
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teaching English for Students of Special Needs in Jordan

Dr. Shafiq Banat

English Language and Literature Department, Jerash University, Jordan

Corresponding Author: Dr. Shafiq Banat, **E-mail:** dr.shafiq_banat@yahoo.com

| ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges related to teaching English to students with special needs in Jordan. Despite Jordan's significant progress in policy development, the practical implementation of these policies lags, resulting in suboptimal educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The research highlights the gap between the Jordanian educational system's philosophical commitment to equality and the reality of educational provision for special needs students. Key challenges identified include limited access to specialized educational centers, insufficient teacher training, inadequate infrastructure, and negative social impacts, such as bullying. Furthermore, Addressing these challenges is essential for building an equitable education system that benefits all students, regardless of their abilities or geographical location.

| KEYWORDS

Teaching English; Students of Special Needs; policy development; Jordan

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Special education these days is no longer a luxury in any educational system, as providing support and services to students with disabilities is considered an inherent right that cannot be denied. Jordan, like many other third-world countries, is making slow strides in this area, which has affected the quality of education provided to students with special needs. Therefore, in this article, the education system in Jordan will be examined, and the issues and challenges related to teaching English to students of special needs in Jordan will be explored.

The philosophy of education in the Kingdom emerges from the Jordanian Constitution and the Arab-Islamic civilization, and this philosophy is represented in many intellectual foundations, such as belief in God and belief in the ideals of the Arab nation (McKeown, 2015). National, nationalistic, and humanitarian foundations also play a major role in the philosophy of education in Jordan, as Jordanians are an integrated unit, and there is no place for racial, regional, or sectarian fanaticism. Education in Jordan is placed on justice, equality, freedom, and positive involvement in and development of global civilization (Constitutional Court of Jordan, Article 5). According to the Jordanian Constitution, Jordanians are equal in political, social, and economic rights and duties and are differentiated by the extent of their giving to their society and their affiliation with it. The bases of educational policy include guiding the system to be more matching with the needs of the individual and society, establishing a balance between them, giving chances to achieve the principle of proper education, and investing in parallel education patterns in coordination with the competent authorities by expanding the patterns of teaching in educational institutions to have special education programs, the gifted, and those with special needs (McKeown, 2015).

Although the steps taken by Jordan in the field of special needs education are great, especially in recent years, represented by the ratification of international agreements that affirm the right to a comprehensive education for individuals with disabilities and the development of special policies to be consistent with these global standards. However, Jordan is still considered one of the lagging

countries in this field. Although the policies, laws, and regulations in Jordan are appropriate and modern, respect rights, and recognize responsibility towards people with special needs, the matter is different from the practical side, as there is still a large gap between the policy and its implementation on the ground. Although special needs schools exist, they are limited, and their ability to provide quality education and inclusive environments for students with disabilities is insufficient.

Indeed, when it comes to reality, we can realize the extent of the challenges and problems related to special needs education in Jordan. One of the most prominent of these challenges is the limited access to these centres for people with special needs. Unfortunately, many students with disabilities cannot reach these specialized schools, either because of the distance of these schools from their places of residence or because of the cost of transportation to and from these schools. In addition, even if they were able to access these centres, they would face the problem of a lack of trained personnel. These schools and canterers often suffer from a shortage of qualified and trained staff specializing in the field of special education, which negatively affects the quality of the service provided to them and the inability to develop them and develop their abilities (Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, 2023).

Moreover, the inadequate infrastructure is considered one of the biggest challenges facing people with special needs in Jordan. Schools and educational canterers are not qualified to receive them or give them an equal opportunity with other students. As a result, special needs students feel that they are unable to learn, which leads to a negative outcome in their academic and social lives (Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, 2023). This is also often the main reason why students bully and stigmatize them, which may negatively affect their self-esteem and educational results.

The problem worsens and becomes greater when these students study with other normal students in the same classroom, especially when the teacher is not qualified or aware of the importance of using the principle of differentiation to encourage and treat people with special needs. In addition, the large numbers in classrooms make attention and support for students with special needs difficult or even impossible.

Therefore, based on many of the challenges mentioned, it is very important to identify and address these problems. Addressing these challenges is crucial to achieving a healthy and balanced education system that does not exclude people with special needs. This is not just a legal and moral obligation but also a means to promote diversity and equality in education. Developing education for people with special needs will also improve the quality of education for all students, which contributes to improving learning outcomes as a whole. The most important step in this is creating suitable and healthy centres for special needs students, and when needed, it is important to merge them with other students when having a safe and supportive environment.

2. The Reality of the situation:

Upon in-depth research into this field, the researcher found that there are many studies presented by the state that lack credibility and contradict many international reports. In addition to this, Strengths and challenges will also be discussed, and Jordanian laws and policies will be examined, which will enable us to conduct a critical and analytical examination to evaluate the current Jordanian education system.

Although Jordan has enacted many regulations and laws that take care of the rights of the disabled and people with special needs, most of these local and international legislations have not been implemented completely and practically. Jordan, for example, is a part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2017, The 10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education (2020), and the Ministry of Education's 2018-2022 Education Strategic Plan.

According to a Handicap International report released in 2022, the percentage of students with special needs who are enrolled in Jordanian primary education is less than 2% (27,694). The report has also revealed that about 79% of the disabled students in Jordan are not covered by the Ministry of Education's service and thus are excluded. The report adds that this percentage is only about Jordanian national students and that the percentage would be worse if non-Jordanians like Syrian refugees and others were included in the report. The report indicates that more than 22% of the Syrian refugee children in Jordan have disabilities. In addition to this, the Handicap International report has also indicated that disabled students tend not to attend school due to a lack of care and special attention to them. Disabled students tend to drop school due to bullying without having special programs to protect them and support them.

As we mentioned previously, the legal framework in Jordan recognizes the right of people with special needs to education, but there is a noticeable gap between theoretical laws and their application on the ground. For example, Jordanian laws and regulations recognize the rights of people with special needs to education, but government schools, in particular, lack the infrastructure that allows people with special needs to enrol in education. Dana Ziadat prepared a report that was published on Jordan News on the

conditions of people with special needs in Jordan and highlighted the tragic conditions that people with special needs suffer from. It also indicated that the percentage of people with special needs enrolling in education is less than 2% due to the poor infrastructure of Jordanian schools and weak financial resources.

Melhem and Isa (2013), in their study "Special Education in Jordan: Reality and Expectations," showed that the education system in Jordan suffers from problems much greater than the infrastructure. For example, in some public schools affiliated with the Jordanian Ministry of Education, there is a resource room that is concerned with educating people with special needs. However, the truth is that the Ministry of Education needs trained teachers to deal with people with special needs. According to what the researchers reported, the problem goes beyond the modest infrastructure to trained competencies. They add that: "The MoE started to work for children with special needs by establishing resource rooms in the regular schools. The special education needs teachers offered special educational services for these students for a short period of time each day" (419).

However, according to a study that was made by the United States Agency for International Development entitled: "Assessment on Education of Students with Disabilities in Jordan: Final Report," the resource rooms in the Jordanian Ministry of Education: "[...] in practice only serve students with learning disabilities (grades 1 to 4), rather than being a support for all students with disabilities. Students with learning disabilities are typically removed from their general education class to receive individualized instruction. There are no supports in place to support general education teachers in providing inclusive education" (5).

This has also been indicated in the Handicap International report about Jordan, "*Disability-Inclusive Education in Jordan*," as the report stated that: "The education system lacks capacity to welcome and support children with disabilities in mainstream education: lack of teachers' preparation on inclusive education strategies, inaccessible and rigid curricula, and inaccessible physical and virtual learning environments are crucial barriers" (2). The same report has also indicated that during difficult times like Covid-19, disabled and special needs students are the ones who suffer the most (2). Their facilities are already poor in ordinary situations, and they get worse during emergencies. This indicates that the situation of the disabled and special needs students is stable, and at any time, their education may be stopped, unlike the other ordinary students. This may not be considered direct discrimination between disabled and special needs students and ordinary students, but it is, as a matter of fact, a practical result of the difference between theory and practice. In other words, all legal documents, laws, legislations, and national and international agreements set out the theoretical part of disabled students' rights, but when it comes to real application, everything is different.

3. Challenges of teaching students of special needs in Jordan:

One of the biggest problems in the research and documents about the situation of the disabled and special needs students is the subjectivity of the studies. This means that when searching about disabled students' situations, you would find results like this study that was conducted by Al Shoura and Ahmad (2014): "Jordan's special education programs were initiated in the late 1960s. At this time, it was comprised of an institute for serving the children who are identified as deaf, blind, mentally retarded and cognitively impaired" (29). This paper, for example, did not study the situation objectively, as having one or two students in the kingdom that take care of a very small percentage of the disabled and special needs students does not mean that these students are maintained, and the government is doing their job and responsibility toward them. In fact, the problem is in the inclusivity of the disabled and special needs students, as some disabled and special needs students are favoured while others are not. That is to say, for sure, the disabled and special needs students who are living in Amman, the capital city of Jordan, would not suffer from the same conditions and situations as those who live in rural areas like Mafraq or even those in the border with Saudi Arabia in the middle of the desert. An inclusive approach should be applied to all disabled and special needs students, disregarding of their age category, religion, gender, or even their geographical location. An inclusive approach should be taken into account.

In addition to this, the lack of harmony between the several institutions in Jordan makes it very difficult to reach an acceptable situation for disabled and special needs children. This is mainly because the issue of the Jordanian disabled and special needs children is not managed by one institution; rather, it is divided between several institutions, such as the Ministry of Education (ME), Ministry of Social Development (MSD), United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Ministry of Higher Education (MHE), and the private institutions (31).

According to Al Shoura and Ahmad, the duties of the Jordanian Ministry of Education is to include the disabled and special needs students in their public education, and according to the researchers, this is done by: "[paying] special attention to the idea of inclusion by establishing resource rooms in public schools for children with disabilities (i.e., including LD, deaf, visual impairment) and resource rooms in many pioneer schools in different areas across Jordan" (30). While the duties of the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development are limited to the supportive role: "The Ministry of Social Development provided education and rehabilitation and employment services care for most types of disabilities, especially mental retardation and hearing impairment across Jordan" (31).

Having said this, it is very clear that the governmental institutions are unable to do their role in maintaining an inclusive and safe educational environment for the disabled and special needs students, as the real role is done by the international voluntary institutions that are funded by the European and American aid institutions and organizations: "The informal Institutions, including international voluntary organizations such as European and American institutions which assist and support Refugees, private schools and Jordanian students through private funds and under the supervision of the ME and MSD" (31).

According to a study that was made by the United States Agency for International Development entitled: "Assessment on Education of Students with Disabilities in Jordan: Final Report," the Jordanian Ministry of Education does not have a way to figure out the exact number of disabled children in the Jordanian schools, or even about the rates of their drop-out. The report adds that The Jordanian Ministry of Education does not have the capability to: "assess the extent to which children with disabilities are out of school. This lack of information impacts the MoE's ability to plan and develop inclusive education programs effectively" (4).

The report adds that the problem gets greater when the Jordanian Ministry of Education is not able to make the right screening about the disabled and students of special needs properly. This means that there are many special needs students who study in the ordinary program and are considered normal students, though they suffer from a disability or a special need. This inappropriate appropriation results in a lack of students' progress. The report adds that: "A systematic process does not exist for screening or evaluating children with disabilities (including vision and hearing screening) in the classroom, which results in large numbers of children being inappropriately identified and thus not receiving the services and support they need to be successful in the classroom" (4).

4. Conclusion

This paper examined the challenges and opportunities in the field of teaching English to students with special needs, focusing on the need for measures to meet the needs of students with special needs. Despite the great strides in policy development, Jordan faces major obstacles in putting these policies in the field practically and tangibly to benefit individuals with special needs.

Although the educational philosophy in Jordan, which is rooted in Arab-Islamic values, emphasizes a commitment to justice, equality, and positive global participation, this research clearly shows the gap between the theoretical aspect promoted by the state and the reality in the field in the field of private education. Hence, this paper showed that among the most important challenges faced by people with special needs are limited access to specialized centres, insufficient training of employees, insufficient infrastructure, and the negative impact on the academic and social life of students with special needs.

The previous studies confirmed the idea that while Jordan has enacted laws and ratified international agreements affirming the rights of individuals with disabilities, the implementation of these measures remains weak. The statistics presented, such as the enrolment rate of students with special needs in primary education of less than 2%, underscore the urgent need to take concrete action. The International Organization for Disabilities report confirms the exclusion of a large percentage of disabled students from the Ministry of Education's services, which indicates a systemic problem that goes beyond mere numbers.

The findings also illustrated that the educational situation in Jordan for students with special needs lacks infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and a scarcity of inclusive education strategies. The contradiction between theoretical frameworks and practical application is clear, as is evident from the disparity between the laws that recognize the rights of people with special needs and the actual reality in schools. The research highlights the negative impacts of these challenges on educational outcomes for students with disabilities, especially during difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, the subjectivity of some studies and the lack of harmony between different institutions in Jordan exacerbate the difficulties faced by disabled students and those with special needs. The fragmentation of responsibilities between multiple entities, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development, UNRWA, the Ministry of Higher Education, and private institutions, hinders a coordinated and effective response to the needs of these students.

In light of these challenges, Jordan must adopt a comprehensive approach to private education. Bridging the gap between policy and practice requires concerted efforts to strengthen infrastructure, provide comprehensive training for teachers, and implement inclusive education strategies. In addition, a collaborative and cohesive approach between relevant institutions is crucial to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all students, regardless of their abilities or geographical locations.

Ultimately, addressing the challenges described in the paper is not just a legal and moral obligation but an essential step toward building a strong and equitable education system. By prioritizing the development of education for people with special needs, Jordan can create a more inclusive and diverse educational environment that benefits all students and contributes to the overall improvement of the education system.

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