

Teacher education for inclusive education in the Arab world: The case of Jordan

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Abstract This article examines teacher education programmes in the Arab region and the extent to which teachers are prepared to work in inclusive education settings. In the Arab world, the emerging area of inclusive education faces various challenges, among them a teaching force that is not adequately prepared to teach all children. This challenge arises partly because, without content on inclusive education, current pre-service and in-service programmes produce teachers who lack the skills to work with children with special needs in mainstream classrooms. This article focuses on teacher education in Jordan, where the problems and challenges surrounding teacher education programmes for inclusive education mirror those in other Arab countries. In Jordan, training for inclusive education is very limited at both pre-service and in-service levels, both because the idea has only recently been introduced and because of limited financial resources in the country. Still, the growing interest in adopting an inclusive education system has raised awareness about the importance of providing teachers with education that enables them to work with children with special needs in inclusive settings.

Keywords Inclusive education · Jordan · Arab countries · Teacher education

In this article I offer a first level of analysis of programmes that prepare teachers to work with students with special needs in inclusive education settings. My analysis targets Arab countries in the Middle East where data were available (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria) and where recent developments have encouraged recognition that it is important to expand the education system to include children with different characteristics and diverse needs. Notwithstanding this interest and awareness, literature and research on inclusive education and teacher education in this region is still scant (Gaad 2011). Moreover, much of what is happening in the area has yet to be systematically documented. For example, it is not easy to track down the plans and practical steps that countries are taking toward building a more

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inclusive educational system; the roles that schools, families, and society are taking on in this process; or the difficulties and challenges facing this system. This lack of literature limits discussion and debate as professionals and researchers attempt to investigate the development of inclusive education in the region.

My aim is to contribute to the literature on inclusive education in the Arab world by mapping what is known about the various teacher education programmes and inclusive education. I obtained much of the data from two sources: official websites that do not necessarily contain all the relevant documents or potentially available information; and interviews with people involved in teacher preparation or knowledgeable about it. Therefore, this is a first level of review, an attempt to provide general evidence on whether or not the teaching force is sufficiently prepared to participate in the move toward inclusion. A more in-depth analysis, built on more concrete data generated from field research, is still needed, but this descriptive review of available evidence provides a basis for such work.

Inclusive education in the Arab region is a newly introduced concept. In general, the term “inclusion” is mainly used to describe the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools (Gaad 2011). As yet, the term does not refer to other children whose exclusion is due to conditions other than having a disability (e.g., bilingual learners, children who live in conflict or poverty, or members of ethnic and religious minority groups), categories increasingly used in international declarations and reports (for example, UNESCO 2010). Accordingly, I focus on teacher education programmes that prepare teachers to work with children with special educational needs associated with impairments, disabilities, and learning difficulties.

For the purpose of this article, the Arab states in the Middle East include the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates), together with Egypt (but not other North African countries), Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Iraq and Yemen were excluded because of a lack of information. Arab states in the Middle East vary socially, economically, and politically, but they share similarities. Their culture stems from their geographical location, common language (Arabic), and common religion (Islam), and minority religions exist in several countries (Gaad 2011). Accordingly, similarities and differences also exist in the education systems across these countries. For example, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are relatively newly established countries that have witnessed rapid social and economic development based on oil wealth. The result has been rapid change in their education systems to meet their economic and social needs. Many schools, especially in the private sector, have adopted a western education system, with English as the language of instruction. Other countries, such as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, have older and more stable educational systems which are more rooted in the Arab culture. One similarity is their recognition of the rights of children with special needs in general and their right to inclusive education in particular. These countries, for example, have all recognized the importance of protecting the right of disabled children by signing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNC-RPD). Nevertheless, all countries in the region face various challenges in fulfilling their commitment to provide an inclusive education system and a key challenge is preparing a teaching force that can work in such a system.

Education in the Arab world: An overview

Although education has been acknowledged as a predominant factor in social and economic development, and in overcoming poverty and enhancing social equality in different

societies (Tabutin and Schoumaker 2005; UNESCO UIS 2001), the Arab world still faces enormous challenges in providing essential educational services, of appropriate quantity and quality, to those entitled to them.

From a developmental perspective, in the Arab world education has the potential to play a significant role in accelerating the development process because its population is young. Among the overall population (352.2 million in 2009, 5.2% of the world population), 114.5 million people were under age 14 as of 2005 and this number was projected to reach 120.6 million in 2010 (33.6% of the total). The total number of youth aged 15–24 reached 67.9 million (20.9% of the population) in 2005 and the figure is expected to rise to 73 million in 2015 (ESCWA 2009). In order to invest in this large and young source of human capital, the Arab region is striving to improve education at different levels (UNESCO 2003). However, the 2008 Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2008) noted that education in this region still faces great challenges. For instance, more than 6 million children of primary school age were still out of school in 2004. Also, adult literacy rates are among the lowest in the world and only two-thirds of adults across the Arab states can read and write with understanding. Furthermore, the quality of education is poor, as indicated by the national and international assessments of literacy and numeracy skills, especially for students who come from poor and culturally excluded families. All too often, students do not master the curriculum, as indicated by the high incidence of grade repetition in some countries.

Further challenges facing the Arab world are linked to inequality of educational opportunity: marginalization and exclusion for poor children, girls (Tabutin and Schoumaker 2005; UNESCO 2003, 2008), members of minority groups, and children with disabilities still occur in the educational system (Chehab 2009; UNESCO 2010). For the Arab world to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals, it must build more inclusive education systems. This approach will both expand education services and provide more equal educational opportunities for marginalized groups such as children with disabilities.

One challenge facing the current system is to prepare teachers who can work with all children despite their diverse backgrounds, learning characteristics, and difficulties (Chehab 2009; UNESCO 2010), so that it can become less exclusionary.

It is evident that teachers play a central role in improving the quality of education and increasing its effectiveness (Cooper and Alvarado 2006). However, the shortage of well-trained and qualified teachers in many countries, including those of the Arab world (UIS 2009), is still a major barrier to achieving EFA goals, especially among marginalized groups (UNESCO 2010). Overcoming such barriers requires governments and policy makers to foster a well-qualified, well-equipped, and motivated teacher work force that is prepared to work in more inclusive educational ways and deal with children with various learning needs and difficulties (UIS 2001). This can be achieved through teacher education programmes that are designed to provide teachers with the required knowledge, skills, and pedagogies to enable them to work with children with disabilities and within an inclusive education system.

Mapping teacher education for inclusion in the Arab region

Various sources of data informed this study of teacher education programmes. As noted above, however, very little data exists that is directly related to this topic. Government policy and other official documents are often not available or accessible. Thus this study draws on university documents, interviews, websites, and other forms of literature.

University documentation on teacher education programmes

This data source includes prospectuses and syllabi from a range of higher education providers. Such programmes are usually offered by higher education institutions (universities and community colleges) and designed to prepare teachers in different specialties (i.e. early childhood, primary education, subject specialties). The preparation of teachers in these programmes usually combines courses at the university or college level with practical experience in schools and other settings.

To determine whether teacher programmes prepare teachers to work in inclusive education systems, I examined syllabi from teacher education programmes. I chose the leading universities in teacher education in each country, downloaded the syllabi from their websites, and reviewed each one separately to find courses in the area of inclusive education, special education or any other directly relevant topics, and the nature and number of these courses.

Interviews

In addition I conducted two sets of interviews to gain data about in-service teacher programmes (mainly in Jordan). First, I interviewed people involved in planning or providing in-service teacher programmes. These interviews focused on examining if any training programmes are offered to teachers in the area of inclusive education, and what is the nature, content, and frequency of this training. Second, in interviews with a sample of regular classroom teachers, I asked whether they have received any pre-service or in-service training in inclusive education, what was the nature of any training, how regular it was, and how much they saw it as helpful. The sample consisted of 60 teachers from five schools in Amman, Jordan.

Since it was not always possible to make direct contact with the interviewees, I conducted interviews via telephone and email as well as in person.

Websites and other literature

I reviewed the websites of educational authorities and other institutions and organizations that might provide information on teacher education programmes in the different countries. Finally, I reviewed literature on teacher education for inclusive education in the region's countries. This literature is very scant and mostly reviews inclusive education in general rather than teacher education programmes. Still, it confirms that one challenge facing inclusive education in the region is the lack of teachers who are properly prepared to work in such a system.

Teacher education for inclusive education in the Arab countries

As in other parts of the world, there are two kinds of teacher education programmes in the Arab world: pre-service and in-service. A pre-service programme is traditionally provided by a higher education institution and offered at two levels: a two-year community college diploma, and a four-year university course leading to a bachelor's degree. Other programmes are offered at a graduate level and include a higher diploma (one year) and master's degrees (usually two years). Pre-service programmes usually combine academic education (subject matter, i.e., math, language, social studies, child development, etc.),

with professional training (i.e., pedagogical studies), usually accompanied by a period of practicum training. The in-service training programmes, which may or may not award a certificate, are usually in the form of short courses or workshops offered by academic institutions or educational authorities such as a ministry of education.

I looked first at pre-service programmes. In most Arab countries there are three different programmes: early childhood education, early primary education (usually the first three grades of primary school), and subject specialist education (mathematics education, language education, science education, etc.). These programmes prepare teachers to work with different age groups: pre-school children (aged 4–6), primary school children (aged 6–9) and older primary school children (aged 9–15) respectively. I reviewed the syllabi of these programmes in the leading universities, known as the “big providers” of teacher education in each country, to see if they included any professional courses/training on inclusive education, disability, special education, or any other relevant subjects (see Table 1).

My review of what is available in the Arab world shows that, in all the universities I considered, the early childhood and early primary education programmes offer one or two special education courses. A closer look at the syllabi of these courses shows that they provide introductory knowledge about disabilities, particularly mild disabilities, and are typically titled “introduction to special education”, “the psychology of exceptional children”, or “learning disabilities”. Hence, these courses provide general theoretical knowledge about disability and special education, but little on pedagogical practices.

Looking at the subject education programmes, I found that few universities offer any training on inclusive education, special education, or disabilities. Indeed, teachers enrolled in these programmes will lack the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to work with all children in inclusive settings when they later start their professional careers as teachers. This may be because educational services are not offered to students with special needs at the later stage of primary and secondary level education in mainstream schools. Accordingly, providing teachers with training in this area is not seen as justifiable. Still, it is worth noting that students with special needs who attend mainstream schools for the first three years of primary education tend to continue their later primary and secondary study at these schools, but without additional support or knowledge from the teachers. This raises questions about the quality of the provision that is provided.

As for in-service training programmes, I found very little evidence that this level of training is provided in most Arab countries. Therefore, as a first step to find out about these programmes, I reviewed the websites of the educational authorities of the Arab countries mentioned above. Unfortunately, I found no indications of in-service training except for teachers of special education. This may suggest that in-service training programmes are not available to classroom teachers, or it may indicate that such programmes are rare and infrequent, if they ever existed. This conclusion was confirmed by some graduate students at the Special Education Department at the University of Jordan who work as special education teachers in the Gulf region (e.g. Saudi Arabia and Oman). Discussions with these students suggested that in-service training in the area of special or inclusive education is not offered to teachers of mainstream education, but only to teachers of special education.

The research literature on teachers’ attitudes toward the inclusion of children with special needs points out that teachers often hold negative attitudes towards these children and their inclusion, partly because they lack knowledge about such children and how to work with them. Therefore, most of this literature recommends that regular classroom teachers should receive training on how to teach these children in regular classrooms (Abedel Jabbar and Massoud 2002; Al Ghazo and Gaad 2004; Gaad and Khan 2007).

Table 1 Teacher programmes in universities in the Arab world

Country	University	Programmes	Courses in inclusive education	Courses in special education
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	Zayed University	Elementary education (pre-school to 3rd grade, 4th to 9th grades)	None	People with special needs
	United Arab Emirates University	Early childhood Primary education	None	Teaching students with special needs Education of exceptional children
Bahrain	Higher colleges of technology	Early childhood education	None	Special needs in early childhood education Special needs in education
	University of Bahrain	Educational technology/English language Primary education	None	The psychology of children with special needs
	Royal University for Women	Early childhood Primary education	None	Students with disabilities
Qatar	Qatar University	Primary education	Inclusive classroom	None
	Sultan Qaboos University	Early childhood	None	Children with special needs
Oman	University of Nizwa	Early childhood	None	Introduction to special education
	Arab Open University	Primary education	None	Children with special needs Learning disabilities
Saudi Arabia	Kuwait University	Primary education	None	Education of children with special needs
	Umm Al-Qura	Early childhood	None	Exceptional children
	Taif University	Early childhood	None	Learning disabilities
Egypt	King Faisal University	Primary education	None	The psychology of exceptional children
	Cairo University	Primary education	None	Special education
	Zagzig University	Early childhood Primary education	None	The psychology of exceptional children Learning disabilities
				The psychology of exceptional children Methods for teaching children with special needs

Table 1 continued

Country	University	Programmes	Courses in inclusive education	Courses in special education
Syria	Alexandria University	Primary education	None	Exceptional children
	Damascus University	Primary education	None	Special education
	Aleppo University	Primary education	None	Special education
	Al-Baath University	Curriculum and educational technology	None	Special education
		Early childhood	None	Learning disabilities
Lebanon	Middle East University	Primary education	None	Educating exceptional learners
		Elementary education with teaching diploma	None	

Given the insufficient information about teacher training programmes in the Arab world, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about their quality or availability to mainstream teachers. However, inferences based on the experiences reported here suggest that such courses are not available to mainstream teachers, or if so, only rarely.

In sum, at both the pre-service and in-service levels, teacher training programmes pay very limited attention to preparing teachers to work with all students in inclusive settings. Yet, these programmes, where they do exist, target mainly teachers of young children (aged 5–8 years) who are enrolled in pre-service professional training. Moreover, this training, if it happens, is usually described as being theoretical rather than pedagogical and focuses on students with mild disabilities. This conclusion is worth discussing in its wider regional context. While many factors may account for the lack of teacher training for inclusive education in the Arab world, I suggest three main reasons.

First, the notion of inclusive education as an educational philosophy and pedagogy is still new in the Arab world (Gaad 2011) and therefore it is not yet clearly integrated into the educational systems, agendas, and strategies. In fact, some educators still perceive inclusive education as a luxury. They point out that many children around the Arab world are still deprived of the opportunity to go to school, and even if they were in school, the schools often lack basic classroom material such as desks and books. Therefore, inclusive education, seen in the Arab world as inclusion for students with special needs, is not a top priority on the educational agenda, as people see other challenges as more important and needing to be tackled first (Chehab 2009).

Second, despite the general consensus among these countries on the right of children with special needs to be educated in inclusive education settings, practical responses on how to implement such provision are still vague. There is no guidance on what form it should take, nor are there suggestions on the roles and responsibilities of the various parties (i.e. educational authorities, society, schools and teachers) in the process of implementing this provision (Gaad 2011).

Third, countries that claim to have introduced inclusive education (for example, Saudi Arabia and Jordan) have established a special classroom in a mainstream school. Students attend these classes for part of the day; they are usually taught by teachers who hold a qualification in special education. Adopting this form of provision has led to a tendency to believe that teaching these students is not a responsibility of the regular classroom teachers but only the special education teachers (Al-Khatib 2007)—even though those with special needs spend most of their school day in the regular classroom and not the special classroom. This situation might have led the planners of teacher training programmes to misidentify the ability to “work with children with special needs” as a prerequisite for becoming a classroom or subject teacher and may partly explain the shortage of training in this area.

Teacher education is an area of development that will have great influence in the future on inclusive education in the region. Preparing teachers to work in inclusive education systems will build the needed infrastructure to sustain its progress. However, multiple challenges face education in the Arab world. For many Arab states, inclusive education is still far from becoming a priority given the difficulties in providing basic education to all children. In other states, which have made more progress toward achieving international educational goals as articulated in EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), inclusive education is being introduced gradually but still faces great challenges. Jordan is one country that has started to advocate for the importance of adopting an inclusive education that will enable children with disabilities to receive their education equally alongside other children.

In the following section I discuss teacher education for inclusive education in Jordan, as a case study of an Arab country, in order to provide a more detailed account of the context of teacher education in the region and the various difficulties it faces.

Jordan: Demographic and educational overview

Located in the heart of the Middle East, Jordan is a newly established country. In 2008, its population exceeded six million and it has a high growth rate, estimated to be 2.2% in 2010 (CIA 2011). The population is young: 42.2% of residents are under 14, and 31.4% between 15 and 29 (THKOJ 2011). Around 89% of the population can read and write (USAID 2011); this gives Jordan one of the highest rates of literacy among Arab countries (Hammoud 2005). Primary and secondary education is free and mandatory for all children until age 16. Currently, around one third of the population is enrolled in educational services with a small disparity in primary school attendance rates between urban and rural areas. In the academic year 2004/2005, Jordan had 5,348 schools, attended by 1,439,800 students, 1,256,400 of them in primary school and 183,400 in secondary (Nasser 2006). The educational system in Jordan consists of three stages: preschool, elementary, and secondary. Elementary school is compulsory, starting with first grade when students are age 6; it continues until grade 10. The secondary stage adds two more years, grades 11 and 12. At the beginning of the secondary stage students decide on the academic specialty (e.g. science, art, information technology) they would like to pursue. By the end of this three-stage system students sit for a general exam after which they enter higher education if they wish to do so.

Jordan is known for its limited natural and economic resources. To compensate, government policies have capitalized on human resources to build a highly qualified workforce and society that is competitive in both the regional and international markets. In order to achieve these goals, special attention has been given to education: providing free school education, spreading and improving schooling in rural areas, reducing the illiteracy rate, narrowing the gender gap in literacy, and regularly reviewing the educational curricula to include skills that encourage students' critical thinking, research, and computer skills. Still, education in Jordan faces many challenges. Among them are the limited access to early childhood education (USAID 2003, 2011) and the high dropout rates at all educational levels but especially in the higher grades. In addition there are insufficient facilities in state schools (Nasser 2006; World Bank 2006), uneven teacher-to-student ratios, outdated teaching methods, limited use of technology, and a clear need to link the various academic skills more closely to actual life and labour market skills (USAID 2003).

The national educational provision for students with special needs

Students with special needs were legally recognized in Jordan when the Law for the Welfare of Disabled People (No. 12/1993) was introduced in 1993. It stipulated for the first time that "education is a right for people with disabilities each according to his/her own abilities". This law also recognized the necessity to improve the current educational system, institutionally and methodologically, to meet the needs of students with disabilities. For instance, it required the Ministry of Education to provide primary and secondary education to students with disabilities and to adjust its educational programmes to include special education services (Turmusani 1999). To enforce the right to education of students

with disabilities, the old law was amended in 2007 by the introduction of the Law on the Rights of Disabled People (No. 31/2007). The new law explicitly asserted the right of students with special needs to inclusive education at both school and higher education levels. It also mandated that all equipment and arrangements necessary for the education of students with disabilities be made available. Such arrangements include providing equipment free of charge to facilitate students' learning, communication, and mobility, as well as providing educational assessments by specialized teams, counseling programmes for students and their families, and professional staff who are qualified to work with students with special needs.

In order to implement this law, the Ministry of Education expanded its educational provision to include special educational services in many schools across the country. These services have been provided gradually through special classes called resource rooms where students with learning difficulties receive educational programming that aims to meet their various needs. The number of these resource rooms in state and private schools exceeds 500 and is growing (MoE 2010). These special classes are seen as providing educational inclusion since they have been established in regular schools and students of these classes also attend regular classes for most of the school day. Resource rooms are structured to allow individual or small-group teaching with easy access to various learning materials for both students and teachers. In general, the one or two teachers who teach in these rooms, depending on the size of the school, have qualifications in special education. In fact, many such teachers hold specialized degrees in teaching Arabic language skills or math in addition to a higher diploma in learning difficulties.

Resource rooms are perceived as a significant step towards the inclusion of students with special needs in Jordan, but this form of provision has limitations. First, few students can be accepted into the resource rooms, given the lack of financial resources, expertise, and trained staff. Second, only students with mild difficulties, who already attend the regular schools, are currently accepted in the resource rooms, so students with more severe learning disabilities and sensory impairments are often still excluded. Third, the pattern of this provision has limited the opportunities of students with special needs to receive intervention elsewhere. For instance, though those students spend most of the school day in a regular classroom, their educational needs are not acknowledged there. Fourth, teachers in the resource rooms and those in regular classrooms collaborate and communicate very little regarding students' difficulties, intervention, educational goals, and progress in the resource room. This results in these students experiencing a form of exclusion in their regular classrooms. Finally, the intervention provided in these rooms is arbitrary: decisions about student referrals and assessment, and the planning and delivery of their educational interventions, are largely left to a given teacher's experiences and knowledge.

In addition to the laws described above, and a further official endorsement of the rights of children with special needs in general and to inclusive education in particular, Jordan signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007. In this convention, Article 24 states that persons with disabilities should have access to inclusive, equal, and free primary and secondary education. This article of the convention, however, did not come into effect until the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCAPD) in Jordan took the initiative to set an agenda to translate the content of this convention into practical procedures. The agenda was developed throughout the last two years through a roundtable discussion with experts in the area discussing each article of the convention and suggesting possible strategies for implementing it in the Jordanian context.

I participated in the session where the article on the right of students with disabilities to receive inclusive education was discussed by representatives from schools, the ministries of education and social affairs, and academic institutions and universities. The participants shared their views and provided feedback on the possibility of developing the education system to become more inclusive. Not surprisingly, many of the perspectives and feedback were negative and did not favour adopting an inclusive approach; the participants pointed to great financial, social, educational, and logistic constraints and the fact that staff are not trained or prepared. Clearly, more support is needed if these views are to be challenged and changes are to be introduced.

Nevertheless, the idea of inclusive education seemed achievable; many suggested that careful planning and cooperation between the different parties would lead to gradually changing the current system to become more inclusive (Charafeddine 2009). It is now hoped that the strategy adopted by the HCAPD will help prepare the ground for more official and practical steps toward adopting an inclusive education system. The agenda will also help gather the efforts and expertise of the various parties—including the private sector, schools, the Ministry of Education, and academic institutions—in order to facilitate the process and procedures needed to implement an inclusive education system. Much can be achieved if colleagues can continue to work together.

In sum, special education is an emerging field in Jordan, a country that is still facing enormous challenges in achieving international educational standards such as the EFA goals. Inclusive education has proved even more difficult to implement and many special education practices are considered inclusive. As a result, the educational provision for children with special needs has been facing great challenges, including the way that the current provision (represented in resource rooms) is functioning, the limited financial resources, and the attitudes of society in general and schools in particular toward children with special needs. Another important challenge, suggested by the HCAPD in its agenda to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is the lack of training for regular classroom teachers on how to work in inclusive education and their lack of all the relevant skills that are important in teaching children with special needs. This issue has been also suggested by researchers who found that regular classroom teachers do not have enough knowledge about children with learning difficulties (Al-Khatib 2007), and do not have positive attitudes toward these children and their inclusion in the classroom (Al Ghazo 2002).

Working towards forming and supporting inclusive provision is now seen as a key challenge to the educational authority, and teacher education remains a crucial factor in overcoming this challenge.

Clearly, providing the nation with qualified teachers is a foundational issue in building inclusive education in Jordan. In the next section I examine and discuss teacher education programmes at both the pre-service and in-service levels in order to identify the weaknesses and problems in providing teachers with relevant training to work with children with special needs.

Are teachers prepared for inclusion? A review of teacher pre-service and in-service training programmes in Jordan

The first institution of higher education to be established in Jordan was a teachers' college founded in 1951 to offer training programmes to those who wanted to pursue a teaching career. Since then, teacher education programmes have been developing and expanding

with more colleges and programmes opening throughout the country (MoHESR 2010). Today, most universities offer teacher programmes at different levels (BA, MA, and higher diploma) in different areas (early childhood, primary education, subject teacher, and special education). In addition many community colleges offer two-year training programmes for prospective teachers. Teacher pre-service training is complemented with in-service training, offered by the Ministry of Education and some professional and academic institutions; it aims to sustain the teachers' professional development whilst they are working.

Though these programmes have been expanding, their quality has long been the focus of excessive criticism (Al-Weher and Abu-Jaber 2007; Roggemann and Shukri 2010). For instance, the current pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes do not fully meet the challenges of preparing students for the modern workplace (USAID 2003), the aims of training programmes are not clear (Al-Weher and Abu-Jaber 2007), and newly employed teachers at various levels do not seem to have the required skills or experience (Roggemann and Shukri 2010). Therefore, providing a good level of teacher quality has become a great concern of the government; in the National Education Strategy launched in 2006, teacher education was accorded great importance. This agenda explicitly asserts that the new role for teachers requires new knowledge and skills and thus teacher training will be given a higher priority for investment within the educational system (Roggemann and Shukri 2010). This has led to the government asserting that universities should reform their teacher education programmes so they correspond to the needs of the education system (Saleh and Al-Karasneh 2009).

The reform agenda, however, has not emphasized preparing teachers for inclusive education. Accordingly, being able to work with all learners—including children with special educational needs—has not been identified as an important skill that fits the needs of the education system. Consequently, the pre-service teacher education programmes offered by all universities still do not sufficiently stress teachers gaining the skills they need to work in an inclusive education system. This was evident from my review of the syllabi of teacher education programmes at the four largest universities in Jordan: the University of Jordan, Al-Yarmouk University, Al-Hashimyyah University, and Al-Balka' Applied University. I found the programmes at these universities do not include training in the skills and knowledge related to inclusive education. Students enrolled in these programmes are introduced to some basic knowledge about special needs education through one or two introductory courses. Sometimes these courses are optional. Reviewing the content of these courses shows that they only provide theoretical knowledge and lack information about pedagogical practices. For example, the syllabus of the course Introduction to Special Education offered at the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Jordan encompasses a number of learning units, each of which generally introduces a particular impairment such as visual, hearing, or physical impairment, or learning difficulties. The course lasts about 4 months and students might be required to do a field visit to a centre or school of special education in order to see and meet children with special educational needs.

In investigating these courses and the training on skills related to inclusive education, I sought the views of colleagues who had supervised the practicum course of the teacher education programme at the University of Jordan and Al Balqa' Applied University. Their views confirmed my findings in the documentary analysis. First, the lack of training on inclusive education is a major weakness of the current teacher programmes in the country. The practicum course, where prospective teachers are expected to develop the required pedagogies and skills for teaching, is designed to prepare teachers to work only in

mainstream classrooms where the curriculum, teaching methods, and assessments are planned for children without special needs. This situation might have resulted from the assumption that teachers need to master skills that are important to teach their specialized subject; thus, skills such as adapting the curriculum or teaching methods to meet the needs of children with special needs are seen as additional or different skills.

Second, the fact that teachers are not equipped with the skills they need to work with all students affects the quality of education provided at schools. A good percentage of students have mild learning difficulties and attend regular classrooms that do not meet their educational needs. These children can be helped if teachers are prepared to work with all children with their diverse abilities and needs. Third, educators do not share a consensus on what inclusive education means and how it functions in society. Consequently, it is difficult for those planning teacher education programmes to decide on the skills that teachers need to work in inclusive education. As one colleague said, "We want our teachers to address the various needs of all children but we never prepare them to do so".

In-service training is offered mainly by the Ministry of Education. To examine the extent to which these programmes prepare teachers to work in inclusive education, I conducted a phone interview with the director of the Special Education Directorate at the Ministry of Education. He told me that the ministry offers a training course that focuses on the subject of specific learning difficulties (SLD). The course covers the learning characteristics of children with SLD, their learning problems, assessment, educational programmes, and learning methods. This course is theoretical and does not train teachers how to work with children with and without learning difficulties in the classroom and how, for example, they can diversify their teaching approaches to respond to the children's different needs and characteristics. I then asked how many teachers enroll in this course each year, and the director said that due to the very limited financial resources, only a small number of teachers could participate. In 2009 they "could only train 100 teachers" out of the more than 10,000 in the country. I concluded from the interview that the in-service training programme is very limited in focus, covering only specific learning difficulties, and reaching a small number of teachers. Above all, the training does not sufficiently address the skills required to work in inclusive education.

To clarify the availability of in-service programmes, I contacted the director of programmes at the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCAPD); while developing the agenda to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, he assessed the in-service teacher programmes in order to define which skills are necessary to work in inclusive education. The director said that teachers do not receive the required training in the area of special education or inclusive education. Accordingly, the council added the lack of teacher training in inclusive education as a weakness in developing an inclusive education system. Therefore, providing teachers with training courses in the areas of special education and inclusive education is now included in the nation's inclusive education agenda.

I collected further evidence from interviews with 60 teachers; I asked whether or not they had received any training in inclusive education. The conclusion that can be drawn here is that in-service teacher education in inclusive education is limited in scope and very scant, available only to a few teachers. Moreover it tends to focus on issues of special education rather than inclusive education. However, awareness is now increasing about the importance of this level of training in promoting and developing an inclusive education system. Only 10 teachers said that they had received any training on how to work with students with learning disabilities in mainstream schools. When I asked these teachers about the content of the training programme, one said "it was about the definitions of

learning disabilities, the characteristics of children with learning disabilities, why these children should learn in mainstream schools, and how to help these children when we have them in our classrooms”. Another said that the training session she attended “talked about why inclusion is important and how children with disabilities can benefit from studying in regular classroom”.

Conclusions

In sum, as the situation in Jordan shows, both pre and in-service teacher education programmes lack training in inclusive education although many children with learning difficulties attend school in regular classrooms and are taught by classroom teachers. These children are not likely to have their needs met in the mainstream classrooms because teachers are underprepared to teach all children, especially those with special educational needs. Nevertheless, more attention is now being given to this issue, since the Ministry of Education and other organisations are becoming more aware of the fundamental role that teachers play in developing an inclusive education. It is important at this stage that the ministry forge communication with the universities and colleges to ensure that their teacher education programmes better correspond to the current needs of the educational system, particularly by including in the teacher education programmes the skills most important for those working in inclusive education.

Although this article has focused on Jordan as an example of teacher education for inclusion in the Arab world, and is limited by the scope and nature of its research base, I suggested that similar challenges face other Arab countries too. These challenges are increasingly recognized by the individual countries concerned and also by international agencies such as UNESCO, which has recently been working with a range of partners to develop pre-service and in-service teacher education for inclusion in many countries in the region. Without such developments, it is unlikely that inclusion will become the means through which the various countries will be able to meet their commitments to achieving Education for All, particularly for children with special educational needs.

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