: It contributes to changing society's view, especially among public school staff, towards the capabilities of children with disabilities.
- Preparing and qualifying individuals with special needs: Integration aids in preparing these individuals to work and learn in a diverse educational environment.

- Reducing disparities between disabled and non-disabled individuals: Integration works to narrow the gap between individuals with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.
- Increasing self-confidence: Integration boosts the self-confidence of disabled children.
- Developing social interaction: Integration improves children's abilities to communicate and interact with others.
- Benefits for parents: Integration improves parents' views of their disabled children, showing them their children's progress and their abilities to interact with non-disabled children.

Parents also notice their disabled child's greater academic and social development in an integrated environment compared to special education schools that follow an isolation system. This development improves parents' feelings towards their child, and the disabled child shows notable academic achievements, especially in writing and understanding language (El-Adl, 2012, p. 396).

School integration effectively contributes to improving the academic performance of children with special needs. By learning alongside their non-disabled peers, they are exposed to higher academic standards and expectations, which motivates them to exert more effort and achieve significant progress. Integration also provides children the opportunity to interact and learn from different teaching and assessment styles, enhancing their academic abilities and facilitating their adaptation to various learning methods.

7. Requirements for School Integration for Special Needs

If the method of integration requires teaching individuals with disabilities in regular schools alongside their peers, this poses a new challenge for those working in the school community, who may not be prepared for it. Therefore, proper preparation and adequate facilitation are essential for the success of the integration experience. All necessary measures and training must be taken to ensure the success of this experience and to avoid its failure, as has happened with some other educational experiments (Mostafa & Zaher, 2013, p. 41).

To effectively succeed in integration, the following steps must be taken:

- Identifying the type and severity of the disability: It is necessary to consider the type of disability and its severity before beginning the integration process.
- Early education: Early education should precede the integration process to help children perform basic functions such as speaking and moving.
- Teacher preparation: Training teachers in regular schools on how to deal with students with special needs.
- Number of students with special needs: It is preferred that the number of students with special needs in a regular class does not exceed two.
- Class preparation: The class size must be suitable and equipped with appropriate ventilation and lighting.
- Preparing other facilities: Equipping different school facilities to accommodate students with special needs.
- Developing positive attitudes: Enhancing positive attitudes towards integration among all members of the school community.
- Family participation: Activating the role of the family and involving it effectively in the integration process.
- Gradual and thoughtful implementation: The integration process should be gradual and after thorough study.

Conditions for the success of integration include:

- Psychological and emotional adaptation of the disabled: The disabled individual must be psychologically and emotionally adapted to integrate with regular students.
- Preparing the school and teachers: Preparing the school and its staff to receive students with special needs.
- Selection of cases suitable for integration: Cases that can be successfully integrated should be selected.
- Providing resources: Providing all material and technical needs and educational tools.
- Availability of staff: Providing specialized staff, including teachers and psychologists, among others.

8. The Downsides of Isolation

The disadvantages of the isolation system become evident when compared to the benefits of school integration, especially from educational, social, and professional perspectives. Isolation, which involves segregating students with disabilities into separate classes or special schools, can lead to the destruction or deficiency in the development of these three aspects. As Wehman pointed out in 1990, isolating these students does not contribute to building independence, social competence, or self-confidence. Instead, it increases their feelings of isolation and separation from society (Sisalem, 2013, p. 32).

The isolation system is a source of concern for disabled students who are educated away from their non-disabled peers, as they receive limited information and skills related to practical life. Education in this environment often lacks

a focus on cooperation and interaction among individuals with different abilities and characteristics. In contrast, the integration system provides opportunities for equality and equity, and works to improve societal views towards individuals with disabilities by promoting inclusion and interaction in regular classroom settings.

Conclusion

Through our discussion of the school integration process for children with special needs alongside their non-disabled peers, it becomes clear that the policy of integration serves as a direct educational application of the principle of equal opportunities in education. This policy works to combat all forms of classification and isolation that have long been directed against the disabled community, reinforced by the precursors of a societal reality that operates within the context of social stigma towards this group. It has become necessary for individuals with special needs to feel their right to education and attendance in regular schools, respecting the necessary requirements for the successful implementation of integration. We have also confirmed that disability is not a justification for isolating a child from their non-disabled peers; on the contrary, integration offers a great opportunity for the school, family, and society as a whole to shed negative perceptions associated with disability. It allows these children to give their utmost of remaining qualifications and abilities without embarrassment. Indeed, this motivation is linked to training and community participation within a broader environment, establishing comprehensive development that includes all societal groups and energies. This development challenges barriers and negative mindsets, leaping over all ideas associated with social stigma.

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