

Developing an inclusive education system education essay



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For the last few decades, there has been an increase in the number of countries which aimed at making their education systems more inclusive. This aim has been in the agenda of both developed and developing countries with variations in their definitions of inclusion, policy making strategies and school practices. In addition, experiences of these countries in their effort to develop inclusive education systems have faced particular challenges (Ainscow, 2005), with the case being more severe for developing countries where it has been unlikely to observe a significant achievement in their trial to develop inclusive education (Eleweke and Rodda 2002; Mittler 2000).

Turkey, as a developing country, has committed to developing inclusion in schools for almost two decades (Eleweke and Rodda 2002; UNESCO 1994). Since then, however, transformation of The Turkish Education System to an inclusive one has been experiencing serious challenges although there have been several positive steps taken towards improving inclusive policy and practice.

This review is concerned with the process of Turkey in developing inclusive education while aiming to contribute to the limited literature which critically reviews Turkey's position in this process. After the conduct of search is discussed, the process towards inclusive education will be reviewed under three broad terms: Definition of inclusion as reflected on policy and practice, the transition process from education in special schools to inclusion, and the current barriers against inclusive education.

Conduct of Search

This literature review is broadly concerned with the field of inclusive education and specifically explores Turkey's position in developing inclusive education. Therefore, the search for this review was started with the scholarship of leading people in the field of inclusive education and was limited to literature about Turkey. The criterion for using the literature was convenience with the purpose of review. In planning this piece of literature review, several types of documents were searched for through some key terms and in some databases and websites. Appendix 1 presents a detailed table of the search terms used, websites and databases searched, the number of documents reached in any year and the number of documents used.

Definition of Inclusion

Recently, an inclusive education system has been a common goal in the agenda of many countries. However, there have been variations in the way inclusion was defined by these countries (Ainscow et al. 2006a). In many of the definitions, a frequently varying aspect has been the target population identified as subject to inclusion which brought about the question of 'who is inclusion for?' Based on this question, it has been possible to trace policies and practices which have focused on students from the most vulnerable groups to all potential learners (Ainscow et al. 2006a).

In 1994, ninety two governments from different parts of the world endorsed that schools would act in a framework which would fully include every learner, no matter what characteristics the student possessed (UNESCO, 1994). These characteristics could be diverse physical, intellectual, social, <https://assignbuster.com/developing-an-inclusive-education-system-education-essay/>

emotional and linguistic properties. Despite this framework, however, it has been difficult to trace a common understanding and unified practices based on the statement (Ferguson, 2008). For example, while the trend in developed countries, such as the UK and the USA is towards an understanding of inclusion for all learners, many developing countries have based their policies and practices on inclusion of disabled students (Gaad 2010; Slee 2010; Ferguson 2008).

Turkey, like many other developing countries, has identified disabled students as the most vulnerable groups in education and adopted an understanding of inclusion which places disabled students in mainstream schools (Gaad 2010; Rakap and Kaczmarek 2009; Turkish Prime Ministry 2008). As the first typology of conceptualization of inclusion by Ainscow et al. (2006b) illustrates, Turkey's definition of inclusion is similar with governments and schools which have based their policies and practices on the inclusion of disabled children.

In 1997, the Special Education Regulation (No. 573) which was considered as the first regulation towards inclusive education was enacted. Since then, all regulations and laws in Turkey have referred to inclusion of disabled children into mainstream schools. As for the disability categories identified, the groups subject to inclusion were defined as visual, hearing and health impairments, physical, mental, speech and language, learning and emotional and behavioural disabilities (Turkish Prime Ministry, 2008).

In the Special Education Regulation of 1997, as well as other regulations such as The Special Education Services Regulation in 2006, several

definitions were made by the ministry which founded the basis for the inclusion of disabled children (Melekoglu et al. 2009). One of the most revolutionary statements was the consideration of special education as part of the regular education. With this in mind, regular education classes were defined as least restrictive environments where education of disabled children should be encouraged. As a result of this, referral of disabled children as well as assignment of special education teachers to regular education schools accelerated in the last ten years (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2012).

Another point emphasized by the regulations was the obligation assigned to mainstream schools to plan and provide educational and support services to disabled children (Melekoglu et al. 2009). Each school was required to prepare and implement an individualized education plan for each child. However, this section which emphasized uniqueness of students was followed by another part in the regulation, which defined special education services to be provided for separate categories of disabled students, rather than emphasizing students with individual and unique needs. This nature of the regulation, therefore, has created education plans which overlooked individual needs and included standard objectives and services for particular disability groups.

As a conclusion, analysis of policies in Turkey reveals the reality that inclusion only refers to the placement of disabled children in mainstream schools (Gaad 2010; Turkish Ministry of National Education 2010; Turkish Prime Ministry 2008). Slee (2010) claims that considering inclusion as the integration of only disabled children weakens the inclusive schooling

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progress in the broader sense. However, although it seems to be a limitation to overlook the need to include other children from vulnerable groups (e. g. learners not necessarily diagnosed with a disability), the process can still be perceived as a step taken to make schools more inclusive by leaving behind the idea of categorizing and placing disabled children in special schools where they were previously seen as ‘ others’ (Gaad, 2010).

In addition, the developmental level of the educational systems and the reality of disabled students as one of the most segregated groups in poor and developing countries might lead countries to focus more on inclusive practices for disabled students. In this context, there is a need for more policies, resources and improvement of powerful support systems to go beyond the point of including only the disabled requires. In addition, this process might require more time in countries where inclusive education is still immature (Gaad, 2010).

Transition from Education in Special Schools to Inclusion

The field of education, in the twentieth century, underwent a substantive trial to legitimize the rationale for special education (Armstrong, 2010) until new legislations and practices started to take an issue with previous special educational theories and practices (Thomas and Loxley 2001). For the last few decades, there has been a cessation in the expansion of special education schools not only in wealthy but also in poor and developing countries as many administrators have started to address inclusion in government policies and school practices (Ainscow et al. 2006a).

Turkey, as a developing country, has been in the process of the transition from education in special schools to inclusion since its endorsement of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). Until a few years ago, the dominant trend towards education of disabled children was based on segregating them in special schools according to a classification based on their disabilities and providing them with special educational services. However, the Ministry of National Education has started to emphasize and support the education of disabled children with their peers in regular schools. For a decade, the emphasis and support for inclusion has constantly been told to schools and parents in order to include them into a system where the inclusive education and its fundamental principles are adopted and supported (Melekoglu et al. 2009).

In Turkey, reflections of the changing attitude towards inclusive education have been observable on the policy of the Ministry of National Education. For example, the 37th article of The Special Education Services Regulation (2006, p. 3) states that “ The Ministry of National Education is responsible for opening special schools for disabled students. However, the priority should be given to the mainstream education of disabled students together with their normally developing peers in regular schools.” This statement obviously underlines the changing attitude of the government favouring inclusion on policy documents.

There were two other signs of the changing perspective of the Ministry towards a more inclusive system. First, The Special Education Services Regulation (2006) included a part which explained the inclusion process to schools in detail. The other sign was the book published by the Ministry and <https://assignbuster.com/developing-an-inclusive-education-system-education-essay/>

gave detailed information about inclusion to attract attention of the stakeholders; namely parents, teachers and administrators (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2010).

Official statistics by the Ministry show that the number of disabled students in mainstream schools has significantly increased for the last ten years (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2012). This increase in quantity is significant compared to the number a few years ago (see Figure 1). Despite this, almost half of the disabled children are still placed in either special education schools or special education classrooms within mainstream schools (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2012). Furthermore, the first alternative for placement of students with some type of disabilities, such as visual and hearing impairments, is the special education school, usually due to the lack of related staff in inclusive schools. Such a situation creates an unconscious preference for the inclusion of some type of disabilities, such as mental retardation, and ignorance of other disability groups.

Figure 1. Number of disabled students in mainstream classrooms between the years 2000-2012 (Source: Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2012).

Another point worth inquiry is the level in which inclusion of disabled students is taking place. In Turkey, there are three levels for inclusion among which there is a dramatic difference in terms of the number of disabled students (see Table 1). According to recent statistics by the Ministry (2011), increase at primary level is promising whereas inclusion of disabled students at preschool and high school levels is still not satisfactory with respect to quantity. One of the reasons for this situation was the compulsory

educational period which was 8 years and did not include the preschool and high school periods. However, the most recent legislation by The Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2012) increased the compulsory education period in a way that it will include the preschool (3 to 5. 5 years of age) and high school. This is expected to decrease the dropout rate of the disabled students and increase the number of disabled students in pre and high schools.

Educational Level

Number of Classrooms

Number of Students

Preschool (3 to six 6 years age)

288

588

Primary (Grades 1 to 8)

40810

84637

High School (Grades 9 to 12)

4573

7775

Total

45671

93000

Table 1. Number of disabled students in mainstream classrooms according to educational levels in 2011 (Source: Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2011).

To conclude, reflections of the transition to inclusive education in Turkey have been somewhat observable on the policy level. However, promising advances at the policy level have rarely been accompanied by satisfactory implementation (Rakap and Kaczmarek 2010) in schools. Research findings have been consistently showing that there have been problems experienced in areas such as service provision, curriculum, inclusive school community and staff quantity and competency. These problems are discussed in the following chapter.

Barriers against Inclusion in Turkey

The reality of inclusive education has been dominating the world, with many countries aiming to develop their systems to a more inclusive structure and implement more inclusive practices in schools (Lindsay, 2007). However, this reality is not without its challenges and responsibilities both for developed and developing countries (Ainscow, 2005) with the problems being more serious for the latter (Mittler, 2000).

In Turkey, like many other developing countries, challenges and responsibilities have been constantly experienced during the trial to foster inclusion in schools. In this trial, three barriers have been identified and discussed in this chapter. These are negative attitudes towards inclusive

education, problems experienced in planning and providing support services
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and lack of human resources (Kuyumcu 2011; Polat 2010; Rakap and Kaczmarek 2010).

Negative Attitudes

For a few decades, research findings have shown that inclusive education produces positive results not only for disabled students who are placed in inclusive settings but also for their peers without disabilities (Lindsay 2007; Balderrama 1997; Staub and Peck 1994). However, a considerable amount of this research also underlines that it is unlikely for educational systems to improve their inclusiveness unless there are positive attitudes in professionals in schools (Polat 2010; Antonak and Larrivee 1995). Because professionals assume a crucial role in providing educational services both for disabled and non-disabled students.

In a school, a welcoming inclusive climate in which professionals have positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion is necessary (Booth and Ainscow 2002). In Turkish schools, findings of research have shown that school professionals do not have sufficiently positive attitudes towards inclusion of disabled students. For example, Rakap and Kaczmarek (2010) investigated attitudes of general education teachers who work in public elementary schools in Turkey and found significant negative attitudes held by them. Similarly, school counsellors in Turkey, according to Polat (2010), have not still had stable positive attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled students. Such research findings show that the current stance of Turkish schools in terms of positive inclusive attitudes has not created a satisfactory impression.

Insufficient Support Services and Non-Inclusive Curriculum

The literature on inclusive education in Turkey displays the difficulties experienced by students, teachers, parents and administrators. According to the Educational Reform Initiative in Turkey (2011), a basic problem underlying these difficulties is the lack of inclusive curricula and support services for disabled students.

In an environment where the number of disabled students entering inclusive settings is constantly increasing, schools have rarely been able to accommodate this increase in terms of their existing curricula. It is expected from a school to arrange a curriculum in which individual needs of disabled students are represented and met. However, the strictly centralized and standard nature of the curriculum in Turkey has made it difficult to represent the needs of disabled students within the content of the curriculum (Sucuoglu and Kargin 2008).

In the Turkish Education System, the policy expects that an individual education plan (IEP) must be planned and implemented for each disabled child who is placed in a mainstream school (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 1997). In addition, support services (e. g. counselling, speech therapy etc.) should direct student needs. However, studies show a contrary situation with these expectations. For example, a recent study has shown that the process of service planning was carried out in only 37 % percent of the inclusive primary schools and only five per cent of the schools had an IEP team (Kuyumcu, 2011). In another study conducted by the Educational Reform Initiative (2011), 23 percent of the teachers reported that they did not prepare an IEP for the disabled students in their classes whereas only 44

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percent of the parents stated that an IEP was implemented for their disabled children. As a result, it is likely to observe students and parents who perceive education as obsolete and to find disabled students who dropout mainstream schools after a while.

Lack of Human Resources

Among the success factors of inclusive practice, sufficient human resource in terms of quantity and quality is an important element. According to a recent study (Educational Reform Initiative, 2011); the progress made by Turkish Educational System in terms of human resources in inclusive education is not satisfactory. To improve progress, it is inevitable to employ more professionals, such as general education teachers, special education teachers and school counsellors, who can contribute to the implementation of inclusive practice in schools (Sucuoglu and Kargin 2008). For example, it can be seen that the average numbers of students in primary and high schools served by a counsellor are 1225 and 554, respectively (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2012). As far as such statistics are taken into account, lack of professional staff might be considered as an important problem.

Teachers play a key role in inclusion because they are the organisers of individual needs and providers of educational and support services.

Therefore, difficulties experienced by teachers within classrooms exacerbate the success of inclusive practices (Sucuoglu, 2004). For example, a problem reported by teachers is the difficulty in classroom management. In Turkish mainstream schools, only one general education teacher serves all students

within one classroom and it might get more difficult to manage when
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disabled students are placed in this class because it is reported that (Educational Reform Initiative, 2011) student teachers at university do not receive appropriate training to such conditions.

In an inclusive education system in which all students are full members of a school, each student is assessed with respect to his or her individual performance. However, teachers in Turkish schools have reported that they have difficulties in measuring and evaluating success of disabled students in their classrooms (Sucuoglu, 2004). As far as unrealistic objective writing and performance determination are taken into account, it might get more difficult for teachers to assess performance against unrealistic criteria.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is a process which includes several variables and stakeholders (Idol, 2006) which constantly influence the inclusive education process because each of them carries out a critical role in shaping the success of inclusion. Therefore, decreasing the gap between the inclusive policy and its implementation, as well as enhancing the progress made by schools in their inclusive practice, requires a holistic perspective towards inclusion and its elements (Educational Reform Initiative, 2011). Especially in developing countries which are at the beginning of their inclusion journey, setting inclusive systems is possible by focusing on each element of the system and their interrelations.

As an important element of an education system, attitudes of school staff towards inclusion are of crucial importance for creating an inclusive environment at school. It is known that these attitudes towards inclusive

education and inclusion of disabled children might positively change when stakeholders receive training at any level of their professional life (Sucuoglu, 2004) because professionals who feel incompetent about their skills in terms of working in an inclusive setting might be reluctant in working with disabled students (Aydin and Sahin 2002).

Finally, the need for a variation in the provision of support services and an inclusive curriculum in mainstream schools of Turkey is high because more students with diverse backgrounds are entering mainstream schools with individual needs and diverse backgrounds. Both in the classroom and outside, students require support, specific to their individual needs. In providing this support, cooperation with families and consultation with colleagues and other professionals is known to contribute to the development of more inclusive schools (Booth and Ainscow 2002). As for the curriculum, the progress made on the policy level might be extended to the development of more inclusive curricula by The Ministry which develops centralized curricula and has schools follow them.

Reflections

Carrying out this literature review has made me face two realities. The first one was the range of necessary skills which must be recruited during the process. Acquiring these skills entails advanced academic training as well as engagement in permanent reading and writing which are challenging. The second reality was the influence of the review process on my assumptions and learning. As it requires permanent reading, some of the assumptions which I had before starting, needed either revision or complete change. As a result of this, I encountered new knowledge, new authors, new books and <https://assignbuster.com/developing-an-inclusive-education-system-education-essay/>

new styles of writing. Combined with the tips I gained during the course training, the process contributed to my confidence in critically analyzing a piece of writing and developing an argument about it.

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