

CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT IN LEBANESE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Project of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education,
in partnership with UNICEF

Submitted by HAIGAZIAN UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences

June 2021



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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This Case Study on The Inclusive Education Pilot Project in Lebanese Public Schools is a joint venture between staff from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), the UNICEF (Lebanon) and the Consultants from the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Haigazian University, who collaboratively gave valuable input throughout the project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorders
CAS	Central Administration of Statistics
CERD	Centre for Educational Research and Development
CFM	Child Functioning Module
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DOPS	Direction de l'Orientation Pédagogique et Scolaire/ Directorate Of Counselling & Guidance
EU	European Union
FDA	Friends of the Disabled Association
FISTA	First Step Together Association
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disabilities and Health
IE	Inclusive Education
IEP	Individualized Educational Program
ILO	International Labor Organization
KG	Kindergarten, sometimes referred to as Preschool years
LASA	Lebanese Association for Self Advocacy
LD	Learning Disabilities and/or Learning Difficulties
LU	Lebanese University
LUPD	Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MTSS	Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
Multidisciplinary Team	Paraprofessionals and Special Educators
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRDC	National Rehabilitation and Development Center
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
Paraprofessionals	Team visiting the school including the psychologist, psychomotor therapist, speech therapist, and occupational therapist.
PBIS	Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports
RTI	Response to Intervention
SEN	Special Education Needs
SEN coaches	DOPS Coaches Assigned to the SEN Unit
SEN unit	Special Education Unit at DOPS
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
YAB	Youth Association for the Blind

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background:

Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 and has exhibited commitment to improving the condition of the child and protecting its well-being. Lebanon was also among the first to sign the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 but has yet to ratify the convention and implement the articles of Law 220/2000 to secure the inclusion of people with disabilities.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) in Lebanon in collaboration with UNICEF launched the Inclusive Education (IE) Pilot Project in 30 public schools spread across all the Lebanese governorates to encourage the enrollment of young learners with learning difficulties (LD) and ensure accessible and quality education for all learners in Lebanon, regardless of their nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, social class and disability.

This case-study assesses the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of inclusive education as concept and practice of different stakeholders from a representative sample of six schools selected from the 30 public schools that were included in the IE Pilot Project.

Methodology:

Data were collected from different categories of school stakeholders directly concerned with the implementation of IE (school principals, classroom teachers, special educators, paraprofessionals and SEN coaches, collaborating NGOs, parents and learners) through questionnaires, focus groups and observation. Questionnaire items measured stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes across three dimensions: inclusive culture, inclusive policies and inclusive practices. A mixed methods design was used for data analysis.

Results:

Inclusive culture: Findings revealed a generally positive perception of IE as a feasible and generalizable concept across all categories of participants and across all 6 schools. Personal definitions of IE differed across participants, with more functional definitions than rights-based definitions. Average estimates of perceived improvement of learners with LD in IE were given by the majority of participants (minority of participants gave above expectations estimates). School culture was described by the majority of participants as acceptant of inclusion, with an emphasis on good to average team collaboration.

Inclusive policy: Majority of participants perceived a good parental inclusion policy, a good to average performance monitoring policy, and an average support policy in terms of provision of material, resources as well as training.

Inclusive practice: Results revealed a degree of confusion among different participants in terms of their contribution to the IE process (roles and responsibilities) and an emphasis on improving teacher training, and in some cases, teachers' vision of inclusion.

Online teaching and intervention services: A major gap is revealed between facilities provided to interventionists, between interventionists and teachers, and between interventionists, teachers and learners with LD. Although a crisis-management plan has been in place, data showed that the

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impact of school closure on the teaching and intervention services was negative, with a big percentage of learners with LD not benefiting from such services.

Recommendations:

The present case study revealed many indices as to the extent to which MEHE is ready for a full-scale implementation of the IE project. As discussed above, the concept of inclusive culture is well ingrained in the surveyed schools, including parents of learners with and without disabilities, thanks to the systematic planning by MEHE and the dedication and obvious determination of all stakeholders for making IE possible, in spite of all the challenges and difficulties that the country is going through.

Specific inclusive policies seem to be in place, accompanied with a fair application of inclusive practices. The six surveyed schools are representative of the 30 schools that have been included in the IE Pilot Project, and data from these 6 schools revealed several strengths to build on, as well as several opportunities to learn from if the project is to be scaled up to a higher level. The below recommendations highlight the areas that will need to be improved before MEHE decides to move to full-scale implementation.

Those past three years have been exceptionally difficult and stressful for Lebanon in general, and for the Lebanese educational system in particular. The suggestion of scaling up the project to a new set of 30 schools in the next scholastic year (2021-2022) is a wise option to consider. Based on the data obtained from the present study, and on the following recommendations, a road map seems to be well paved for the establishment of a national inclusive education policy to be implemented at the national level in all public schools in Lebanon. Table 1 below summarizes the main strategic recommendations for such a road map.



TABLE 1

Summary of recommendations for a national policy for inclusive education in Lebanon

Policy rubric	Recommended strategies
1. Definition of Inclusive Education	- For consistency purposes, it is recommended that MEHE adopts the UNICEF definition of inclusive education (UNICEF, 2017a and UNICEF, 2017b)¹ as a unified definition to be used among all stakeholders, including MEHE, schools, parents and learners with and without disabilities. Such a definition should also include the specific objectives inclusion is seeking to achieve. - This definition is based on the CRPD Article 24 and the associated General Comment 4 which emphasizes that persons with disabilities, historically viewed as welfare recipients, are now recognized as right-holders, with a claim to the right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities.² - The definition emphasizes the active consultation with and involvement of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities and their families, through their representative organizations (OPDs), in all aspects of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education policies.³ - The definition of inclusive education should be reflected in all aspects of the life of the school (classroom teaching, students' relationships, parental involvement, etc.) and in the language and narrative used by all school stakeholders, including parents, when talking about IE.
2. Disability Terminology and Criteria	- Lebanon needs a unified terminology and classification system for the various types and categories of disabilities to be included in schools so as to avoid confusion in (a) terminology among different ministry and school stakeholders, and in (b) statistical reporting. - MEHE may benefit from UNICEF's (2012) recommendation to use the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)⁴ to ensure that different data sources use the same concepts, criteria and frameworks, thus enabling the generation of a strong, integrated national data base for disability statistics with clear disability categories.

1. Inclusive education is “an education system that includes all students, and welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements. This means making sure that teaching and the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets are appropriate for all children at all levels.” (UNICEF, 2017a, p. 1); inclusive education “is a fundamental human right for every child with a disability.” (UNICEF, 2017b, p. 3)

2. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, General Comment No. 4. Retrieved from: <https://www.ref-world.org/docid/57c977e34.html>

3. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4, Introduction, para 7.

4. The ICF is a classification of health and health-related domains relating to the body, individual and societal perspectives. ICF ‘mainstreams’ the experience of disability and recognizes it as a universal human experience. It goes beyond an exclusively medical or biological dysfunctional approach and recognizes the impact of the environment on the person’s functioning (UNICEF, 2012, p. 44).

TABLE 1

Summary of recommendations for a national policy for inclusive education in Lebanon

Policy rubric	Recommended strategies
3. Unifying, Sharing and Disseminating Data	- Close collaboration between different organisms (MEHE, MoSA, CERD) which collect data on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in schools of Lebanon is recommended so as to establish a unified data bank on IE that may be shared by a wide range of interested stakeholders (service providers in the public and private sectors, policy makers, donors, academicians, researchers, NGOs, etc.) for making informed policy choices and effective planning.
4. Capacity Building	- MEHE needs to further invest in teacher training on developing skills for teaching in inclusive environments, promoting tolerance and recognizing non-discrimination as a human right. As an example, Universal Design of Learning (UDL)⁵ is one of the modern approaches to learning that has proved high efficiency in the context of inclusive education. - MEHE needs to consolidate in-service teacher training with a goal to systematize inclusive education. Teacher training must be on-going through the application of a Training-of-Trainers (ToT)⁶ model to ensure sustainability. Teachers should be made to feel that their training is part of a larger reform project directly linked to making their school more inclusive. - MEHE needs to establish agreements with Education and Special Education departments in local universities for providing teaching-assistants (TAs) for school teachers, as part of their degree requirements. - Adequate staffing (number and working hours) should be provided for schools with staff shortage, especially in terms of paraprofessionals and special educators. - In most of the literature on IE, students' behavioral difficulties are identified by school teachers as a major barrier and challenge to inclusion⁷ (discipline problems, disruptive behavior, lack of motivation, etc.). To reduce the challenge, MEHE needs to make sure that psychologists are very well trained in PBIS⁸ so they can train other paraprofessionals, special educators and classroom teachers on the implementation of PBIS inclusive practices in their intervention and teaching strategies.

5. UDL is a flexible teaching approach that uses a variety of teaching methods that can be adjusted for every learner’s strengths and needs, thus benefiting all learners.

6. For more information on the ToT model, readers are referred to the UNICEF ToT Modules on Inclusive Education: Linking Theory to Practice (UNICEF, 2015)

7. The reader is referred to the following articles listed in the references: Aldabas, 2020; Ali et al., 2006; Travers et al., 2010.

8. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) operates at 3 levels: (1) it provides general interventions designed to prevent the initial occurrence of undesirable behavior, (2) it consists of delivering targeted intervention for learners needing additional social, emotional, and behavioral support, and (3) it provides individualized and intensive intervention for learners needing additional social, emotional, and behavioral support.

TABLE 1

Summary of recommendations for a national policy for inclusive education in Lebanon

Policy rubric	Recommended strategies
5. Support within Schools	- Granting school principals a reasonable leeway for exerting their authority to respond in a prompt and efficient way to their schools' needs. This would also entail holding school principals accountable for the success or failure of IE in their respective schools. -Empowering school principals to serve as role models, enforcers and advocates of inclusive education for school staff, parents and learners, as well as for the immediate school community. - Parents of learners with and without disabilities should be more involved in the inclusive school project as potential support resources within the school, and in the community as IE advocates.
6. Monitoring and Evaluation	- MEHE needs to implement an empowering "self-monitoring" system for teachers so they hold themselves accountable for contributing to the principle of IE: Such a system may consist of the distribution of a monthly tool for self-monitoring, self-assessment and impact assessment of the activities teachers implement in the classroom, the findings of which are to be discussed and evaluated with the schools' respective SEN coaches, with good practices and areas that need improvement being highlighted and compared on a monthly basis for progress tracking. - MEHE needs to standardize and unify practices across all schools regarding learners' preliminary assessment and progress assessment (who does what, when, and how), and to develop the proper mechanism to monitor the implementation of such practices across all schools. - MEHE needs to standardize practices across all schools regarding intra-school meetings: fixed schedules, required deliverables, required attendance, status and responsibilities of all attendees including parents, standardized meeting outcomes (via standardized forms for minute-taking, and outcome reporting). - MEHE needs to convert to digital reporting, documentation and monitoring of all standardized practices. - MEHE needs to enhance its digital documentation system so as to include data (social background, diagnostics, IEP, performance monitoring multiple levels) on every learner with disability to track his/her development into adolescence and young adulthood to ensure proper vocational or employment placement within inclusive settings.
	- Inclusive schools should be the main vehicle for challenging negative attitudes and prejudice against children with disabilities not just at the school level but also at the community level.

TABLE 1

Summary of recommendations for a national policy for inclusive education in Lebanon

Policy rubric	Recommended strategies
7. Awareness Raising: Promotion of Respect for Diversity	- To this end, MEHE needs to ensure that all school stakeholders (principals, teachers, special educators, paraprofessionals, parents and other school staff): (1) Are adequately trained in order to work in unison to promote the rights of learners with disabilities for quality education and for full integration in society (2) Understand their responsibility as agents and promoters of change within the community. - MEHE needs to join forces with different NGOs in the design and implementation of awareness campaigns about the benefits of inclusive education to all learners, not just learners with disabilities. Such awareness campaigns need to be on-going, as opposed to "seasonal" or intermittent. They also need to be evidence-based, documenting the positive impacts on different levels, as opposed to appealing to feelings and pathos. - An inter-ministerial and inter-sectorial approach should be used in promoting the benefits of an inclusive society: The Ministry of Labor may be showcasing the feasibility of inclusive employment of people with disabilities and its benefits through the promotion of good employment practices and their positive impact on particular businesses and on the country's economy at large. Successful inclusive initiatives in the private sector should be highlighted and their replication encouraged via a variety of media channels. - At the academic level, social psychological research on the efficacy of "Contact Theory" in reducing stigma and prejudice against people with disabilities should be encouraged and possibly funded, and research findings are to be disseminated to the public across different media channels.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, many countries all over the world, in line with the UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), have made great strides in terms of inclusive education. The Statement argues that inclusive regular schools are the most effective means to combat discrimination against disability and create welcoming communities for all learners, thus promoting the realization of the Sustainable Developmental Goal 4 (SDG 4) of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations Flagship Report on Disability and Development, 2018).

The right for all children to be educated is related to other rights, for all human rights are interlinked. When inclusive education is implemented for learners with disabilities, this serves to promote their participation in public life, their access to adequate standards of living, and to decent work and employment in the future (UNICEF, 2017b, p.6).

The concept of inclusive education is closely tied to theories in social psychology that postulate that contact between groups (majority and minority groups) is a very effective way to reduce inter-group prejudices, biases and stereotypes (Allport, 1954). The contact theory has been confirmed by an impressive amount of evidence-based research from different cultures, for different age-groups, and for different types of target groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

The Salamanca Statement states that inclusive education “improves the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system” (UNESCO, 2020, p.11), implying that the concept of inclusion may be thought of more as a school improvement issue in the sense of putting certain values into action, rather than an addition on existing structures and pedagogies (Winter & O’Raw, 2010). However, inclusive education should not be perceived as merely a “school affair”: It is about creating schools which respect and value diversity, and aim to promote democratic principles and a set of values and beliefs relating to equality and social justice so that all children can participate in teaching and learning (UNICEF, 2012, p.8).

Legislation relating to inclusion constitutes a solid frame for the implementation of inclusive education in schools. However, inclusive education should not be considered as a ‘top down’ process where schools are made to feel that reforms are imposed from top authorities (Winter & O’Raw, 2010). This creates a two-way problematic situation: On the one hand, those who are supposed to implement the reforms (teachers and other school personnel) may not be sufficiently prepared for undertaking such reforms, and on the other hand, legislators and policy makers may not be appropriately and adequately aware of how teachers work on a daily basis. Therefore, inclusive education should be conceptualized from a partnership perspective, where top leadership is to be accompanied by proper bottom-up preparation, motivation and support for these reforms. If legislation provides the ground rules, “ideas and initiatives for change must come from those who do the work in the schools” (Thomas, Walker & Webb, 1998, p. 25); hence, the importance of allowing school stakeholders to form their own positions and perspectives on any change to be introduced in their school(s) (UNESCO, 2005). The promotion of inclusive education is not just a technical or organizational change; inclusive schools contribute to the creation of more inclusive societies (UNICEF, 2017b); inclusive education is a philosophical change requiring “a culture of inclusion that permeates the education system” (UNESCO, 2020, p.25). The creation of such a change requires a shared commitment amongst all school stakeholders; it is therefore crucial to have a clear assessment of their knowledge, attitudes and perceptions towards inclusive education. The present case-study aims at providing such an assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 and has exhibited commitment to improving the condition of the child and protecting its well-being. Lebanon was also among the first to sign the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 but has yet to ratify the convention and implement the articles of Law 220/2000 to secure the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Implementing the concept of inclusive education in the Lebanese public schools has not been an easy ordeal. Over the past few years, Lebanon has witnessed many challenges that have slowed down, and sometimes halted, the efforts and motivation of all stakeholders toward ensuring that the rights for education for all learners have been safeguarded. Over the last two years, the country has been going through an escalating political instability and a devastating recession which has left families and children in a dire situation; “children’s education and their future are severely threatened as unemployment continues to increase, and 15% of families stopped their children’s education” (UNICEF, 2021). In addition, the educational sector in Lebanon has been severely hit by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As was the case with most countries around the world, the pandemic led to a full closure of schools and universities in Lebanon, which has negatively affected the learning processes of young people. Although the Ministry of Education and Higher Education had introduced an online educational platform to be accessed by all teachers and students in public schools, many families could not afford the tools needed for online learning, and many schools were not adequately prepared for such a change, a fact which was exacerbated by the difficulty in accessing the Internet and problems of electricity connectivity (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020). To make matters worse, the massive August 2020 Port explosions were a major blow to education in Lebanon. The explosions damaged 183 educational facilities, affecting over 77,000 students (UNICEF, 2021).





2.

THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT IN LEBANESE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



2. THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT IN LEBANESE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

2.1. Aim of the Inclusive Education Pilot Project

The Inclusive Education (IE) Pilot Project, launched in 2018, was conceived to promote the development of inclusive education in 30 Lebanese public schools and ensure quality education for all children. It aims at building the capacity of the public school system, equipping teachers, administrators, and other education personnel with the essential knowledge and skills to foster inclusive education environments, and increasing awareness at the family, decision-making and community levels about rights to an inclusive education. In addition, the IE Pilot Project should generate evidence-based data that would be used to inform the development of the Inclusive Education Policy of Lebanon (MEHE, Concept Note).

2.2. Desk Review

The information for this desk review was predominantly gleaned from the following documents submitted by MEHE:

- 1) Inclusive Education Pilot Project / MEHE-DOPS Progress Report covering the period of January 2018 - March 2019 (in English)
- 2) Report on Inclusive Education Pilot Project 2018-2019, prepared by DOPS (in Arabic)
- 3) Concept Note (in English) – no cover title page (n.d.)
- 4) IE Pilot Project: Annual Report Covering the Period between March 2020 and February 2021⁹

Additional literature for this desk review consisted of a set of documents provided by MEHE to the Consultants which included monitoring reports, briefing notes, operational summaries and other documentation forms and assessment grids used by different specialists.

The Concept Note reveals, on one hand, the dire need for inclusive education as a means to implement Articles 59 and 60 on Law 220/2000, namely the provision of equal education opportunities for all children or adults with disabilities within regular classes and in special classes if necessary, and on the other hand, the many challenges that face such implementation, namely budgetary and infrastructural constraints as well as the stubborn prevalence of the outdated medical model of disability, or the perception of people with disabilities as dependent on charity and aid. The Concept Note also discusses the need to revamp the national educational curriculum which overemphasizes academic knowledge at the expense of the learner's social and emotional development, calling for a more holistic perspective to education, in line with CERD's child-centered, multi-competence approach to the new national curriculum.

MEHE adopts the definition of Inclusive Education as promoted by UNESCO (2005) with its structural ("inclusive education is process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning") and functional ("It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range") dimensions (see Concept Note, para. 2.1)

9. Progress Reports are not annual reports in reference to the scholastic year. The recent progress report presents data for 2019-2020 in addition to reporting of activities between March 2020 and February 2021.

2. THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT IN LEBANESE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Concept Note delineates the rationale for the implementation of IE as it contributes:

- To the enhancement of the way child-centered schooling is planned, implemented and evaluated.
- To greater overall gains in academic and behavioral outcomes for learners with disabilities compared to outcomes in segregated settings
- To increases in the level and standard of learning for all learners as a result of the teachers' knowledge of the values of IE, its strategies and classroom management techniques
- To the development of an inclusive school culture emphasizing high expectations in learning, equity of learning opportunities, and team cooperation, all of which result in the creation of a self-reinforcing cycle of success.
- To the decrease in the stigmatization of disability
- To a reduction in welfare costs

Underlying such benefits, MEHE's vision is to promote autonomy and independence of learners with disabilities through education, thus paving the way for their economically productive future.

Inclusive education in the IE Pilot Project is based on the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model. The MTSS consists of 3 tiers across two dimensions: The academic dimension is based on the Response to Intervention (RTI) support framework, and the behavioral dimension uses the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework (see Figure 1).

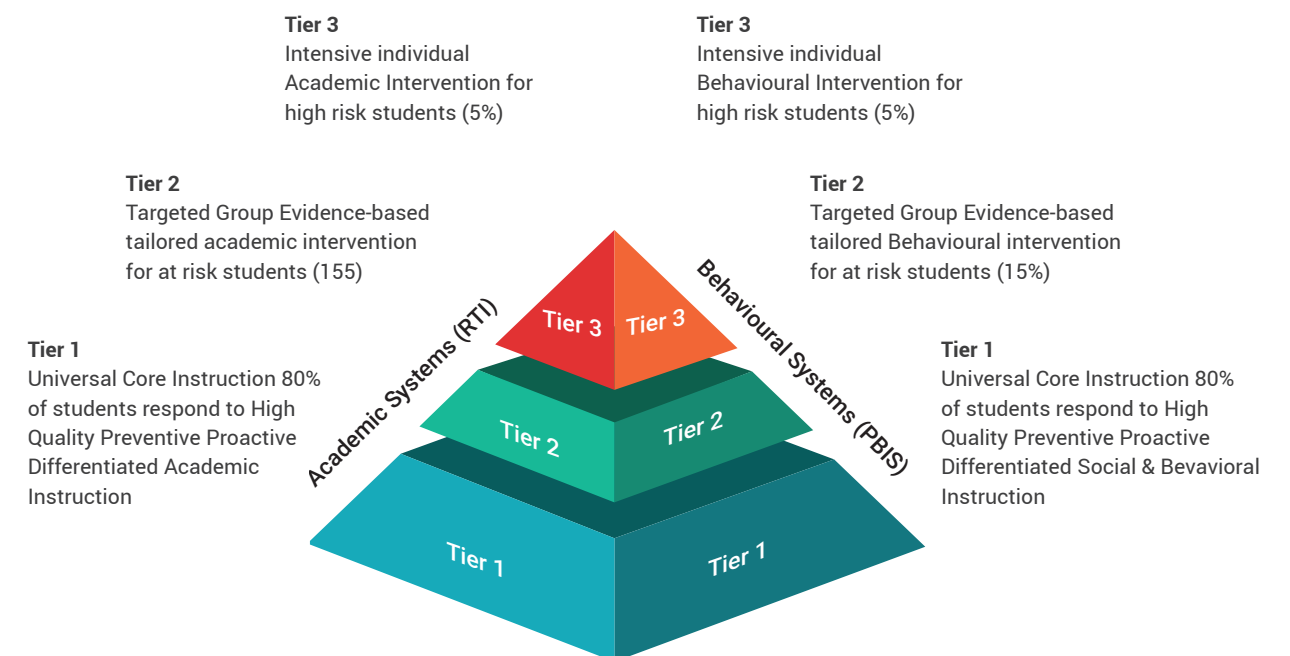


Figure 1
The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support model (source: MEHE Concept Note)

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At the academic level, Tier 1 consists of delivering high-quality core instruction to all learners, with differentiated learning activities and accommodations to the instructional program. Tier 2 consists of interventions of moderate intensity for at-risk learners, including adult-led small-group instruction of specified duration and frequency. Tier 3 instruction addresses the needs of learners who show minimal response to Tier 2, and it consists of intensive individual interventions and support through the design of an individualized educational plan (IEP) for each learner.

At the behavioral level, Tier 1 provides general interventions to prevent the initial occurrence of undesirable behavior. Tier 2 delivers targeted intervention for learners needing additional social, emotional, and behavioral support, and Tier 3 provides individualized and intensive intervention.

Both the academic and behavioral dimensions of the MTSS model proceed from a general toward a more specific, targeted and intensive perspective.

2.2.1. Description of the IE Pilot Project

Thirty schools were selected by MEHE to be part of the IE Pilot Project. MEHE created a special team to follow up and monitor all activities being implemented in the 30 selected schools; this team, located in the Ministry, is tasked with providing coaching and support to all 30 inclusive schools.

For the provision of direct services and interventions, MEHE deployed 30 full-time special educators, one for each of the selected schools, and a team of part-time paraprofessionals (psychologist, psychomotor therapist, and speech therapist) visiting each school.

For the implementation of the IE Pilot Project, MEHE allocated a wide and diversified network of service and support providers. The various elements of this network are presented in summary form in Table 2, as a function of the different components of the Project.

Table 2
Service and Support personnel for the implementation of the Main Components of Inclusive Education in Public Schools
(summarized from: Action Framework for the Inclusive Education Pilot Project, Concept Note)

Component	Responsible Agent(s)
1 Access to Education	MEHE, DOPS, School principals, CERD, SEN unit, Multi-disciplinary team, Social worker ¹⁰ , Teachers, NGOs.
2 Implementation of MTSS - RTI	Teachers, Multi-disciplinary team, Parents, School Principal, IT Department, CERD, DOPS.
3 Implementation of MTSS - PBIS	Teachers, Multi-disciplinary team, Parents, School Supervisor, School Principal, IT Department.
4 School-Community collaboration	Social worker, School Principal
5 Within-School Communication & Collaboration	Teachers, Multi-disciplinary team, School Principal, Coordinators, Learners.
6 Parental Involvement	Teachers, Parents, School Principal, Multi-disciplinary team.
7 Professional Development	CERD (for teachers/principals), SEN unit (for SEN coaches and multi-disciplinary team)
8 Policies and Procedures for IE	CERD, MEHE, with participation of MoSA
9 IE in Teacher Training	CERD and LU Faculty of Pedagogy

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2.2.2. Implementation Procedures

The MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report highlights the procedures of implementation of the IE Pilot Project; these consist of:

- Delivery of a series of training workshops on IE, MTSS methodology, differentiated instruction, referral and screening procedures for the following service providers: special educators, SEN coaches, subject coordinators and paraprofessionals.
- Delivery of training workshops on IE, MTSS methodology and differentiated instruction for school principals. The aim of such training is to unify the language used by all the partners involved in the IE Pilot Project.
- Delivery of awareness sessions to teachers and parents of learners in Kindergarten, Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, the objective of which was to introduce the concept of IE, its advantages on learners, on the school environment and on the community, as well as to introduce the team taking part in this project.
- Development by CERD of support materials (monitoring tools, documentation forms, intervention planning, observation grids, evaluation forms, etc.).
- Development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) delineating duties and responsibilities for all team members to ensure consistency of practice across different specializations.
- Development of a referral procedure by the SEN unit, in collaboration with the NGOs who will be delivering intervention services and/or equipment needed (technical supplies, assistive devices, specialized training).
- Provision of technical support by special educators for all teachers at Tier 1 of MTSS (implementing differentiated learning practices and making material adaptations).

The MEHE-DOPS Annual Report covering the Period between March 2020 and February 2021 is a comprehensive report documenting the activities implemented in an extremely stressful period due to the constraints imposed by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lebanon. In spite of the challenges and obstacles (school closure, increased health risks, sudden shift to online teaching, national economic collapse, etc.), the MEHE-DOPS, in collaboration with UNICEF, was able to maintain and reinforce the motivation and efforts of all concerned stakeholders toward ensuring that no learner with difficulties enrolled in any of its 30 public schools would be left behind.

2.2.3. The Special Education Unit at DOPS (designated as SEN unit in this report)

MEHE created the Special Education Unit at DOPS (SEN unit) to provide the necessary coaching, monitoring, and follow up of the IE Pilot Project (see Fig. 2 for a summary of SEN unit's main responsibilities). This unit includes the General Coordinator of the Special Education Unit, the Senior Consultant for Inclusive Education, the Special Education Officer, the Social Worker for Inclusion and nine SEN coaches, 5 of which are the Focal points for the five different Governorates (Mount Lebanon, Beirut, South, North, and Beqaa-Baalbek-Hermel).

10. Social workers are not available in schools; however, the social worker in the central SEN team is providing support to the schools.

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Figure 2
Main responsibilities of the SEN Unit
(Adapted from: MEHE-DOPS 2020-2021
Annual Progress Report, p.6)

As of mid-March 2020, a procedural action plan was developed by the SEN unit to support learners with difficulties within the inclusive schools. Table 3 summarizes the implemented activities between March 2020 and February 2021.

Table 3
Summary of the SEN Activities for the IE Pilot Project during the period from March 2020 to February 2021.

Activity	Beneficiaries	Facilitated by	Modality	Beneficiaries' feedback
Awareness raising sessions on coping with the emerging COVID 19 crisis in the context of IE	Parents, Cycle 1 learners and teachers	Special Educators and Paraprofessionals (Multidisciplinary Team)	Started face-to-face then shifted to remote, plus supporting videos	Very grateful for the support provided by IE team (resources, techniques, strategies), with face-to-face sessions yielding more positive results than online sessions
Capacity Building in areas that had not been covered in previous training	30 special educators, 28 psychologists, 21 speech therapists, 29 psychomotor therapists and 9 SEN coaches.	Experts from Université Saint Joseph (USJ) Assessment and screening expert	Online	Very positive feedback as more than 50% of participants found the training very useful especially in regard to "télé practice"

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Activity	Beneficiaries	Facilitated by	Modality	Beneficiaries' feedback
Procedural action plan for activities and interventions in light of school closure	30 inclusive schools (learners at tiers 1, 2 and 3, parents, teachers and principals)	Multi-disciplinary team	Online (videos, audio clips, Microsoft TEAMS, WhatsApp, voice calls, emails, working sheets, etc.) Individual and/or in group	Good level of communication and collaboration between the SEN team (centrally and in school) and beneficiaries (principals, teachers and parents)
Enhancement and completion of the recruitment process of specialists for all 30 schools	Inclusive Schools	SEN Unit	Enhancement of the recruitment process required a written test and an interview.	Nine speech therapists and two occupational therapists were recruited to complete the need for paraprofessionals in the 30 inclusive schools
Monitoring, evaluation and documentation of the implementation of the distance learning intervention	Principals, Teachers, Parents and Learners at Tiers 1, 2 and 3	115 specialists at school level (special educators and paraprofessionals), and the SEN Unit at the central level.	- Submission of a weekly log on content delivered, and digitalization of the data for situational analysis (specialists). - Quantitative and qualitative documentation (SEN Unit and SEN coaches).	Principals' feedback on online teaching (including teaching of all learners) was very positive in spite of non-availability of digital resources to many schools
Management and Support of the IE Pilot Project	Teachers, learners (with and without disabilities/ difficulties) in all 30 inclusive schools, and parents	At the school level, principals in regular coordination with SEN Unit	Coordination, monitoring, administrative logistic organization and follow up	- Principals' flexible and creative initiatives enabled to reach out for the highest possible number of learners. - Parents' feedback was generally positive in spite of difficulties.
		SEN Unit	- Technical Support for specialists - Preliminary assessment of	The coordination between all stakeholders ensured the

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Activity	Beneficiaries	Facilitated by	Modality	Beneficiaries' feedback
			learners, parental consultation, placement and referral of learners. -Management of SEN coaches -Coordination meetings with school principals.	continuous delivery of services in all 30 schools, without interruption in spite of obstacles, especially the challenges related to the proper implementation of distant learning
		DOPS Director, Primary Education Department, and DGE	Prompt decision-making and support initiatives for strategies in line with the vision of "No child left behind"	Continuous delivery of services in all 30 schools, without interruption in spite of obstacles, especially the challenges related to the proper implementation of distant learning
		External support	- Provision of supplies, devices, technical and didactic material - Assessment and follow up	Continuous delivery of services in all 30 schools, without interruption in spite of obstacles, especially the challenges related to the proper implementation of distant learning
Documentation and Policy Development	Teachers, Learners with and without disabilities/ difficulties in the public sector and their parents	MEHE-DOPS (more specifically the SEN Unit) in partnership with UNICEF, Haigazian University, Consultant	Annual qualitative report developed by MEHE-DOPS (SEN unit, see below, Table 4). Submission of a case study report on 6 inclusive schools, as a baseline assessment and documentation tool for the IE Program	

The MEHE-DOPS 2020-2021 Annual Report delineates additional responsibilities for the SEN unit in light of the changes imposed on the educational system due to the spread of the pandemic in Lebanon. In fact, under the supervision of the DOPS Department at MEHE, the central SEN Unit ensured and coordinated the efforts

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done by the multi-disciplinary team and the SEN coaches in schools in line with the exceptional educational measures undertaken by MEHE. In sum, the SEN unit's responsibilities can be clustered into two types of services: Support and Documentation (see Table 4).

Table 4
Updated responsibilities of the SEN Unit in light of exceptional pandemic-related school measures (Adapted from MEHE-DOPS 2020-2021 Annual Report, p20)

Support Responsibilities	Documentation Responsibilities
Meetings with specialists to support them in the provision of distance learning (examining the feasibility of activities, their duration, their modality and tools, adherence to IEP goals)	Monthly and yearly documentation of both quantitative data (number of students enrolled in the IE program, types of specialized interventions, team meetings, activities, etc.) and qualitative data (outcomes of the interventions, lessons learned, challenges and steps forward, etc.).
Guidance for parents on the use of online educational resources	Collecting accurate data via specific templates for monthly virtual visits to the IE Pilot Project schools
Continued coordination with school principals	Monitoring, reviewing and evaluating paraprofessionals' and special educators' quarterly reports
Review of protocols to set in additional support to learners with difficulties during remote learning.	Digitalizing data collection for situational analysis for a faster and more efficient tracking of the evolution of the IE Pilot Project.

2.2.4. The SEN coaches

The SEN coaches represent what is referred to in the literature on Inclusive Education as the Coaches. Their knowledge of the details of the public system enables them to orient the professionals and facilitate the system procedures. Their role description is specified in the MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report (p. 9) as consisting of the following tasks:

1. Guiding the team's interventions for group work and for behavioral issues
2. Implementing awareness sessions for school staff and parents
3. Supporting the team during parents' meetings
 - Following up on the referral process for learners with special needs to the NGOs collaborating with the
4. SEN unit to provide assistive devices and services
5. Providing coaching and support on how to deal with each learner and encouraging the use of the resource room in the learning process
6. Continuous coordination with the school principals so as to increase their engagement in the Project
7. Supervising, supporting, and monitoring the performance of the multidisciplinary team.

2.2.5. The targeted learners

Table 5 shows the number of targeted learners per gender and disability category in all 30 schools over two consecutive years since the start of the project.

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Table 5
Number of targeted learners across all levels of the educational cycle in 30 public schools per gender and disability category (adapted from MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report, Inclusive Table, p. 16, and MEHE-DOPS Annual Report 2020-2021, Annex 3, p.45)

Disability Category	2018-2019			2019-2020		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Auditory Impairment	1	4	5	3	6	9
Visual Impairment	3	7	10	4	9	13
Motor Impairment	12	9	21	8	10	18
Intellectual disability	45	33	78	36	31	67
Learning difficulties	485	402	887	675	481	1156
Behavioral difficulties	112	34	146	177	95	272
Autism Spectrum Disorders	---	---	---	10	2	12
Total	658	489	1147	913	634	1547

The increase in the total enrollment figure of learners with disabilities over the 2 years is a good indicator that parents and families of children with disabilities are being more receptive to the concept of inclusive education, and are now more willing to remove their children from segregated learning centers. Further, it is an indicator of (1) an improvement in teachers' capacity to identify learning difficulties in their classrooms and refer these to the paraprofessionals for further assessment, and (2) an improvement in the quality of support provided by the special educators and the paraprofessionals to the classroom teachers at Tier 1 level reaching out for all learners and detecting learning difficulties in their early stage. On a more contextual level, there may have been an increase in the transfer of learners with difficulties from the private schools to the public schools due to financial burdens on families in light of the economic crisis Lebanon is going through.

The figures per disability category in Table 5 are quite comparable to statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics in the USA for the year 2017-2018 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), where learning disabilities yield the highest percentage of all disability categories for learners enrolled in national schools, compared to deaf-blindness and visual impairments which yield the lowest percentages. In both MEHE-DOPS reports, learning disabilities constitute 77% and 74.7% respectively for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 of the disability categories catered for in the 30 inclusive schools, while auditory and visual impairments taken together represent only 1.3% and 1.4% of the total distribution of disabilities in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 respectively.

The distribution of disabilities per gender reveals higher numbers for males than for females in the learning disability category, a finding in line with figures for learners in the 6 to 21 years age-range from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2020).

A drawback of the above table has to do with the vague terminology used to categorize disabilities: It is not clear what disabilities are included in "behavior disorders", nor is there any indication of Attention

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Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), one of the most prevalent childhood disorders. In Lebanon, a study by Ghossoub et al. (2017) investigated the prevalence and correlates of ADHD among 510 adolescents in a Beirut community; their findings reveal that 10.20% of the adolescents were diagnosed with ADHD, with correlates of academic difficulties and bullying behavior. Similarly, in an epidemiological study in Lebanon to estimate ADHD prevalence in school-age population (6 to 10 years), Richa et al. (2014) report a prevalence rate of 3.2% while the pooled worldwide prevalence for ADHD is of 5.29%. Looking at the above table, one may wonder whether ADHD is included under the category of "behavior disorders", thus contributing to the inflated figure of 146 (second highest category after Learning Disabilities) for 2018-2019, and 272 (also second highest category after Learning Disabilities) for 2019-2020¹¹. A tentative explanation for such a figure would be the fact that a large number of learners with such disorders who are served by the schools have been informally assessed by the paraprofessionals but have not been formally diagnosed as ADHD or other disorders due to the parents' inability to assume the costs of a formal diagnosis in the clinical setting.

Another drawback with such figures is the ambiguity of the term "learning disabilities". For example, in the data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the term "specific learning disabilities" is clearly used to mean reading, writing or mathematics disabilities. Learning disability is a very vague and inclusive term that needs to be further specified. Moreover, because of the well documented co-morbidity of ADHD with specific learning disabilities, ADHD has been traditionally associated with Learning Disabilities. The absence of the ADHD category in the above MEHE-DOPS table may imply that it has been incorporated in the Learning Disabilities category.

In the last decades, a large increase in the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) has been observed, with figures ranging from 31.3/1000 in Iceland, to 17.4/1000 in Sweden, 15.5/1000 in Spain, 15.3/1000 in Lebanon, and 11.4/1000 in Qatar (Chiarotti & Venerosi, 2020), with an average worldwide estimate of 1 in 160 children (World Health Organization, 2019). While in the MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report, ASD was not included among the learning difficulties served in the 30 schools, the MEHE-DOPS 2020-2021 Progress Report shows that learners with ASD make up for almost 1% of all learners with difficulties being served in the IE Pilot Project. It is worth noting that it is not before the school year 2019-2020 that public schools started enrolling learners with ASD.

Working on our desk review for the IE Pilot Project led us to research additional statistics on the schooling of learners with disabilities in Lebanon. While it is advisable to adhere to the figures published by MEHE-DOPS in the particular context of the IE Pilot Project, it is interesting to see, nevertheless, that there are some noteworthy differences in terminology, in listed disability categories, and in statistics pertaining to enrollment numbers, between the MEHE-DOPS data and that provided in the Statistics Bulletins published by the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) for the same 2 years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 (See Table 6 for school enrollment data for learners with disabilities in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020, according to CERD Statistics Bulletins).

11. DOPS communicated to us that learners with ADHD are indeed clustered under the "Behavioral Difficulties" category. Moreover, ADHD is listed among the types of disabilities being served in the 6 schools selected for the case study (see tables 23 and 25).

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Table 6
Number of Learners with Disabilities per Disability Category in the Lebanese public schools for all levels of the educational cycle in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 (Adapted from: CERD (2019), Statistics Bulletin for the scholastic year 2018-2019, p. 31, and CERD (2020), Statistics Bulletin for the scholastic year 2019-2020, p.31).

	2018-2019	2019-2020
Disability Category	Number of Learners	Number of Learners
Visual	23	28
Hearing	15	25
Speech Difficulties	42	45
Motor/Physical	51	60
Learning Difficulties	488	763
Autism Spectrum Disorders	8	7
Special Needs	57	133
Intellectual Developmental Disabilities	26	20
Gifted	15	30
Grand Total	725	1111



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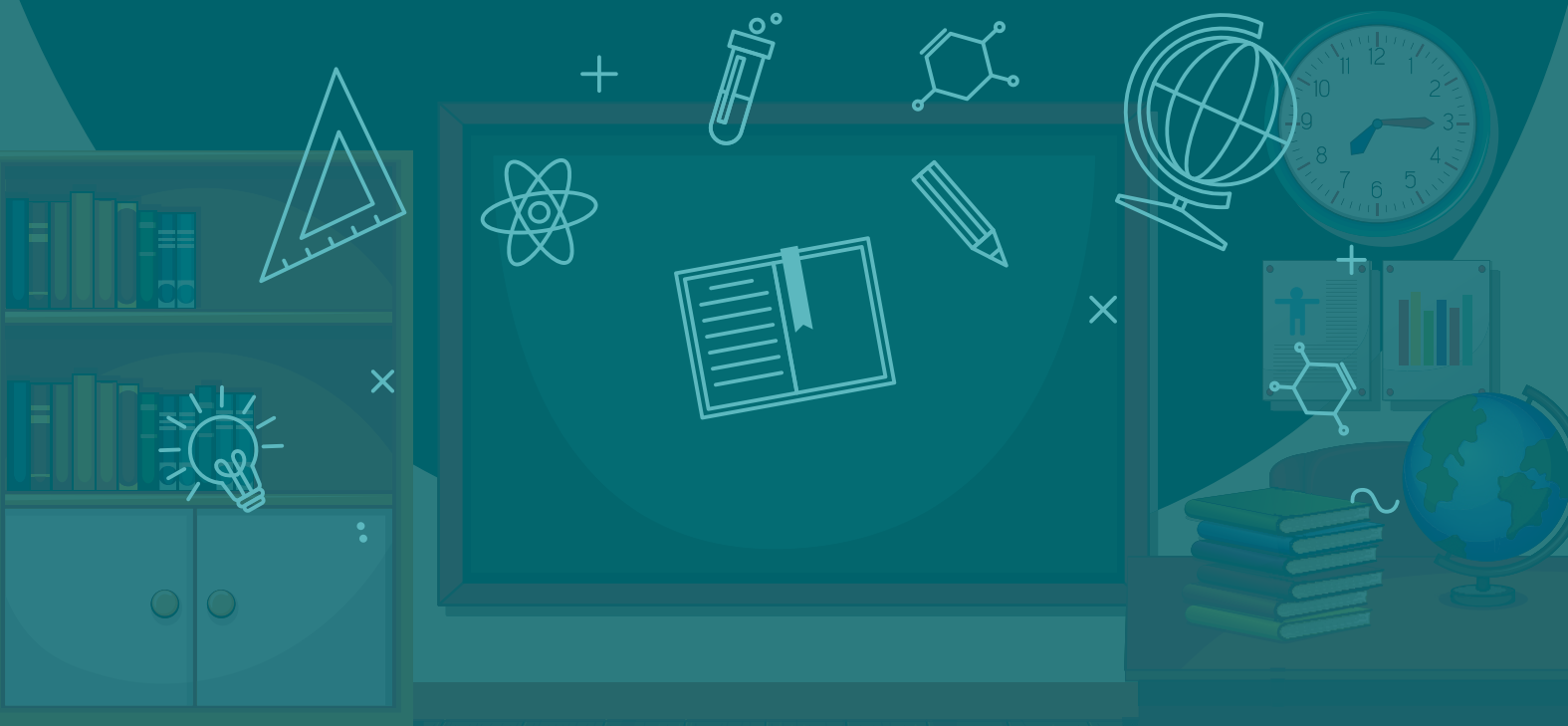
Our examination of the above CERD and MEHE-DOPS figures leads us to conclude the following consistencies, differences and suggestions:

- In both data sources, an increase in enrollment figures for learners with disabilities in public schools is noted from 2018 to 2020.
 - In both data sources, the disability category with the highest enrollment figures is Learning Disabilities.
 - In both data sources, the category of ASD yielded very low enrollment figures. Considering that the average worldwide estimate for ASD is 1 in 160 children (WHO, 2019), it is important to question these low ASD enrollment figures in Lebanese public schools. A study on toddlers in nurseries in Beirut and Mount Lebanon has shown a prevalence of 1 in 66 children for ASD, a figure comparable to US statistics (Chaaya et al., 2016). Further, CERD (2019) and CERD (2020) reveal that in the private sector, enrollment figures for ASD are 355 and 409, across all educational levels from KG to the Secondary Cycle, for both 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 respectively. It is therefore worth exploring why the category of autism is under-represented in public schools: Are the public schools well prepared to cater for the needs of learners with ASD? Is there a proper diagnostic system to distinguish learners with severe forms of ASD from learners with intellectual disability?
 - The CERD data source includes the category of ‘Speech Difficulties’ which is an important category that needs to be addressed in the MEHE-DOPS data source related to the IE Pilot Project as an independent disability category.
 - The CERD data source includes the category of ‘Special Needs’ (which yielded the next highest figures following LD, in both 2018-2019 and 2019-2020). It is not clear what disabilities are considered as special needs, and therefore adding such a category to the list of disabilities is misleading and needs further specification.
 - The CERD data source includes the category of ‘Gifted’ while such a category is altogether absent from MEHE-DOPS data source. To the best of our knowledge, the IE Pilot Project does not mention any information related to giftedness. Moreover, the literature on inclusive education is quite ambiguous in the area of giftedness. Ninkov (2020) explains that since the principles of inclusive education rest on the idea that all children should receive all resources necessary to fulfill their learning needs, then inclusive education as a concept can be applied to the category of gifted learners, in line with Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). This is a grey area that needs to be further explored.
- The MEHE-DOPS data source includes the category of ‘Behavioral Difficulties’ which is not listed in the CERD data source. Similarly to what was discussed with respect to the category of ‘Special Needs’, this is a category that needs to be further clarified, especially that it yielded the next highest enrollment figures after LD.

Such disparities and differences in labeling categories coming from official sources necessitate a reflection on the quality of coordination between the two sources and, given the scarcity of independent research on disability statistics in Lebanon, urge for more convergence in the delivery of much needed data on disability for promoting any policy change to the benefit of the inclusive education project in the country.

3.

THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT



3. THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

This report is a case-study assessing the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of inclusive education as concept and practice of different stakeholders from six schools selected from the 30 public schools that were included in the Inclusive Education Pilot Project.

3.1. Overview

The present case-study on the IE Pilot Project in 30 Lebanese public schools was conducted amidst most difficult circumstances characterized on one hand by the general stress caused by the Covid-19 pandemic which has been ravaging Lebanon since early 2020, and on the other hand, the prevailing sense of despair among the Lebanese population due to intense political, security and economic uncertainties and frustrations. An agreement was signed between Haigazian University (HU) and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) with the support of UNICEF on February 19, 2020, to carry out a Consultancy Project related to the Pilot IE Project in Lebanon. The consultancy project consisted of (1) conducting a baseline analysis of the inclusive education pilot program, (2) providing an on-going documentation of the program and (3) compiling a set of documented lessons learned, highlighting the program's major challenges as well as strengths into an end-line analysis report.

As per the project's original timeline, school visits to the 30 public schools of the IE Pilot Project were planned to start in February 2020. Due to the difficult security conditions in Lebanon imposed by the massive October 2019 demonstrations, students stopped going to school. In addition, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Lebanon and the application of strict lockdown measures forced school closure for several months. In light of these circumstances, the consultancy project could not start phase 1 (conducting the baseline analysis) which relied on school visits and face-to-face interviews with all stakeholders. This necessitated a re-evaluation of the original plan by crafting an alternate study design, namely converting the original project into a case-study using a representative sample of six schools instead of a large scale survey of all 30 schools.

3.2. Methodology and Procedures

The present case-study, agreed upon jointly by MEHE, UNICEF, and the Consultants consisted of the following amendments to the original plan:

- Selecting 6 schools that are representative of the 30 schools where the IE Pilot Project has been implemented.
- Substituting the face-to-face interviews of teachers, school principals and other specialists with questionnaires sent via emails
- Substituting field visits to schools with observation of online teaching and intervention sessions
- Organizing focus group meetings with learners and parents via the Zoom application
- Including a section inquiring about the online management of teaching and interventions in all questionnaires
- Securing feedback from different non-organizational organizations (NGOs) that have played a role at any time during the implementation of the IE Pilot Project

3.2.1. Criteria for the selection of schools

For this case study, the sample consisted of 6 schools selected from the 30 schools where the IE Pilot Project is being implemented, according to the following 9 criteria:

3. THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

1. Representation of all socio-economic backgrounds:

The sample should consist of schools whose populations represent all social classes attending public schools in Lebanon. This would allow to control the variable of home support and resources provided by the learners’ families.

2. Equal gender distribution of learners:

The sample should consist of schools with a mixed-gender population in order to neutralize the effect of gender on the measured outcomes. No statistics are provided in the MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report as to gender distribution of all students enrolled in the 30 public schools of the IE Pilot Project; however, large scale data show that gender distribution in all Lebanese schools is generally well balanced between males and females; the Labor Force and Household Living Conditions Survey 2018-2019 (Central Administration of Statistics CAS, et al., 2020) shows that overall enrollment rates in all schools (public and private) of Lebanon are slightly higher for females than for males across all levels of the educational cycle (see Table 7), and small differences are noted between male and female learners when comparing enrollment rates in the public versus the private sector (see Table 8).

Table 7
School enrollment rates of learners per gender and educational level (adapted from CAS et al., 2020, Table 2.1, p.35)

Educational level	Age group (years)	Males	Females
KG	3 to 4	61.2	61.7
Elementary	5 to 9	92.4	92.9
Intermediate	10 to 14	90.7	94.1
Secondary	15 to 19	65.9	77.1
University	20 to 24	31.5	38.8

Table 8
Comparison of school enrollment rates per gender between the public and private sector across all levels of the educational cycle (adapted from CAS et al., 2020, Figure 2.7, p.45)

Gender (all levels of educational cycle)	Public sector	Private sector
Male learners	44.0	49.9
Female learners	49.1	45.8

Narrowing down the picture to the gender distribution of learners with disabilities in the public Lebanese schools, the MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report provides the following gender figures for learners with LD enrolled in all 30 public schools in the KG-Elementary classes.

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Table 9
Gender distribution of learners with disabilities enrolled in all classes in all 30 public schools (adapted from MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report, Inclusive Table, p.16)

Educational level	Males	Females	Gender Difference
KG classes	76	50	26
Elementary level	511	373	138
Intermediate level	70	66	4
Secondary level	---	1	---
Total	657	490	---

The MEHE-DOPS 2020-2021 Progress Report reveals that there is a total of 913 male versus a total of 634 female learners with disabilities in all 30 schools of the IE Pilot Project. The large gender difference noted for the Elementary level (age group during which learning difficulties are detected, screened and eventually referred for formal diagnosis) between male and female learners with disabilities (138) is worth exploring in light of the literature on learning disabilities which emphasizes the fact that disabilities in reading, writing and mathematics are more prevalent in boys than in girls (Rutter et al., 2004; Liederman, Kantrowitz & Flannery, 2005; WHO, 2017; Yin et al., 2020). Assuming that ADHD cases have been included in the definition of “learning disabilities”, this large gender difference is in line with the significantly higher prevalence of ADHD among boys than girls in Lebanon (Richa et al., 2014).

3. The age factor

The sample should include schools where IE teaching and intervention services target learners from the KG and Elementary classes. The MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Report on the IE Pilot Project (in Arabic) shows that all 30 public schools included in the IE Pilot Project serve those 2 age groups (see Table 10 for enrollment of learners with disabilities in the KG and Elementary classes in each of the 6 schools that were selected for the present case study).

Table 10
Targeted age-groups of learners with learning disabilities across the 6 selected schools for the case study (Adapted from MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Report on the IE Pilot Project, untitled table)

School	Number of learners with disabilities enrolled in KG	Number of learners with disabilities enrolled in Elementary classes
Beirut	3	83
Tripoli	19	56
Saida	---	45
Zahleh	9	32
Aley	1	38
Zouk Mosbeh	4	15
Average for all schools	5.7*	30.4**

* N=22; ** N=29

3. THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

4. Diversity of governorates

The sample should consist of one school per governorate. Lebanon is divided into eight governorates which are sub-divided into districts. In the present case study, only 6 of the 8 governorates were represented, based on MEHE’s suggestion to choose governorates with the higher number of “pilot-schools” (see Table 11 below). Such distribution of schools ensures a fair representation of the diversity of the geographic and socio-economic fabric pertaining to each governorate.

Table 11
Selected schools across Lebanese governorates for case study

Governorate	District	Selected school
1 Beirut	Beirut	In Beirut city
2 South Lebanon	Sidon	In Saida city
3 North Lebanon	Tripoli	In Tripoli city
4 Mount Lebanon	I: Aley	In Aley city
	II: Kesrewane	In Zouk Mosbeh city
5 Beqaa	Zahleh	In Zahleh city
6 Baalbeck-Hermel	Merged with Beqaa	
7 Nabatiyeh	Excluded from sample	Excluded from sample
8 Akkar	Excluded from sample	Excluded from sample

Table 12
Number of selected schools for the implementation of the IE Pilot Project across all governorates (Adapted from MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Report on the IE Pilot Project, in Arabic, untitled table)

Governorate	Number of selected schools for the IE Pilot Project
Beirut	6
South Lebanon	3
North Lebanon	6
Mount Lebanon	6
Beqaa	3
Baalbeck Hermel	2
Nabatiyeh	2
Akkar	2
Total	30

3. THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

5. Number of learners enrolled at school

The overall enrollment figures of the 6 selected schools should reflect the diversity of enrollment figures across all 30 schools involved in the IE Pilot Project. It is important to control this variable in the overall analysis because of its potential effect on the quality of inclusive teaching and services, especially when large classes are at stake. While it is generally held that small class size yields better learning outcomes for learners with disabilities, as large class sizes are often described as a barrier to the proper implementation of inclusive education (Grimes, Stevens & Kumar, 2015), other studies report mixed results, such as Zarghami and Schnellert (2004) who say that class size reduction in the absence of systematic teacher training and professional development do not produce effective results (p. 90). Table 13 shows the distribution of learners with disabilities in the 30 inclusive schools per Governorate, while Table 14 shows the number of learners with disabilities per each of the 6 selected schools for the present case study against the total number of enrolled students per school.

Table 13
Distribution of Learners with Disabilities per Governorate in the 30 inclusive schools (Source: MEHE-DOPS 2020-2021 Annual Report, p. 24)

Governorate	Number of Learners with Disabilities	%
Beirut	299	19
North Lebanon	369	24
South Lebanon	310	20
Bekaa-Baalbeck-Hermel	323	21
Mount Lebanon	246	16

Table 14
Number of Learners with Disabilities per each of the 6 schools against overall learner enrollment, compared to the lowest, highest and average total overall enrollment across all 30 schools (Adapted from MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Report on the IE Pilot Project, in Arabic, untitled table)

School	Overall Learner enrollment	Number of Learners with Disabilities
Beirut (Omar Hamad Mixed Public Elementary School)	599	110
Saida (Lebanese Omani School)	1390	49
Tripoli (Al Fadila Public School for Girls)	352	97
Aley (Mixed Intermediate School of Aley)	588	54
Zouk Mosbeh (Zouk Mosbeh Mixed Intermediate School)	171	21
Zahleh (Intermediate School of Moallakah for Girls)	281	47
Highest enrollment across 30 schools	1390	---
Lowest enrollment across 30 schools	99	---
Average enrollment across 30 schools	456	---

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6. Quality of available human and material resources

The sample should consist of schools with varying proportions of the quantity and quality of human and material resources that facilitate the inclusive education process. This would allow for a comparison of data related to the quality of the delivery of inclusive educational services between schools with different proportions of available resources (educational staff, training opportunities, tools used, etc.), and a delineation of the areas that would need more focus in the future.

7. School vision regarding inclusive education

It is widely acknowledged that school administrators as well as classroom teachers are largely responsible for implementing inclusive principles and breaking down barriers to inclusion. Their perceptions and attitudes are known to facilitate or limit successful inclusion (Miyachi, 2020). This constitutes the “school vision” regarding inclusive education. With the help of the SEN coaches who are very familiar with each of the 30 schools involved in the Pilot IE Project, six schools were selected as representing different visions regarding inclusive education in all of the 30 schools. Adding this criterion for school selection in the case study should allow to assess the impact of the general school mindset regarding inclusion on the attitudes of the teaching staff, the attitudes of learners enrolled in the school and the attitudes of parents of learners without disabilities.

8. Types of learning disabilities

The sample should consist of schools targeting all types of LD and special needs included in the IE Pilot Project. According to the MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report, (Inclusive Table, p. 16), this should include hearing, visual, motor, intellectual and learning disabilities, as well as behavior disorders (see Table 5).

9. Quality of online teaching/interventions

The sample should consist of schools with a varied range of facilities related to the implementation of distance learning and the provision of online intervention services to the learners with LD, due to the lockdown resulting from the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic; such facilities rest upon different factors including among others the technical resources of the school, the financial capabilities of the parents, the technical readiness of teachers, and the problems in the infrastructure (electricity and internet) per different regions.

The shift toward online teaching hasn't been easy on many levels: On the one hand, from the onset of the pandemic, teachers, at every level of education, were immediately pressured to start implementing distance learning modalities, often without sufficient guidance, training, or resources. In many cases all over the world, marginalized teachers may have missed out on the training delivered online or disseminated via telephone and video applications and found themselves unable to provide their teaching services (United Nations, 2020). According to a survey that took place between March and June 2020 on the impact of online teaching on education in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine (Abu Moghli & Shuayb, 2020), for those teachers in the Lebanese public sector who were able to embark on the distant teaching experience, over 51% said that they had to self-learn and do their own research and practice to be able to move to distance teaching. In this context, it is worth noting that MEHE, through the DOPS academic and unit coaches, had provided coaching for public school teachers on how to use Microsoft TEAMS. On the other hand, the pandemic crisis has exacerbated already existing learning vulnerabilities, such as those found among children with disabilities, and has unfortunately further reduced their opportunities to continue their learning (United Nations, 2020)

3. THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

3.2.2. The Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a good tool to measure people's attitudes, especially when they consist of both close-ended and open-ended questions and anonymity is ensured. They may elicit rich content from respondents and allow for further content exploration. This case study used self-administered questionnaires, sent via email, to replace the face-to-face interviews that were initially planned in the original study.

Form:

In the present case study, five different versions of questionnaires were constructed as per the five different types of participants: (1) class teachers, (2) special educators, (3) school principals, (4) SEN coaches, and (5) paraprofessionals (same format and content for speech therapists, psychologists and psychomotor specialists).

All 5 versions consisted of a blend of yes-no questions, close-ended questions and open-ended questions.

In all 5 versions, the 8 avoidance rules of question designing (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2011) were applied (avoiding ambiguous terms, long questions, double-barreled questions, general questions, leading questions, questions that include negatives and avoiding technical terms, except for terms with which all those involved in IE are familiar).

In all 5 versions, in addition to questions about recommendations for improvement and about the delivery of online services, there were other common questions, such as:

- Give your own definition of inclusive education
- To what extent do you think IE feasible and generalizable?
- Are there any types of disabilities that are difficult to be targeted in an IE program?

Besides the common questions, the content of each of the 5 versions was specialized as a function of their respective recipients' status, role and functions within the inclusive education process. Such specialized questions varied from “attitude-questions” assessing perceptions and beliefs about learners' progress, the participants' own contribution to the project, cooperation with other team members, etc., to more technical task-related questions related to implementation procedures as part of their role and functions.

Contents:

The contents of the questionnaires were designed according to the indicators set forth by Booth and Ainscow (2002) in the Index for Inclusion. The Index is a resource to support the inclusive development of schools. It includes a set of indicators that enable a detailed review of various aspects of a school and identify priorities for change. Collins (2012) describes the Index as a potentially powerful tool to support school planning, drawing on a range of perspectives from different stakeholders involved in the school inclusive education process.

For all five versions of the questionnaires, the same conceptual framework was used based on the Index' three dimensions: (a) the inclusive culture, (b) the inclusive (school) policies, and (c) the inclusive practices. These three dimensions constitute important ways to structure school development (see Figure 3). In the questionnaires used in the present case study, questions were organized along these three dimensions.

3. THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

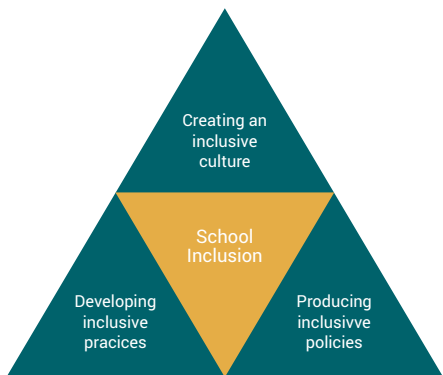


Figure 3
The three dimensions of school inclusion (Adapted from: Booth & Ainscow (2002), Fig. 3, p. 7)

A set of questions was prepared to capture the meaning of each of the three dimensions. Thus, for the first dimension (culture), participants are asked to provide their own definition of inclusive education, and to reflect on whether IE is a feasible and generalizable concept, on the importance of their role in the IE process, on the challenges facing IE, the extent to which values of acceptance and collaboration are fostered in their school, etc. With respect to the second dimension (policy), participants are asked to respond to questions assessing full participation of school staff, inter-staff communication, dissemination of an inclusive mindset across all school levels, and their recommendations for any strategic changes toward improvement. In the third dimension (practices), questions focus mostly on the participants’ reflections regarding the orchestration of learning and the mobilization of resources (see Table 18).

All questionnaires consisted of a mixture of quantitative items (yes/no items, ranking questions and Likert scale ratings) and qualitative items (open-ended questions). The present case study uses a mixed methods design of the convergent parallel type where quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously with equal priority; the resulting analyses of both sets of data are then merged to form an integrated whole (Bryman, 2016). In a mixed methods research, triangulation can be easily achieved by cross-checking the data from one research strategy against data obtained from another strategy.

The questionnaires that were designed for the present case study, similarly to the Index for Inclusion upon which they are based, are not about assessing anyone’s or any school’s competence. They are to be viewed as a collaborative self-review process, drawing on the experiences of everyone connected to the school, and aiming toward finding ways to support school and professional development in their implementation of inclusive education.

All questionnaires were in the Arabic language, and were sent via email with a cover letter emphasizing confidentiality and privacy of information. They were sent to all participants between 8 and 10 March 2021 and participants were given the 18th of March as a deadline for sending back their completed questionnaires.

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3.2.3. The Focus Groups

In the present case study, the following categories of participants were targeted in focus group meetings, moderated by the consultants, instead of questionnaires:

- 1. Learners with LD
- 2. Learners without LD
- 3. Parents of learners with LD
- 4. Parents of learners without LD
- 5. NGOs that have been involved in the IE Pilot Project

The focus group method was chosen for these particular categories because it is a technique that allows the participants to discuss a certain issue as members of a group. During the focus group, the researcher is able to assess how the group members respond to each other’s views, how they collectively make sense of a phenomenon (in this case, inclusive education) and construct meanings around it, and to build up a comprehensive view out of these interactions (Bryman, 2016). To this purpose, the researcher provides a fairly unstructured setting for the extraction of these views and perspectives. In addition, focus groups allow for a more spontaneous, informal communication with the researcher, and as is generally known of focus groups, a richer narrative can be obtained, especially when participants are children. Another important characteristic of focus groups is that it allows the researcher to pay attention not just to what participants say but to how they say it.

All focus group sessions were attended by two Consultants and administered via the Zoom application, recorded and later transcribed. Each focus group lasted for a little more than 60 minutes, and consisted of 6 to 7 participants, with the exception of groups 1 and 3 which were merged together into one group. An important limitation of focus groups has to do with group effects: Some participants are reticent to speak, others “hog the stage”, still others may tend to uncritically accept others’ point of views and abstain from voicing their own concerns, and those who are prone to express only culturally expected views (Bryman, 2016). Table 15 provides a summary of the themes elicited in each of the above mentioned focus groups.

Table 15
Summary of themes elicited in focus group meetings per category of participants.

Category of participants	Summary of elicited themes
Learners with LD]	Sense of well-being at school, sense of belonging, of being accepted by peers
Parents of learners LD	Satisfaction over the teaching practices and the overall school inclusive strategy
Learners without LD	Attitude toward the concept of IE, understanding of the nature of difficulties of their peers, acceptance of different others
Parents of learners without LD	Attitude toward and understanding of the concept of IE, attitude toward the school’s strategy, concerns about their own children, perception of LD
Non-governmental organizations	Reflection on their contribution to the IE Project, perception of the MEHE strategy, recommendations for improvement

3. THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

3.2.4. Observation of online teaching/interventions

In addition to questionnaires and focus groups, the technique of observation was used in the present study to ensure data triangulation; however, due to the logistic restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, an alternate online version of observation was applied. The method used was a mixture of a structured and unstructured observation:

The structured part of the observation relied on a coding scheme specifying the categories of behavior (at the level of both the teacher/interventionist and the learner(s)) that were observed, based on Flander’s system of interaction (FIACS) (Flanders, n.d.) which is known as the most popular technique used for the analysis of the teacher’s behavior and interaction going on in the classroom at a particular teaching-learning situation (Evans, 1970; Amatari, 2015). This system codes any interaction between teacher and learner(s) into 10 categories within 3 clusters, as shown in Table 16.

Table 16
Coding system used in structured observation of teacher/learner interaction in a classroom setting (based on Flanders’s Interaction Analysis Categories System, FIACS)

Cluster	Categories	Coded as
Teacher Talk (TT)	Accepts feelings of students	TT1
	Praise of encouragement	TT2
	Praises or accepts ideas of students	TT3
	Asks questions	TT4
	Lectures	TT5
	Gives direction	TT6
	Criticizes	TT7
Student Talk (ST)	Answers questions of teacher	ST1
	Initiates topics, expresses ideas	ST2
Silence / Confusion (S)	Periods of silence and/or confusion in which communication between teacher and student cannot be understood by the observer	S

The unstructured part of the observation consisted of recording down as many details as possible from the ongoing teacher/student(s) interaction with the aim of developing a narrative account of that interaction and the behaviors of those involved in that interaction.

In the present case study, we were able to attend only one online intervention session (psychomotor intervention) during which we were unobtrusive (camera and microphone turned off). We were provided with two pre-recorded sessions: One individualized speech-therapy session with a highly functioning boy with cerebral-palsy, and another mixed speech-therapy/special education session with three learners with dyslexia. For all intervention sessions, the same coding system was applied.

3. THE CASE STUDY ON THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT

All online observations (real time or pre-recorded) were made by two observers in order to achieve an acceptable level of reliability where one observer used an unstructured observation technique, while the other used a structured coded technique, and the two reports were compared for inter-observer consistency. In addition, we were provided with accounts of observations prepared by the Education Specialist and the Inclusive and Outreach Education Assistant at UNICEF for 4 online intervention sessions.

3.2.5. The Participants

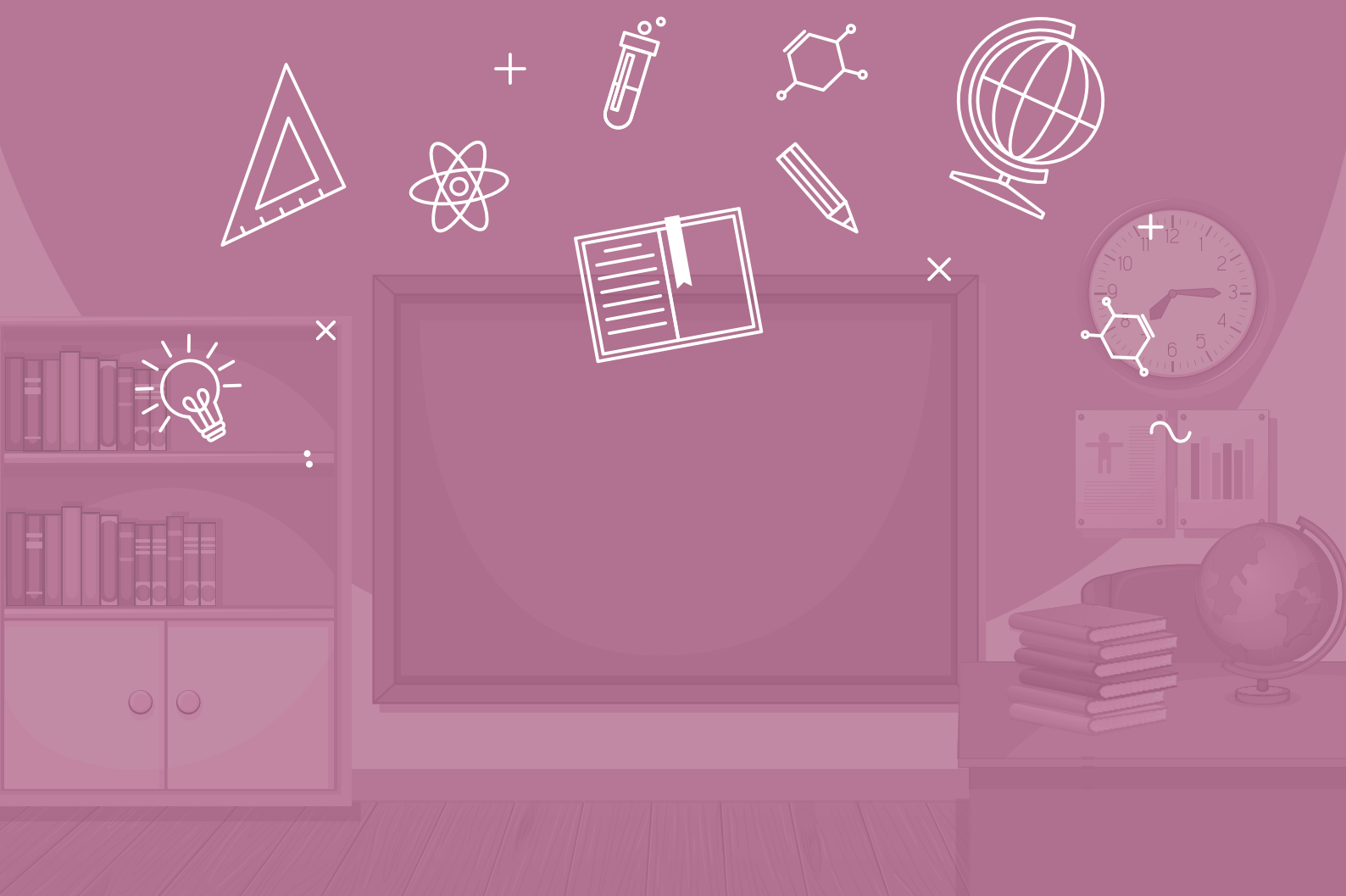
The total sample of participants for all questionnaires and in focus groups amounts to 77 (see Table 17). Participants from category 1 to category 7 were selected on the basis of convenience sampling from their respective school population. Participants from categories 8 to 11 were selected on the basis of purposive convenient sampling, as they matched the specified characteristics of the population of interest (gender, age range for learners, type(s) of LD/special needs). Participants from categories 12 and 13 (NGOs) were suggested by UNICEF as per their active involvement in the early stages of the conception of the IE Pilot Project.

Table 17
Total number of participants in the case study as per category and research method

Category	Number of participants	Research method
1 Regular classroom teacher	6	Self-administered questionnaire
2 Special educator	6	Self-administered questionnaire
3 Speech therapist	5	Self-administered questionnaire
4 Psychomotor specialist	6	Self-administered questionnaire
5 Psychologist	6	Self-administered questionnaire
6 DOPS-SEN coach	6	Self-administered questionnaire
7 School principal	6	Self-administered questionnaire
8 Learners with LD/special needs	7	Focus Group
9 Learners without LD/special needs	6	Focus Group
10 Parents of learners with LD/special needs	6	Focus Group
11 Parents of learners without LD/special needs	6	Focus Group
12 Non-Governmental Organizations I	5	Focus Group
13 Non-Governmental Organizations II	6	Focus Group
Total	77	

4.

RESULTS



4. RESULTS

The Results section is organized as follows:

- Data from Questionnaires
- Data from Focus Group meetings
- Observations of Online intervention sessions
- Data concerning the experience of online teaching and intervention (special section added to the original questionnaires)

4.1. Data from Questionnaires

Data from the 5 different questionnaires were first entered into special tables specific to each of the 5 categories (special educators, classroom teachers, school principals, paraprofessionals and SEN coaches), then was coded as a function of the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow’s Index for Inclusion (see section 5.2.2.), namely (a) the inclusive culture, (b) the inclusive (school) policies, and (c) the inclusive practices. Table 18 summarizes the type of data pertaining to each of the 3 dimensions.

Table 18
Summary of type of data extracted from participants across the three dimensions of the Index for Inclusion, with examples of questionnaire items

Dimension	Type of data	Examples of questionnaire items
1 Inclusive culture	- Participants’ definitions of IE - Participants’ reflections on whether IE is a feasible and generalizable concept - Participants’ assessment of the importance of their role in the IE process - Participants’ thoughts on the challenges facing IE - Participants’ thoughts on the extent to which values of acceptance and collaboration are fostered in their school	- Could you provide your own understanding of IE? - To what extent do you think IE is feasible and generalizable? - What is your perception of the learners’ progress? - What are the challenges facing IE? - What is the importance of your contribution to IE? - In what ways your school has changed since the beginning of IE implementation? - What are ways to mobilize IE awareness at the community level?
2 Inclusive policies	- Participants’ assessment of inclusion/exclusion criteria in IE policies - Participants’ assessment of staff coordination mechanisms in the school - Participants’ thoughts on priority areas to be addressed in any IE policy - Participants’ recommendations for strategic changes at school level	- Do you think IE should target all disabilities? - Do you think certain types of disabilities should not be included in schools? - How can you describe the support provided by MEHE? - How can you describe parental participation in IE? - What can be done to face the challenges of online teaching in IE?

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Dimension	Type of data	Examples of questionnaire items
3 Inclusive practices	- Participants' views on efficacy of IE procedures (assessment, planning, monitoring, evaluation, etc.) - Participants' evaluation of available resources (material and human) - Participants' reporting on details of every day operations	- What is being done to mobilize IE awareness at the community level? - How do you evaluate coordination between IE team members? - How do you evaluate the training program of the personnel? - Questions about assessment, designing plans, monitoring, evaluating - Questions about frequency of meetings

The next section summarizes the main findings for each of the 5 categories of questionnaires.

4.1.1. Category 1: Special Educators

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 3 identifier-questions specific to the targeted category: (1) At which educational level(s) is the participant intervening? (2) What is the number of learners with LD served by the participant? (3) What is/are the type(s) of LD served by the participant?

Table 19
Special Educators' responses to the identifier-questions across the 6 schools in the pilot case-study

Identifier question	Beirut school	Tripoli school	Saida school	Aley school	Zouk Mosbeh school	Zahleh school
Educational levels of intervention	KG, Gr.1,2	KG, Gr.1, 2, 3,4	KG, Gr.1, 2, 3,4	KG, Gr.1, 2, 3,4	KG, Gr.1, 2, 3,4	KG, Gr.1, 2, 3,4
Number of learners being served	62	73	41	38	26	25
Type of disabilities	Learning and intellectual disabilities, behavior disorders and autism	Learning, motor and intellectual disabilities, speech difficulties, behavior disorders, autism and hyperactivity	Learning and intellectual disabilities, speech difficulties, behavior disorders, hyperactivity, epilepsy and brain damage	Learning, motor and intellectual disabilities, autism, speech difficulties	Intellectual, motor and learning disabilities, autism and behavior disorders	Learning disabilities

4. RESULTS

Inclusive culture:

An inclusive culture starts with an understanding of the concept of inclusion. The question concerning giving a personal definition of IE yielded different views across all 6 special educators: Two out of 6 gave a rights-based definition, while the others gave a more functional definition as in integrating learners with LD and ensuring their interaction with others, providing differentiated teaching, accommodating techniques to match individual differences, and offering equal learning opportunities for all learners.

An important indicator of an inclusive culture is the extent to which the service providers perceive their work to be meaningful and sustainable. On a scale from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("completely"), measuring the special educators' belief that IE is feasible and generalizable, three out of 6 special educators gave a score of 5 ("completely") and the remaining 3 gave a score of 4.

In an inclusive culture, the service providers' perception of the learners' progress plays a crucial role in (1) their motivation and perseverance, and (2) their willingness to emotionally distance themselves from their learners and assess their improvement. On a scale from 1 (below expectations) to 5 (beyond expectations), only 1 of the 6 special educators gave a score of 4 ("very good") in estimating the progress of the learners with LD since the beginning of the IE Pilot Project, while the remaining 5 gave a score of 3 ("average").

Similarly, an important component of an inclusive culture has to do with the service provider's self-esteem vis-à-vis the services they provide and the meaning it bears on the entire inclusive educational process. On a scale from 1 ("not important at all") to 5 ("extremely important"), five out of the 6 special educators rated their role in the Pilot IE Project as 5 while the remaining one rated it as "important".

An inclusive school culture rests upon the degree of awareness regarding inclusive education among various school personnel. When asked to rate the quality of awareness raising about IE in the school on a scale from 1 ("very poor") to 5 ("excellent"), only 1 rated it as "excellent", 3 rated it as "good" and 1 rated it as "average".

The questionnaire section on recommendations for improvement reveals several matters related to the concept of an inclusive culture: Team work, for example, is an essential aspect of the successful implementation of inclusive education. Five out of 6 special educators emphasized the need to have more motivated, more cooperative and better trained classroom teachers for IE to succeed. One special educator stressed the "dire need" to better equip classroom teachers at all levels (curriculum planning and technical expertise). At the level of multi-disciplinary performance, while 1 out of 6 special educators stated that there is no need for improvement since "we are a very cooperative team", another one asked for more team coordination and for further asserting the importance of the role of special educators in parallel to the other specialists in the IE process, while the remaining special educators offered various suggestions that may help promote a more inclusive culture, such as:

- Ensuring the full-time presence of an SEN coach to further support the parents
- Increasing the number of paraprofessionals per school as well as their attendance frequency in order to benefit a greater number of learners

4. RESULTS

Inclusive policies:

Inclusive policies include participants' assessment of inclusion/exclusion criteria for a successful implementation of IE. In this context, when asked to evaluate the inclusion of parents in the IE process, all special educators, with the exception of one, mentioned that parents are involved, and gave several examples, ranging from contributing ideas and novel activities to be applied at home, organizing regular guidance and informative meetings with parents, inviting parents to participate in activities performed in the school's resource room, to including parents in goal-setting while planning the learner's educational program. One special educator mentioned that no intervention may start without securing parental consent.

Similarly to an inclusive culture, an inclusive policy stresses an efficient coordination mechanism within the school and with the relevant governmental organism. Five out of 6 special educators believed their role would be inefficient and insufficient without proper multi-disciplinary coordination: Their major concern was the high number of learners with LD in the schools, thus the inability of one person alone to handle all the educational and developmental requirements; they see themselves as playing a complementary, yet indispensable, role to the paraprofessionals, and they believe learners would have not progressed without the intervention of each of the team members.

An important school inclusive policy is to involve special educators in the preliminary assessment of learners with LD so they will be able to design the right kind of educational activities and produce the right kind of curricular accommodations and modifications for the learner that would secure his/her inclusion in the classroom. Five out of the 6 special educators mentioned they participate in the preliminary assessment session(s). It is important to note that not all of the 30 schools require the presence of the specialists' team during the registration/admission process of the learner. It thus seems that preliminary assessment takes place after the learner's admission, during what is referred to as "goal-setting coordination meeting". When asked to provide examples of their participation in the learner's preliminary assessment, only 2 of the 6 special educators gave an accurate answer (initial screening of the learners, meeting with the learner's parents, observing the learners in the classroom, and finally assessing their educational competencies). The remaining 4 special educators seem to have misunderstood the question for their answers stressed "monitoring the learner's progress and providing individualized evaluations for learners". In this context, one special educator noted the absence of formal, standardized assessment tools.

The questionnaire section on recommendations for improvement reveals several matters related to inclusive policies: The prevalent theme across responses from all six special educators was the need to provide adequate training for classroom teachers to (1) become more familiar with the concept of inclusive education, (2) modernize their teaching techniques so they may target all learning styles, and (3) motivate them to become more cooperative with the special educators. Other policy recommendations had to do with:

- Increasing the number of special educators per school
- Reducing the number of learners per class (suggested by 3 out of 6 special educators)
- Making curricular and examination adaptations
- Increasing arts and sports sessions for all learners where learners with disabilities actively participate
- Adding an extra-session of psychological orientation and group counseling to all classes where the psychologist addresses students' concerns and raises awareness about inclusive education
- In spite of the fact that job descriptions for all specialists have been well formulated during the initial

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stages of the IE Pilot Project (see Section 2.2.2. of the present case study, p. 19, about the development of SOPs), some special educators seem not to be aware of such SOPs.

Inclusive practices:

An assessment of the inclusive practices at the school level is very important for identifying strengths and weaknesses of the school structure and functioning. The questionnaire included several items measuring the practice dimension.

Good inclusive practices necessitate good coordination between different service providers. When asked to rate the extent of coordination with the classroom teachers on a scale from 1 ("very poor") to 5 ("very satisfactory"), only 1 out of 6 special educators gave a score of 5, 4 out of 6 gave a score of 3 and the remaining special educator gave a score of 2.

When asked to provide examples of the type of inclusive activities they propose for classroom teachers, answers included:

- Applying adaptations to exams
- Providing teaching resources (including games)
- Planning lessons for learners with LD
- Assisting the teachers in lesson planning
- Cooperative teaching
- Offering guidance on how to use visuals to explain concepts in such a way as to reach all learners in the classroom

Good inclusive practices require the systematic application of a progress monitoring mechanism, such as the establishment of a fixed schedule of coordination and evaluation meetings. Responses to the question about the frequency of such meetings with classroom teachers varied greatly across the 6 schools, thus implying the absence of such a regulatory mechanism: Two out of 6 special educators mentioned "monthly", another 2 mentioned "weekly", one special educator mentioned "every 3 months", and the remaining one mentioned: "we meet once every few months". The same irregularity in such a practice was shown with regard to the frequency of meetings between special educators and paraprofessionals: Four out of 6 special educators mentioned "weekly", one mentioned "monthly" and the remaining special educator mentioned "every 3 months". Further irregularity is revealed in their answers to questions related to "who calls for such meetings" and "who prepares the agenda for such meetings": It was not clear if the special educator is in charge of both tasks (calling for meetings and setting the agenda) or the team or the school principal, in addition to two responses which mentioned: "it depends on who needs the meeting".

Proper inclusive education practice entails the implementation of learning activities in a classroom where all learners feel engaged and motivated to participate. Asked if they have the opportunity to implement such a practice, all 6 special educators said they do, but relevant examples of such activities were provided by only 4 out of the 6 special educators:

- Giving one entire session weekly to the whole class, the purpose of which is to consolidate concepts learned during the week through interactive teaching with a variety of resources and games
- Dividing the class into small groups and using differentiated teaching as a function of the different "types of intelligence"
- Cooperative teaching
- Giving an entire math session using sensory material from the "resource room"

4. RESULTS

The answers of the remaining two special educators were either too vague (“giving a lesson in the Arabic language using reinforcements and rewards”) or were irrelevant to the question (“I offer recommendations to the teacher on how to explain the lesson in a way that would attract students’ attention and warrant a greater participation in class”).

4.1.2. Category 2: School Principals

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 2 identifier-questions specific to the targeted category: (1) What is the number of learners with LD enrolled at your school? and (2) What is/are the type(s) of LD served by your school?

Table 20
School principals’ responses to the identifier-questions across the 6 schools

Identifier question	Beirut school	Tripoli school	Saida school	Aley school	Zouk Mosbeh school	Zahleh school
Number of learners being served	70	86	64	50	26	50
Type of disabilities in school	Learning and motor disabilities, speech difficulties, hyperactivity	Learning, motor and intellectual disabilities, behavior disorders, autism	Learning and motor disabilities	Learning, motor and intellectual disabilities, autism, speech difficulties	Intellectual, motor and learning disabilities, autism and behavior disorders	Learning disabilities

Inclusive culture:

An inclusive culture starts with an understanding of the concept of inclusion. The question concerning giving a personal definition of IE yielded different views across all 6 school principals: Two principals presented a rights-based definition, three presented a definition of inclusion as (1) conditional on the availability of specialized personnel at school, (2) the opposite of segregated schooling, and (3) the adaptation of the learner with difficulties to the school environment, rather than the adaptation of the school to the needs of the learners. Only one definition included the notion of respecting diversity and tolerating differences among all learners, not just learners with difficulties.

Associated with the definition of inclusive education is the extent to which IE is perceived to be a feasible and generalizable concept. On a scale from 1 (“not at all”) to 5 (“completely”) where participants are asked if IE is a feasible and generalizable concept, five principals gave a score of 5, and the remaining one gave a score of 4. When asked whether they perceive some types of disabilities to be more difficult to target than others in IE, 3 out of 6 principals said “no”, and the remaining 3 said “yes” for severe intellectual disabilities, severe autism, and severe emotional disorders (see Table 21 for all participants’ perceptions of which types of disabilities ought not be included in schools).

In an inclusive school culture, the school principal’s perception of the learners’ progress is essential in decision-making and in reinforcing or undermining an inclusive culture in the school. Two of the 6 principals estimated

4. RESULTS

the progress achieved by learners with LD to be between 50 and 75%, 2 out of 6 estimated it to be 50%, and the remaining two principals estimated it to be between 25 and 50%. Estimates below 50% were justified by (1) the insufficient and superficial training of the service providers, (2) the poor quality of infrastructural readiness, (3) insufficiency of human as well as material resources, (4) insufficiency of time allocated for special educators, (5) poor motivation and cooperation of some administrative officers, (6) poor inclusive vision in the school, and (7) poor school readiness to manage cases of bullying against learners with LD

School Principals’ perceived estimated % of progress in learners with LD per school

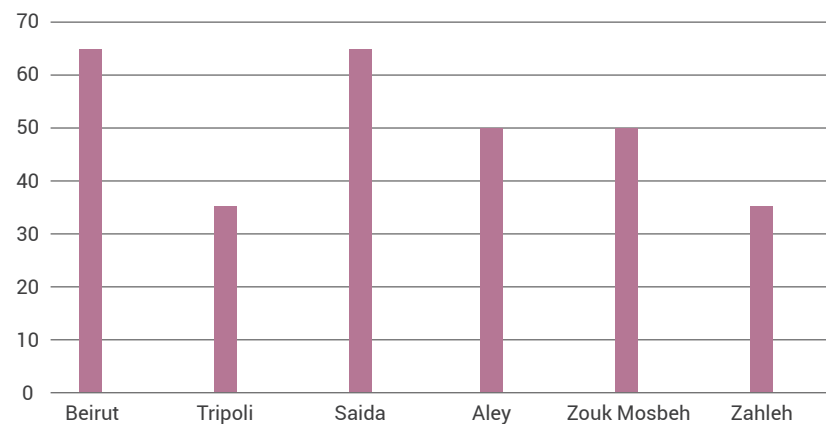


Figure 4
School principals’ perceived estimated percentage of progress in learners with LD per school

Creating an inclusive culture in the school has been widely associated in the literature with efficient school leadership, such as progress monitoring, personal involvement in and knowledge of IE implementation procedures: All principals, with one exception, said they attend the progress evaluation meetings of learners with LD, along with other team members. Principals’ responses to the frequency of such progress evaluation meetings matched those for Special Educators across all schools, except for 1 school where the special educator mentioned a monthly rate of meetings while the principal mentioned a bi-weekly rate of meetings.

Responses about the principal’s role in progress evaluation meetings were of a generic nature (guidance, orientation, support, respect), except for one principal who described her role as encompassing irrelevant tasks (“identifying the number of LD and categorizing them”) and strictly administrative functions (“making sure service providers are executing the tasks assigned to them by MEHE”). Asked about their familiarity with the kind of school documentation used to evaluate learners’ progress, 3 out of 6 principals provided details including learners’ assignments, exams, class observations, evaluation grids, weekly progress reports, records of grades, etc. One principal gave an irrelevant answer (“documentation on the individual learner or the learning environment through a workshop”), while the remaining principal answered “paperwork”.

School principals are role models for the school personnel. In an inclusive school culture, the school principal’s self-perception is crucial for the implementation of inclusive education as it influences their motivation to persevere or not in their work, which in turn influences the kind of model they convey to school personnel. On a scale from 1 (“not important at all”) to 5 (“extremely important”), all 6 school principals perceived their role in IE as extremely important.

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Inclusive policies:

The overarching goal of an inclusive school policy is to define the delivery and management of educational services to respond to the diverse needs of all learners in the school. Good school inclusive policies are based on the collaboration among partners: Outcomes for learners improve when the relationships among partners are based on trust, respect and support, and are properly coordinated. Asked to rate the quality of coordination between school principals and other team members in the school on a scale from 1 (“minimal”) to 5 (“excellent”), 5 out of 6 principals rated this coordination as excellent, while the remaining principal rated it as good. This response pattern was further confirmed in a question asking to specify who is responsible for monitoring the implementation of IE objectives in the school, as all 6 principals emphasized that it is a “teamwork”, and 2 out of 6 principals included themselves as part of the team.

Partnership in IE includes the role of MEHE at the administrative level by the primary education department, and at the technical level by the SEN unit at DOPS. In an inclusive school policy, the ministry’s role is essential in overseeing policy implementation, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment. Asked to clarify the type(s) of contribution offered by MEHE to their schools, all 6 principals mentioned educational material and resources, training and technical support. However, 1 out of 6 principals added that the material and resources were insufficient, and another principal added that training and technical support were insufficient. Asked to rate the extent to which MEHE support was important in ensuring the success of IE, 2 out of 6 principals rated it as “extremely important”, 2 principals rated it as “important”, and the remaining two rated it as “average”.

Inclusive school policies emphasize the active involvement of parents of all learners. Asked to rate the active participation and acceptance versus the resistance of parents of students without LD to the concept of IE, only 1 out of 6 principals rated it as “extremely acceptant”, 3 out of 6 rated it as “acceptant” and the remaining principal rated it as “average”. When asked to rate, on a similar scale, the active involvement of parents of learners with difficulties, only 1 out of 6 principals rated it as “extremely active”; three principals gave a rating of “active” and two principals gave a rating of “average”. However, when asked to name who participates in the school meetings for evaluating the progress of learners with LD, only 2 out of 6 principals mentioned the presence of parents in such meetings.

As per the literature on inclusive school policies, the task of a school leader is to promote IE in the community. When asked about how could one promote inclusive education in society, all the given options were chosen by the participants (distribution of pamphlets and posters, organizing debates at school by hosting experts in IE, giving free awareness lectures in public spaces, inviting community members to visit the school, etc.), but only 3 out of 6 principals opted to write additional options such as organizing campaign about IE in partnership with MEHE and the local municipalities, and organizing lectures for parents about IE. One principal added: “inviting parents to visit the classrooms in order to reassure them that their children are not being affected”.

A good inclusive school policy is associated with the development of a well-informed and trained human resource cadre for delivering quality services in IE. Asked to provide recommendations for improvement, 5 out of 6 principals called for “increasing and deepening” the level of school staff training, in addition to increasing the number of special educators, increasing the attendance weekly schedule of paraprofessionals, adding a teacher-aid in classes to assist the teacher, and appointing an administrative supervisor to handle all the learners’ files.

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Inclusive practices:

The school principal’s active participation is cited as the most important predictor of success in implementing change and improving services in a school. The school principal is central to facilitating systemic change and leading the school personnel to adopt new attitudes and new practices. Good inclusive practices at the level of school leadership thus include the principal’s active participation in monitoring the implementation of IE objectives. While only 2 out of 6 school principals mentioned specifically the principal as responsible for such a task, the remaining 4 mentioned “it is a teamwork” without emphasizing the role of the principal. When asked to describe their role in progress evaluation meetings, all the principals’ responses were of a very generic nature (guidance, orientation, support, respect), except for one principal who described her role as encompassing irrelevant tasks (“identifying the number of LD and categorizing them”) and administrative functions (“making sure service providers are executing the tasks assigned to them by MEHE”).

The questionnaire’s section on recommendations for improvement allows to have an idea about the kind of practices school principals perceive to be part of their authority. At the administrative level, principals’ responses emphasized organizational tasks (clarifying job descriptions for school personnel, organizing distribution of learners with difficulties per class, planning team work according to MEHE’s requirements) in addition to other tasks that were described in generic terms (supervision, follow-up, promotion of IE in the school, provision of incentives for cooperative school personnel). At the community level, while 2 out of 6 principals did not provide any suggestion, the remaining four portrayed a role which emphasized the contribution of “others” (organizations, municipalities, experts, parents) rather than their own leadership initiative, or in case there was an initiative, it was described in very generic terms (“increase social participation” or “connect with organizations” or “meet with the community”).

4.1.3. Category 3: SEN coaches

Inclusive culture:

An inclusive culture starts with an understanding of the concept of inclusion. The SEN coaches’ personal definition of IE revealed a somewhat different vision of IE, compared to the previous two sets of responses (special educators and school principals). Their definitions were worded in a more rights-based language, emphasizing acceptance of diversity, equal opportunities for all learners, and the universality of the learning experience. However their responses to the question whether they perceive some types of disabilities to be more difficult to target than others in IE, showed a unanimous “yes” for severe autism, learning, intellectual and motor disabilities, as well as behavioral and emotional disorders (see Table 21 for all participants’ answers to this question across all schools).

To the question as to what extent they think IE is feasible and generalizable, 1 out of 6 SEN coaches responded “completely” while the remaining respondents thought it was, pending “certain criteria”.

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Table 21
Types of disabilities perceived to be difficult to be targeted in IE per participant category for all 6 schools.

Category of Participant	Types of Disabilities
School Principals	Severe intellectual disabilities, severe autism, severe emotional disorders
SEN coaches	Severe autism, intellectual disabilities, severe motor disabilities, severe emotional and behavioral disorders, severe learning disabilities
Speech Therapists	Severe autism, moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, severe motor disabilities, severe behavioral disorders, multiple disabilities
Psychologists	Severe autism, severe to moderate intellectual disabilities, severe motor disabilities, severe behavioral and emotional disorders, multiple disabilities
Psychomotor Specialists	Severe autism, moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, severe behavioral and emotional disorders, severe motor disabilities, multiple-disabilities

Sustainability of an inclusive school vision depends on the perceived degree of progress among learners with LD. Three of the SEN coaches gave a “good” estimate for the progress of learners with LD in their respective schools, 2 out of 6 gave a “poor” estimate, and the remaining participant gave a “below expectations” estimate.

An inclusive school culture is associated with the degree and nature of change perceived in the school as a function of the implementation of IE. All SEN coaches with the exception of one perceived more acceptance in students’ attitudes toward learners with LD; four out of 6 participants perceived more acceptance in teachers’ attitudes toward learners with LD, the remaining 2 participants specifying that this change was not perceived in all teachers. Five out of 6 SEN coaches perceived more acceptance in parents’ attitudes toward learners with LD, and 5 out of 6 participants perceived more self-confidence and enhanced social skills in the learners with LD. It is noted that only 1 of the 6 SEN coaches saw change in the teachers’ acceptance of learners with LD.

An inclusive school culture is often faced with many challenges. The absence of an inclusive school vision was mentioned as one such challenge by 3 out of the 6 SEN coaches; resistance of parents of students without LD and of students without LD to the concept of IE was mentioned by 2 out of 6 participants; poor motivation and commitment from the teachers were mentioned by 3 out of 6 participants; poor administrative support was mentioned by 1 out of 6 participants, and insufficient training, human and teaching resources were mentioned by all 6 participants.

Inclusive policies:

To ensure a successful implementation of IE, a fundamental school inclusive policy relates to the professional training of the service providers. The SEN coaches’ knowledge of the details of the public system enables them to orient the school staff and facilitate the system procedures (for a full description of the SEN coaches’ duties, see Sections 2.2.2., 2.2.3. and 2.2.4. on pp. 18-22 of the present case-study). It is therefore worth exploring how the SEN coaches perceive their own training in light of their many varied responsibilities in the context of IE. The need for continuous training was expressed by 2 out of 6 participants; while 2 out of 6 participants considered this training to be very important, 1 out of the 6 participants said the practical part was important; 1 out of 6 participants said the training was too theoretical and too general. These last 2

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participants asked for more topics to be included in their training, namely strategies to help teachers better accommodate their curriculum to the types of learning difficulties in their classrooms.

The SEN coaches’ contribution to a successful inclusive school policy cannot be undermined. Their bridging role between the MEHE and the school can be influential in changing some policies and/or creating new ones. When asked to rank by order of importance a set of priority areas that need to be improved, all 6 participants ranked teacher training on differentiated teaching practices and inclusive strategies as first priority, followed by classroom management, management of bullying and harassment of learners with LD, and training on provision of psycho-social support when needed.

Good school inclusive policies are based on the collaboration and cooperation among different stakeholders: Asked to rate the extent of their satisfaction with teachers’ cooperation, 4 out of 6 SEN coaches were “satisfied”, and the remaining two were “average” and “poorly satisfied” respectively. The responses were different for the ratings of the extent of cooperation with the special educators and the paraprofessionals where ratings were between “extremely satisfied” and “satisfied”.

Inclusive practices:

The Ministry’s role is essential in overseeing the implementation and monitoring of inclusive practices in the school. The SEN coaches’ visits to the schools serve that purpose. When asked about their perception of the special educators’ performance, 4 out of 6 SEN coaches responded they were “extremely satisfied”, 1 responded she was “satisfied”, and the remaining one responded she was “poorly satisfied”.

Asked about their perception of the paraprofessionals’ performance, 1 out of 6 responded she was “extremely satisfied”, 2 responded they were “satisfied”, and the remaining 3 rated their satisfaction as “average”.

Asked about their perception of the school principals’ performance, 2 out of 6 responded they were “extremely satisfied”, 1 responded she was “satisfied”, 2 rated their satisfaction to be “average”, and the remaining one responded she was “poorly satisfied”.

As for their perception of the teachers’ performance, 4 out of 6 rated their satisfaction as “average”, 1 responded she was “poorly satisfied” and the remaining one responded she was “not satisfied at all”.

One item in the questionnaire asks the SEN coaches to rank by priority a list of options they perceive as important practices related to their own role and responsibilities within the inclusive school setting. The item offers a set of 9 options (among which an “other” option for free expression). It is important to note that the given options (1) may or may not directly apply to the typical description of a SEN coach, and (2) may be incomplete, hence the provision of an “other” option for the participants to fill as they see fit. Table 22 summarizes the SEN coaches’ responses.

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Table 22
Perceived priority rankings of SEN coaches for proposed practice options (1 = highest priority, 10= lowest priority)

Practice Option	SEN 1	SEN 2	SEN 3	SEN 4	SEN 5	SEN 6
1 Assessment of the learners' progress	N/A ¹²	2	9	9	6	8
2 Preparing the learner's individual learning and intervention program file	N/A	1	8	8	7	6
3 Attending teams' evaluation meetings of learners' performance and progress	N/A	4	5	6	2	7
4 Monitoring learners' progress	5	3	3	3	5	9
5 Providing needed teaching resources for teachers and special educators	N/A	9	7	7	8	5
6 Coordinating between different team members	3	5	2	1	4	1
7 Report writing and communicating with central SEN unit at MEHE	1	7	6	5	9	2
8 Referral of vulnerable learners to centers for specialized therapy	4	6	4	4	3	3
9 Providing psychosocial support resources for team members	2	8	1	2	1	4
10 Other	None	None	None	None	None	None

As revealed in Table 22, responses provided by the SEN coaches varied greatly across the 6 schools. Perceived priority of different tasks is inconsistently reported, and some noteworthy responses stand out, such as considering attending evaluation meetings of learners' performance and progress (Option 3) as non-applicable to the scope of the SEN coach's responsibilities. Another noteworthy inconsistency is the ranking of Option 2 (preparing the learner's file) as a top priority while the same option is perceived as non-applicable for another respondent. Inconsistency in the perception of Option 7 (communicating with SEN Unit at MEHE), which is a core function of SEN coaching, is also worth exploring. Further, the absence of responses to the "other" option is also worth noting, for one would expect this option to be reserved for suggesting practices related to parental support, coaching and orientation.

4.1.4. Category 4: Teachers

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 4 identifier-questions specific to the targeted category: (1) How many years of teaching experience do you have? (2) Which class level(s) do you teach? (3) What is the number of learners with LD in your class(es), and (4) What is/are the type(s) of LD in your class(es)?

12. Participant perceived the option as non-applicable to the scope of SEN Coach's practices

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Table 23
Teachers' responses to the identifier-questions across the 6 schools in the pilot case-study

Identifier question	Beirut school	Tripoli school	Saida school	Aley school	Zouk Mosbeh school	Zahleh school
Years of teaching experience	17	17	4	11	30	19
Class level	Grades 4 & 5	Grades 1 & 5	Grade 1	Grade 1	Grades 2 & 3	Grades 1,2,3 & 4
Number of learners with LD in class	1	16-13	6	7	10	17
Type of disabilities in class	Motor disability	Learning, motor and intellectual disabilities, behavior disorders, speech difficulties	Dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADHD	Learning and motor disabilities, autism	Learning disabilities, ADHD and motor disabilities	Learning disabilities

Inclusive culture:

The transformational experience of inclusive education in contemporary schooling rests upon the critical need to prepare teachers for this transformational mindset, and equip them with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions required to effectively and efficiently implement an inclusive culture in the school. An inclusive culture starts with an understanding of the concept of inclusion.

The question concerning giving a personal definition of IE yielded different views across all six: participants: Only 1 out of 6 teachers included a rights-based dimension to her definition of inclusion. Other responses varied from: "IE is giving children with disabilities the chance to participate in the learning process", or "IE is the process of including children with disabilities in normal schools along their normal peers, with the necessity of providing them with special education", to "IE is the process of engaging children with disabilities with normal students so they can 'enjoy' access to a healthy education while being provided with all possible means to help them acquire learning concepts".

Associated with the definition of inclusive education is the extent to which IE is perceived to be a feasible and generalizable concept. On a scale from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("completely") where participants are asked if IE is a feasible and generalizable concept is, one teacher gave a score of 5, two teachers gave a score of 4 and the remaining three gave an "average" rating.

Teachers' perception of the improvement achieved by their students has been often associated in the literature with teachers' expectations of success or failure of their students. In an inclusive school culture, teachers' expectations of success for learners with difficulties have been associated with increased motivation to learn

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and with improved performance in learners. When asked to rate their perception of the improvement achieved by learners with LD on a scale from 1 (below expectations) to 5 (beyond expectations), all six teachers from all six schools gave a score of 3 (average). A comparison of the teachers' ratings with the ratings given by all participants from all categories across all 6 schools (see Figure 5) is a fair triangulation procedure to capture the actual improvement of learners with disabilities in the IE Pilot Project: it is thus noted that teachers' ratings were identical to those given by the speech therapists and relatively similar to other categories, with few participants giving exceptional ratings (SEN coaches, special educators, psychologists and psychomotor specialists). In sum, it can be said that the performance of learners with disabilities has improved over time since their admission to the IE Pilot Project, and that this improvement is fair enough to build on for the future.

What is estimated progress of learners with learning difficulties?

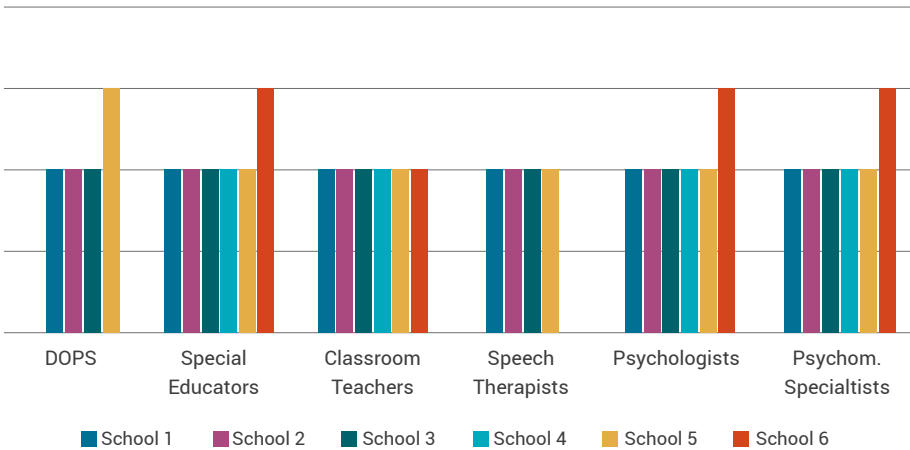


Figure 5
Participants' estimates of the progress of learners with LD per participant category across all 6 schools.

School 1: Beirut; school 2: Zouk; school 3: Tripoli; school 4: Saida; school 5: Aley; school 6: Zahleh

An inclusive culture cannot be imposed externally. It needs to stem from a deeply-rooted commitment from those who are or who will be directly involved in the process, in that case, the teachers. When asked whether they would consider joining another non-inclusive school if they had the choice, 3 out of 6 teachers said no and the remaining 3 said yes. Explanations were as follows:

- The yes answers: "I would leave to another school because of the big number of students in my school not because of the inclusive project", "I would leave because teaching in a traditional way does not work with learners with LD; they need a more 'entertaining' way to learn", and "I would leave because IE requires from teachers that they use different methods of teaching for different types of students".
- The no answers: "I would not leave because the mission of teaching is one and it is my duty to perform this mission for all learners, diversity is useful for all", "I would not leave because I strive to serve those difficulties", and "I would not leave because I feel satisfied in this school and I am convinced with IE"

The "yes" answers clearly do not reveal an antagonism to the concept of IE; rather, they reveal a need for some logistic improvements (reducing the number of learners with disabilities per class) and more efficient, targeted teacher training.

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An inclusive school culture is one where all learners feel comfortable in each other's presence, where differences are tolerated and diversity is embraced. Asked whether their students feel at ease in the presence of learners with LD in their class, 2 out of 6 teachers answered "no", justifying their answers as follows:

- "They do not feel at ease because they are jealous from the different treatment we provide to learners with LD and because of the distractions some of these learners cause, and sometimes they even try to imitate them"
- "The reason why students do not feel at ease because of the hyperactivity of learners with LD as some of them do not comply with instructions and this leads to conflicts between them"

As a means to solve this problem, one teacher suggested to "talk separately to students about the importance of accepting their peers with LD and to behave with them in a normal way".

In an inclusive school culture, teachers are the key stakeholders as their contribution is essential for the development of positive attitudes in their students. It is therefore important to assess the degree to which teachers appreciate the importance of their contribution. Three out of 6 teachers rated their role as "extremely important", one rated it as "important", and the remaining 2 gave it an "average" rating. However, all 6 teachers said they gained a lot from the IE project, providing examples as follows:

- Knowledge of ways to deal with learners with LD
- Benefiting from the paraprofessionals' expertise in improving the way I deal with my students and even my own children at home
- Patience and the ability to tolerate pressures
- Gaining more experience (teaching strategies and teaching material)
- Establishing excellent relations with the team

Inclusive policies:

Inclusive education requires that teachers modify, adopt, and/or abandon certain traditional practices. Good inclusive policies emphasize professional development and training of teachers because they are the means for improving academic and behavioral practices at the classroom and learners' performance levels. Asked whether they think the kind of support (human and material) they have received from MEHE sufficiently satisfied the school's needs, all 6 teachers answered that it was insufficient, and their recommendations for improvement were listed as follows:

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Table 24
Teachers’ recommendations for improving the provision of support for schools

Type of support needed	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
At the level of classroom teaching	Number of learners per class should not exceed 20	Provide more teaching equipment	Provide more teaching equipment	Improve students’ acceptance of their peers with LD	Change classroom arrangement	Material must be better adapted to learners’ needs
At the level of specialized interventions	Therapy must be provided for learners with LD	Provide equipment and tools according to standardized criteria	Increase the number of specialists	Increase the number of para-professionals	Increase the number + available time of para-professionals	Provide a speech therapist to the school
At the administrative level	Allocate 1 weekly hour for teachers to coordinate with specialists	Faster response to teachers’ needs when requested	Provide equipment	None	None	None

It is interesting to note that none of the 6 teachers listed professional development or training as an area that needed improvement. This may be due to the fact that teachers in the 30 schools of the IE Pilot Project had received a robust training package by CERD, consisting of awareness raising and MTSS professional development sessions (for more details, see Sections 2.2.2. and 2.2.3. of the present case study on pp.18-19, as well as the Teacher Profile for Inclusion delineated in the Concept Note, and Procedures for Implementation in the Inclusive Education Project, MEHE-DOPS 2018-2019 Progress Report, p.4).

Central to any inclusive school policy is the acceptance that the learner’s family is part of the collaborative team. Parents of the learner with LD have the greatest vested interest in seeing their child learn and develop, and have thus the ability to positively influence the quality of educational services provided in the school. Two out of 6 teachers did not perceive parental participation as part of the inclusive education process, while the other 4 did. Asked to give examples of such participation, responses included multi-disciplinary meetings with parents, and awareness raising sessions for all parents about the importance of IE.

Booth and Ainscow (2002) say that inclusion is not just about making schools supportive; it is also about building communities which encourage and celebrate the school’s achievements. Hence, an important inclusive school policy is for the school to reach out for the community and minimize exclusionary practices and pressures, as well as draw on the community resources and facilities (libraries, halls, canteens, etc.) for the benefit of all learners in the school. When asked whether the concept of IE should include the community, five out of 6 teachers answered “yes”, and their responses included organizing awareness sessions about IE, and outdoors activities for all learners using community facilities.

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Inclusive practices:

It is important to identify teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education because their attitudes can dramatically affect the educational outcomes. An increased receptivity toward including learners with difficulties in one’s classroom has been associated with greater teacher efficacy, and mostly, with greater confidence in teachers’ and students’ success. Thus, teachers’ apprehensions, whether due to lack of experience or an overall skepticism of the idea of inclusion, will affect teacher efficacy (Cassady, 2011). Asked to rate how easy it is to have learners with LD in their classes on a scale from 1 (“extremely difficult”) to 5 (“extremely easy”), 3 out of 6 teachers gave a rating of 3 (“average”) and the remaining 3 teachers gave a rating of 2 (“not easy”). Asked whether pulling out learners with LD from class to attend their specialized intervention sessions reduces the load on them, all teachers, with the exception of one, answered “yes”. Asked to give explanations for their answers, responses were as follows:

- Because of my inability to handle some learners with LD in class
- Because learners with LD need special attention due to their hyperactivity or behaviors that distract the teaching process
- Because it is easier to explain the lesson and in less time
- Because it is beneficial to all (learners with LD and the other learners in class)

Teachers were also asked whether pulling out learners with LD from class to attend specialized intervention sessions reduces the load on the other learners in the class, all teachers, with the exception of one, answered “yes”. Asked to give explanations for their answers, responses were as follows:

- Sometimes, the presence of learners with LD in class, their lack of compliance with instructions and their distracting behavior lead to chaos in the class and loss of teaching time
- When the learner emits annoying sounds or when they speak incomprehensible speech, this surely disturbs the other learners
- Because learners with LD influence other learners due to their hyperactivity and “unusual” behaviors, so they distract others and this affects the learning process

To further assess teachers’ confidence or apprehensions, a question asked them to rate their ability to manage classroom and teaching activities in the presence of learners with LD on a scale from 1 (“not able at all”) to 5 (“very able”), one teacher out of 6 gave a rating of 5, 2 teachers out of 6 gave a rating of 4, and the remaining 3 teachers gave a rating of 3.

For inclusive teaching practices to be effectively applied in the school, teachers must be willing to plan lessons for all learners, recognizing their different learning styles. Booth & Ainscow (2002) refer to this as the “orchestration” of learning. When teaching activities are designed to foster the participation of all students, the need for individual support is reduced. Asked how often they take into consideration the objectives set for the learners with LD in their overall lesson plans, 2 out of 6 teachers answered “all the time”, 2 out of 6 teachers answered “most of the time”, and the remaining 2 teachers answered “sometimes”.

As indicated previously, good inclusive practices necessitate good collaboration and coordination between different service providers in the school. Since teachers are key players in the implementation of inclusive education, it was important to assess their perception of their contribution to the process. Asked to describe such contribution, responses were as follows:

- “Because we see the learners with LD on a daily basis, our evaluation of their progress, both at the academic and behavioral levels, is important”
- “There is continuous communication with the paraprofessionals where we ask questions so we can assess

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- the learner’s progress or regression”
- “I am always consulted about the learner’s performance and my views about some changes”
 - “My opinion of the learners’ performance is taken into consideration with respect to any behavioral or academic changes”
 - “We have routine weekly meetings to assess learners’ progress”
 - “There are continuous consultations between teachers and the multi-disciplinary team”

When asked whether they are actively involved, at the beginning of the IE process, in setting the educational and behavioral goals for the learners in their classrooms, all teachers with the exception of one said “yes”. And when asked whether their voices are heard in the final decision to be made about a learner’s status and placement, 4 out of 6 teachers responded “yes” while the remaining 2 teachers responded “no”. These different patterns of responses across the 6 schools call for the need to elaborate standard unified inclusive practices about teacher’s involvement to be applicable in all schools alike.

4.1.5. Category 5: The Paraprofessionals (Speech Therapists, Psychologists and Psychomotor Specialists)

In this category, the same questionnaire format was used for all three specializations. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 3 identifier-questions specific to the targeted specialization: (1) At which class level(s) do you intervene? (2) What is the number of learners with LD whom you serve? and (3)What is/are the type(s) of LD whom you serve?

Table 25
Paraprofessionals’ responses to identifier-questions across the 6 schools in the pilot case-study

	Speech Therapist					Psychologists						Psychomotor Sp.					
Schools*	B	T	S	A	Z1	B	T	S	A	Z1	Z2	B	T	S	A	Z1	Z2
Grade level	K, 1,6	KG, 1,4	1,2, 3	KG, 1,2	KG, 1,2	1,3	KG, 4,5	KG, 1,2	1, 6	KG, 1,3	KG, 1-2	KG, 1,2	KG, 1	KG, 1,2,3	KG, 1,4	KG, 1,2	KG, 1,2
Number of learners with LD served	50	44	48	26	26	26	48	30	21	26	25	X	87	8	38	26	25
Types of disabilities served**	H Sd ASD	ID ASD M B Hy Sd	LD Sd	LD Sd	LD ID B M ASD	LD B E	Hy LD ID B E B ASD M ID Sd	LD ID B E	Hy B M	LD B M ID ASD	LD B E	LD ASD ID M	ASD LD M ID Hy	LD H	LD ID M ASD Sd	LD B M ID ASD	LD

*Schools: B: Beirut, T: Tripoli, S: Saida, A: Aley, Z1: Zouk Mosbeh, Z2: Zahleh.
**Types of Disabilities: ASD: autism spectrum disorders, B: behavioral disorders, E: emotional disorders, H: hearing impairment, Hy: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, ID: intellectual disability, LD: learning disabilities, M: motor disability, Sd: speech difficulties.
While the table does not include Visual Impairments, it is important to note that some of the 30 schools in the IE Pilot Project cater for learners with visual impairments.

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Since the same questionnaire format was used for all paraprofessionals, the data will be presented into one section.

Inclusive culture:

In regular schools which do not normally seek the services of paraprofessionals, the mere presence of the latter is one of the key pillars to promote an inclusive culture in the school. In an inclusive school, their role is crucial in ensuring the full participation of learners with learning difficulties and reducing their exclusion from classroom activities. In an inclusive school culture, they should be perceived as an integral part of the school personnel and of daily life school functioning rather than external experts who are brought in to offer selective services for particular people. Paraprofessionals greatly contribute to the school culture by instilling the notion that differences between learners are resources to support learning rather than problems to be overcome (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

In this context, it was important to assess paraprofessionals’ own understanding of inclusive education. Two of the psychologists’ definitions were functional and service-oriented (modification of curriculum- provision of therapy – differentiation of instruction), while the remaining 4 used a more rights-based language emphasizing ideas of belonging, equal opportunities, least restrictive environments and child-centered education.

The quality of definitions of IE for psychomotor specialists was similar to the psychologists’ responses: With the exception of one participant who did not provide any answer, the remaining 5 definitions consisted of a blend of rights-based concepts (“equal opportunities, the right of all children for education”) and functional elements (“the provision of differentiated instruction, curriculum modifications”).The same pattern and contents of definitions were provided by all 5 speech-therapists. In sum, the right of all children for education was emphasized in 11 out of the 17 total definitions of IE (64.7%) provided by all paraprofessionals of the sample.

Four out of the 17 paraprofessionals (23.5%) believed IE was “completely feasible and generalizable”. While slightly more than half of the paraprofessionals (53%) believed IE was “feasible and generalizable”, 4 out of 17 paraprofessionals (23.5%) believed IE was “moderately” to “poorly feasible and generalizable” (see Figure 6).

4. RESULTS

Is IE feasible and generalizable?

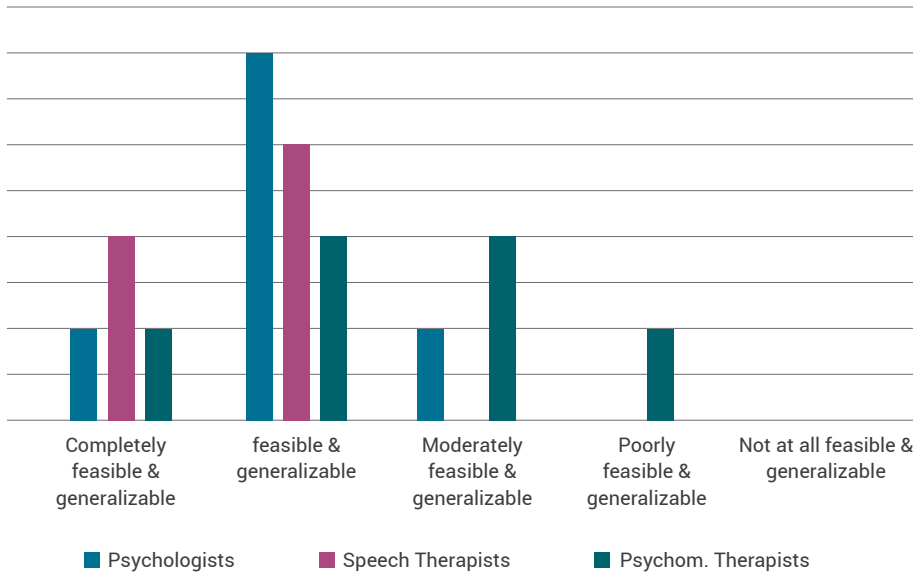


Figure 6 Paraprofessionals' responses to the question whether they believed IE was feasible and generalizable, per paraprofessional category.

Comparing data from paraprofessionals to the overall data from all other categories of participants to the same question (see Figure 7), it is interesting to note that the school principals showed the highest ratings ("extremely feasible and generalizable") and in a relatively consistent pattern across all 6 schools, while all other categories of respondents, including the paraprofessionals, gave a variety of responses, the lowest rating of which was given by psychomotor specialists ("poorly feasible and generalizable").

Is IE feasible and generalizable?

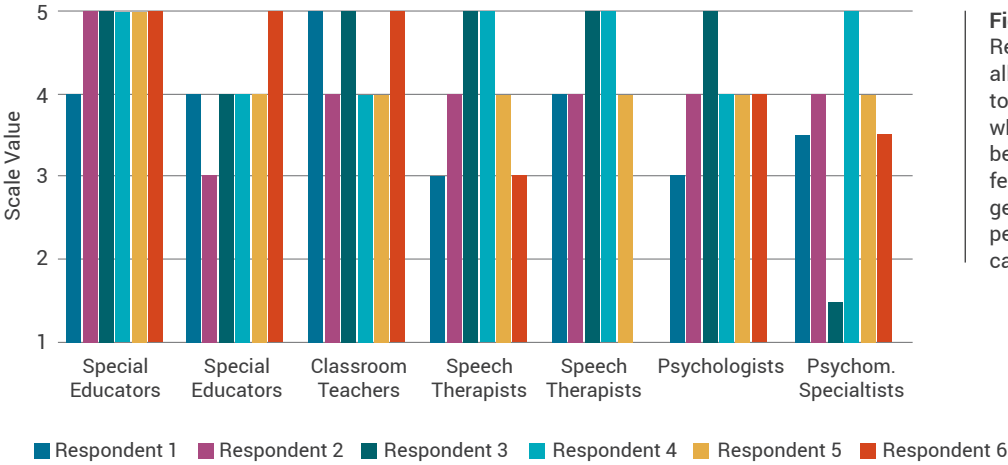


Figure 7 Responses from all respondents to the question whether they believed IE was feasible and generalizable, per respondent category.

Respondent 1 refers to Zouk school; Respondent 2 refers to Beirut school; Respondent 3 refers to Tripoli school; Respondent 4 refers to Saida school; Respondent 5 refers to Aley school; Respondent 6 refers to Zahleh school.

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In response to the question whether they perceive some types of disabilities to be more difficult to target than others in IE, all 17 paraprofessionals answered "yes", and the listed types of disabilities were common across all 3 categories of paraprofessionals, and across all 6 schools. In this regard, paraprofessionals' responses did not vary much from the responses of other school stakeholders, namely school principals and SEN coaches (see Table 21).

In an inclusive school culture, everyone, from the school principal down to the learners, should be made to feel that they have a significant role to play in fostering an inclusive vision and implementing it. At the personal level, this fosters a sense of commitment and engagement in the IE process. When they perceive their role as unimportant or of little importance, this would imply a certain degree of detachment and demotivation which would in turn affect the quality of their services as well as the outcomes of the process. On a scale from 1 ("not important at all") to 5 ("extremely important"), 4 out of the 5 speech therapists rated their role in the Pilot IE Project as 5 while the remaining one rated it as "important". Four out of the 6 psychologists rated it as 5, one as 4 and the remaining one as 3. Four out of the 6 psychomotor specialists rated it as 5, and the remaining two as 3.5 (see Figure 8).

Paraprofessionals' perceptions of the importance of their role in IE

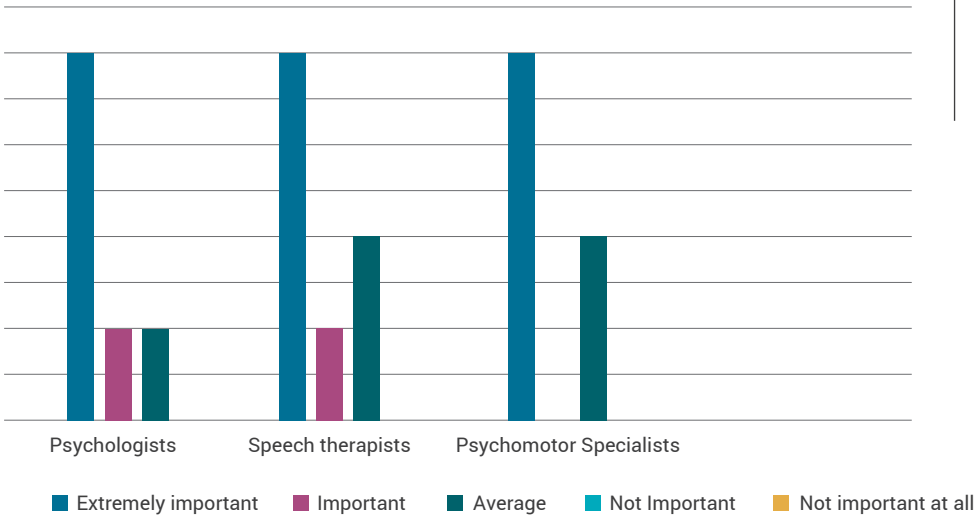


Figure 8 Paraprofessionals' perceptions of the importance of their role in IE

Related to the perception of the importance of their role is their perception of the learners' progress. Learners' progress is thus a concrete outcome of their contribution to the IE process. Asked to rate the average learners' progress specifically with respect to their specialized intervention on a scale from 1 ("below expectations") to 5 ("above expectations"), all 5 speech therapists gave a rating of 3, 5 out of 6 psychologists gave a rating of 3 while only 1 gave a rating of 4, and 5 out of 6 psychomotor specialists gave a rating between 3 and 3.5 while only one gave a rating of 5 (see Figure 9).

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Paraprofessionals' average estimation of learners' progress as per type of intervention

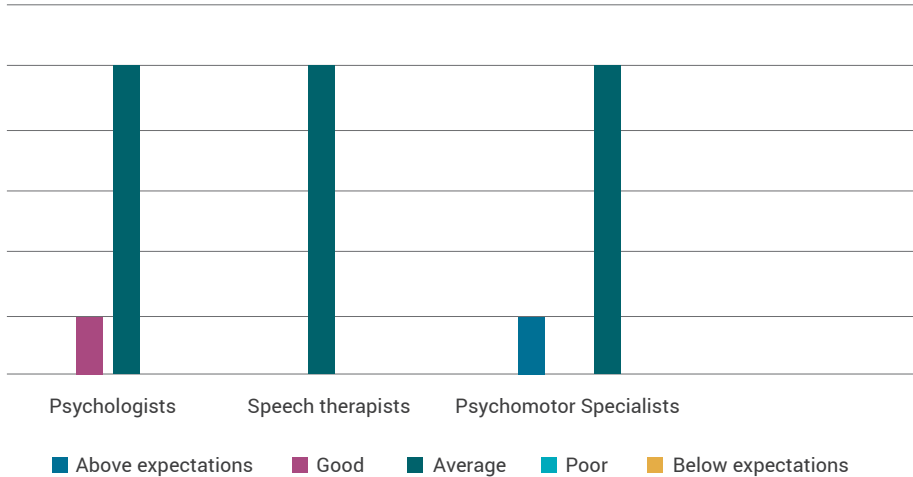


Figure 9 Paraprofessionals' average estimation of learners' progress as per type of intervention

Comparing the ratings between Figure 8 and Figure 9 reveals a discrepancy between the paraprofessionals' perceptions of the importance of their role and their estimation of the learners' progress as a function of their interventions: While the majority of paraprofessionals (12 out of 17) perceived their role in IE as "extremely important", the majority of paraprofessionals (15 out of 17) gave an "average" estimate for learners' progress as a function of their specialized interventions. Such "average" estimates of perceived learners' improvement may be due to many factors, perhaps the most important of which is the insufficient number of intervention sessions that learners benefit from, or the very high interventionist/learner ratio (see Table 26).



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Table 26 Number of learners with LD being served by different interventionists across all 6 schools

School	Number of learners with LD enrolled	Interventionist	Number of learners with LD served
Beirut	70	Special Educator	62
		Psychologist	26
		Psychomotor specialist	---
		Speech Therapist	50
Tripoli	86	Special Educator	73
		Psychologist	48
		Psychomotor specialist	87
		Speech Therapist	44
Zahleh	50	Special Educator	25
		Psychologist	25
		Psychomotor specialist	25
		Speech Therapist	---
Zouk	26	Special Educator	26
		Psychologist	26
		Psychomotor specialist	26
		Speech Therapist	26
Saida	41	Special Educator	41
		Psychologist	30
		Psychomotor specialist	8
		Speech Therapist	48
Aley	50	Special Educator	38
		Psychologist	21
		Psychomotor specialist	38
		Speech Therapist	26

Other factors also include the degree of cooperation between all service providers toward inclusive goals. In an inclusive school culture, lines of communication between different stakeholders should be open and functional. In this context, assessment of the paraprofessionals' satisfaction with the quality of communication with special educators differed from their assessment of satisfaction with the quality of communication with class teachers (compare Figures 10 and 11).



4. RESULTS

Perceived Paraprofessionals’ Satisfaction with Communication Quality with Special Educators

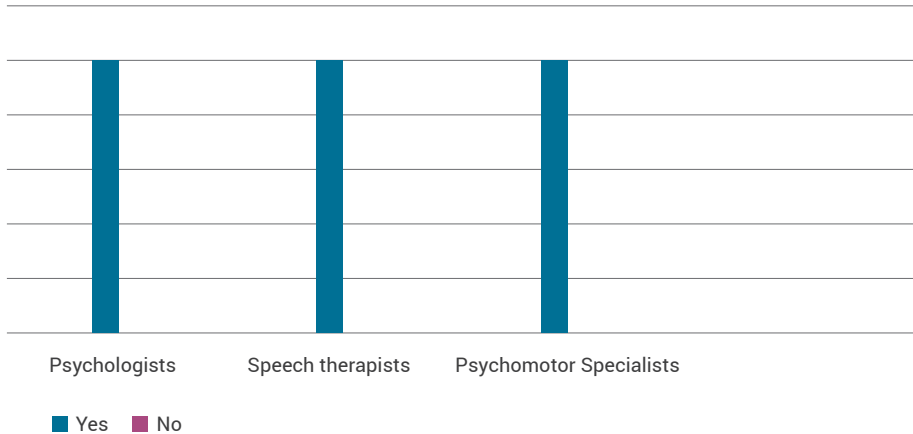


Figure 10 Paraprofessionals’ perceived satisfaction with the quality of communication with Special Educators

Perceived Paraprofessionals’ Satisfaction with communication Quality with Classroom Teachers

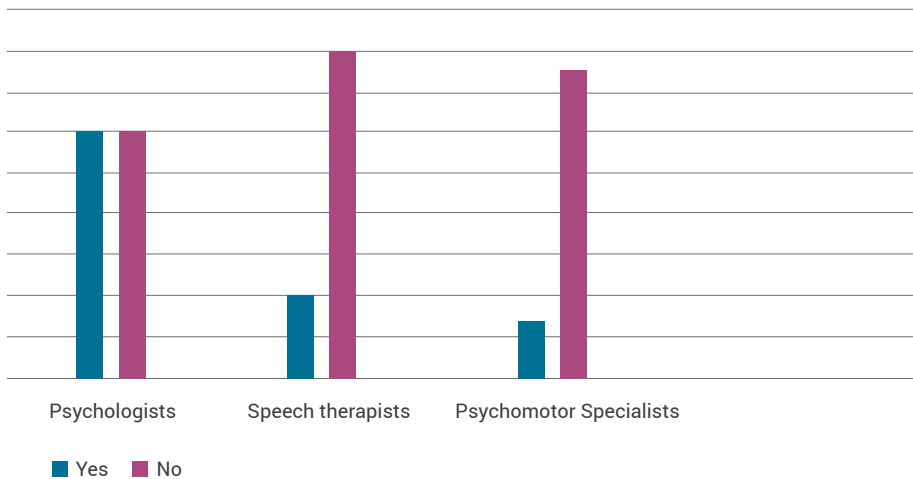


Figure 11 Paraprofessionals’ perceived satisfaction with the quality of communication with Classroom Teachers

Asked to give reasons why communication with classroom teachers seems to be less functional than with special educators, 8 out of the 17 paraprofessionals mentioned that this was due to a “difference in vision related to IE”, 6 out of 17 professionals mentioned that this was due to the classroom teacher perceiving the paraprofessionals’ intervention as “interference in their work”, and 2 out of 17 paraprofessionals mentioned that “classroom teachers refuse to prepare additional work for learners with difficulties” and “ classroom teachers consider they know the learner best”, respectively.

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Inclusive policies:

Good inclusive school policies include parental involvement in the IE process, especially at the preliminary stage when learners are being assessed in order to prepare their IEPs. Fourteen out of 17 paraprofessionals included parents as key members of the team in charge of preparing the learners’ IEP.

Good inclusive school policies stress an efficient coordination mechanism within the school. The questionnaire included a series of “coordination questions” as follows: (1) assessment of inter-paraprofessional coordination during evaluation meetings, (2) assessment of inter-paraprofessional coordination at the daily operations level, (3) assessment of coordination between paraprofessionals and special educators, and (4) assessment of coordination between paraprofessionals and classroom teachers. All questions used a scale from 1 (“minimal”) to 5 (“excellent”). Results are reported in Table 27.

Table 27 Paraprofessionals’ (N=17) assessment of their satisfaction level in four coordination contexts

	Coordination Contexts	Paraprofessional	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Minimal
1.	Inter-paraprofessional coordination during evaluation meetings	Psychologists	4	2	-	-	-
		Speech Therapists*	5	-	-	-	-
		Psychomotor specialists	4	2	-	-	-
2.	Inter-paraprofessional coordination at daily operations level	Psychologists	2	3	1	-	-
		Speech Therapists*	4	1	-	-	-
		Psychomotor specialists	2	4	-	-	-
3.	Coordination between paraprofessionals and special educators	Psychologists	3	3	-	-	-
		Speech Therapists*	4	1	-	-	-
		Psychomotor specialists	4	2	-	-	-
4.	Coordination between paraprofessionals and classroom teachers	Psychologists	1	1	4	-	-
		Speech Therapists*	1	1	3	-	-
		Psychomotor specialists	1	1	3	1	-

*N=5

Based on the above, there seems to be an overall satisfaction with the quality of coordination across all contexts except the 4th (communication with teachers).

Another important element of an inclusive school policy is the level of involvement and participation of paraprofessionals in the preliminary assessment phase of the learners with LD, alongside all other team members. Asked about this matter, 5 out of 6 psychologists, 3 out of 5 speech therapists and 5 out of 6 psychomotor specialists answered they do participate, and when asked to provide examples about such a participation, responses were very similar across all paraprofessionals, thus indicating a good amount of inter-team coordination.

The questionnaire sought to inquire more into the paraprofessionals’ perception of how essential they feel their role is in (1) the preparation of the IEP for learners with LD, and (2) in the process of evaluating the learners’ progress throughout the year. Both perceptions are important to draw an idea about how the inclusive school policy is implemented with respect to its emphasis on team work. All paraprofessionals said they do consider themselves as essential team members in (1), with the exception of 1 psychologist and 1 psychomotor specialist, and all paraprofessionals (with one non-respondent) considered themselves

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as essential team members in (2). Such a finding indicates a good implementation of inclusive policy with regard to team work.

A good inclusive school policy is associated with the development of a well-informed, well-trained and well-supported human resource cadre for the delivery of quality IE services. Paraprofessionals are a crucial element of this cadre. It was therefore important to assess their perceptions of the kind of support and training they have received for the implementation of IE. As for types of received support, all paraprofessionals listed tools and materials (testing instruments, educational kits), and training (training on test administration, on online interventions, on classroom management, on the implementation of MTSS). Once the support was identified, it was equally important to assess paraprofessionals' views on how necessary this support (materials and training) was to them at a personal level (personal growth) and at the school level. Responses are summarized in Table 28.

Table 28
Paraprofessionals' perceptions of how necessary received support was for their personal growth and for successful school outcomes

How necessary received support was		Extremely necessary	Very necessary	Average	Somewhat necessary	Minimally necessary
For personal growth	Psychologists	-	3	2	1	-
	Speech Therapists (N=5)	-	3	0	2	-
	Psychomotor specialists	1	1	2	2	-
For successful school outcomes	Psychologists	-	3	1	2	-
	Speech Therapists*	-	2	1	2	-
	Psychomotor specialists	1	1	2	2	-

An additional question asked paraprofessionals to describe the received training as a function of seven provided options (including "other"). Response rate of all paraprofessionals is summarized in Table 29.

Table 29
Response rate of paraprofessionals (N=17) to descriptions of received training

Description of received training(questionnaire-given options)	Psychologists	Speech Therapist	Psychomotor Specialist
I think the training I received was important and sufficient	2	-	2
I think I need continuous training	4	4	3
I think the training I received was very basic	1	-	-
I think the training I received was too theoretical	3	1	2
I think the training I received was not adapted to the local culture	1	-	-
I think the training I received was too general	2	1	3

Three paraprofessionals from the same school added an "other" description as follows: "The training was not appropriate because it was based on university training and added nothing to practical work in the schools". Since only 4 out of 17 paraprofessionals perceived the received training as important and sufficient, and 11 out of 17 paraprofessionals indicated the need for further training, there seems to be a need to revise the present training policy in inclusive schools to better address the paraprofessionals' concerns.

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Inclusive Practices:

Good inclusive practices at the paraprofessionals' level require the application of a progress monitoring mechanism, such as the establishment of a fixed schedule of meetings where learners' progress is systematically evaluated in order to plan for further steps. Data from the present study seem to imply that such a practice differs across different schools and across different paraprofessionals. Thus, for example, when asked who attends such meetings, 3 out of 6 psychologists mentioned the parents in addition to the multidisciplinary team, the special educator and the classroom teacher. In other cases, special educators and classroom teachers were excluded. Still in other cases, the school principal was included. For all speech therapists, parents were included in such meetings, but classroom teachers were excluded. In some cases, school principals were included, and in other cases they were excluded. For some psychomotor specialists, such meetings were restricted to the paraprofessionals, with parents "sometimes attending", while for others, school principals and special educators were included, in addition to the classroom teachers, and in one case, the learners themselves were included. Interestingly enough, in none of the paraprofessionals' responses was there any mention to the SEN coaches attending such meetings.

In relation to the above question, it was important to assess the frequency of such meetings. Paraprofessionals' responses to this question were very confusing, as can be seen in Table 30.

Table 30
Paraprofessionals' responses to the question on frequency of learners' progress evaluation meetings

Paraprofessionals	Psychologists
Psychologists	End of each term – Twice or 3 times during each year – Once - Weekly
Speech Therapists	Once a year – Weekly – Twice a year
Psychomotor specialists	At the end of each term – Once a year – Twice a year – Every 6 months - Periodically

Hence, it is clear that there is no standardized practice across all schools for such meetings. Moreover, the different responses noted among paraprofessionals within the same specialization seem to imply that the practice is not well implemented (poor monitoring, poor supervision).

Good inclusive practice requires equipping the service providers with the appropriate, necessary and quality material to carry out their job effectively. Asked about their satisfaction with the materials provided to them by MEHE, paraprofessionals' responses were as follows:

Table 31
Paraprofessionals' satisfaction with material provided by MEHE per school

Paraprofessionals	Satisfied						Not satisfied					
	B	T	S	A	Z1	Z2	B	T	S	A	Z1	Z2
Psychologists	x				x			x	x	x		x
Speech Therapists	x		x	x	x			x				
Psychomotor specialists	x	x	x	x	x	x						

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It thus appears that the majority of paraprofessionals are satisfied with the material provided by MEHE. As for those participants who were not satisfied, when asked to give a reason for their dissatisfaction, they said it was “not enough” and “they should be improved”. The same participants further elaborated on this matter in the questionnaire section dedicated for recommendations; they called for more specialized and standardized screening and testing instruments, for computers to digitalize information, and for more educational and intervention material.

Finally, good inclusive practice requires the provision of the right learning and intervention environment. Paraprofessionals in 2 out of the 6 schools called for the provision of special rooms for intervention services, such as “a room far from the noise, soundproof and well ventilated”.

4.2. Data from Focus Group Meetings

Six focus group meetings were held in the present case study. The first 4 consisted of meetings with parents and learners, and the last 2 consisted of meetings with NGOs who have been involved in the Pilot IE Project with MEHE.

4.2.1. Focus Group Meetings with Parents

The idea behind holding focus groups with parents is based on the literature on parents’ perceptions of inclusive education. Garrick Duhaney and Salend (2000) see that because parents are directly impacted by inclusion programs for their children, their perceptions are critical in ascertaining the social validity of inclusive education and the effectiveness of the school’s inclusive practices and policies. In their systematic review of several studies of how parents of learners with and without disabilities view inclusive education, they conclude that:

- Parents of learners without disabilities have varied but generally positive perceptions of inclusion: Mentioned benefits include enhancement in pro-social behavior, greater acceptance of human diversity, decreased prejudices and stereotypes about disability, and more friendships with classmates with disabilities. However, some parents did express concerns about (a) the instructional effectiveness of IE for their children (are all learners receiving enough help?), (b) the emulation of inappropriate behaviors of learners with disabilities, and (c) the qualifications/training of teachers dealing with learners with disabilities.
- Parents of learners with disabilities identified several benefits of IE on their children, such as fostering their acceptance and their social skills, preparing them for the real world, and providing them with a creative environment. However, there was a common trend among these parents to favor the specialized interventions their children were receiving in the resource rooms over their full integration into the general classroom, where they were concerned that their children would be deprived from individualized instructional and supportive services. Some parents also expressed concerns about their children being mistreated or isolated by peers without disabilities.

Because parents can probably see the effects of inclusive education more holistically than anybody else (paraprofessionals are mainly focused on their intervention effects, and teachers are mainly focused on their teaching effects), it is therefore important to take parental appraisal into consideration in evaluating any inclusive educational program (Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013).

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Western research on parental attitudes towards IE has confirmed that most parents of learners with and without disabilities hold positive perceptions towards inclusion, with surveyed parents of learners without disabilities frequently mentioning the social benefits that IE provides for all learners. However, Stevens and Wurf (2020) note that while quantitative research into parents’ perceptions continues to show strong support for IE, qualitative research sheds light on some significant concerns about classroom practices in inclusive education. Qualitative analysis of parental opinions reveals beliefs that schools lack the qualified expertise and necessary commitment that are necessary for successful inclusive education. Such analysis also reveals that negative parental attitudes toward inclusive education affect the way their children perceive and interact with their peers with disabilities.

Based on the above, it was decided to hold focus group meetings with parents rather than ask them to fill out questionnaires about their perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusive education project in the schools where their children were enrolled. The focus group meetings were all online, due to the COVID 19 constraints. Parents of learners without disabilities were met in one group, and parents of learners with disabilities were met in a second group in the company of their children. This second formula was adopted in compliance with the parents’ request as they explained that it would be very difficult and not convenient to organize such an online meeting with their children without any adult assistance.

Each focus group lasted approximately one hour. Each group consisted of 6 parents, was facilitated by 2 consultants, audio-recorded, and transcribed. A thematic analysis was then conducted whereby themes were identified by analyzing instances of repetition and the similarities/differences in the responses of the participants. A summary of the thematic analysis of both groups is presented below:

Group 1: Parents of learners without disabilities

In line with previous research, the overall impression is that all participating parents shared a generally positive view regarding inclusive education. Results of the analysis of parents’ comments and responses to some of the questions align with previous findings in the literature (strong parental support for inclusive education). All participating parents perceived inclusive education as having multiple, beneficial effects and they all agreed that it was a right of children with disabilities to be educated in mainstream schools. All participating parents said that inclusive education was better than the provision of special education in segregated schools or centers because the learner with disability is more motivated in the presence of peers without disabilities. One parent even insisted that “inclusion is a must”, and another parent said that “*inclusive education should be applied in all the schools of the city*”.

One parent elaborated on the benefits of inclusive education by saying that her daughter “*has now generalized her feelings of care and empathy to the neighborhood children with disabilities*”.

Some parents commented on the fact that the school closure imposed by COVID 19 has prevented their children from mingling more effectively with their peers with learning difficulties. One parent even suggested to “*organize real contact activities that would bring the children together, so they can get to know each other better*”.

When asked about any fears or worries that they may have had when they found out that the school was going to be a part of the IE project, only 1 parent admitted that she was suspicious at the beginning, and that she had doubts about how such a “difficult” project can be realized, but that she was later persuaded

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that “it is not wrong at all to include children with disabilities”. She was not very sure, however, how would inclusive education work online. Other parents said that they had been “well prepared to the idea of inclusive education accept the idea through conferences and workshops held at the school”, and that such a measure was “very helpful in fostering more acceptance of IE among the parents”. All participating parents agreed that the school should organize more meetings between parents of learners with and without disabilities, and “involve all parents in common activities so they can get to know each other better”; in this context, one parent expressed herself using a sympathy-based language (using the word “haram”) to explain that “these parents need all our support”. The term “support-group” was repeated on several occasions, but it was not very clear what it meant for all parents: Some mentioned it in the context of offering support to the parents of learners with LD, while others seemed to use it in the context of “support for the parents of learners without LD in order to remove their worries and fears”. When asked to elaborate more on the “fears” and “worries”, parents gave elusive answers and shifted the discussion to another level.

When asked whether the experience of IE has been difficult on their own children, all parents gave evasive replies by focusing their answers on “how important it is for parents to prepare their children at home”. They all talked about this “home preparation”, mainly consisting of giving instructions to their child “to be nice and helpful to these children”. One parent, however, said that there were no difficulties at all because her child had already been in frequent contact with people with disabilities within their family, and that “this was not a surprise for him”. This respondent’s comment is in line with the research on contact theory where substantial research has confirmed the positive effect of prior contact with minority groups on reducing prejudices and stereotypes about these groups (McManus, Feyes, & Saucier, 2011; Scior, 2011).

Interestingly enough, while previous research indicates that parents’ attitudes toward IE vary as a function of the type and degree of disability (for example, parents would be more acceptant of the inclusion of children with moderate to mild disabilities than of children with severe disabilities or behavior disorders) (Paseka & Schwab, 2020), none of the parents in the present study mentioned anything about types or degrees of disabilities in their comments and reflections.

Group 2: Parents of learners with disabilities

Western research, using focus groups as research method, on attitudes and perceptions of parents of learners with disabilities toward IE reveals the gap between the ideals of inclusive education and school practices. Such research has for example highlighted parents’ frustrations resulting from discriminatory practices in inclusive schools, and the need for more coordinated and more consistent instructional services for learners with disabilities (Stevens & Wurf, 2020).

The focus group that was held in the present case-study did not reveal any of the themes brought forth in previous research. Instead, all the participating parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the services provided by the schools: “We are very happy that our child goes to this school”, “The school respects the right of every child for good education”, “The school administration is very caring and attentive to our requests”, “Everything is good; our child is very happy there”. Some parents mentioned that their “child was first enrolled in a specialized center for children with disabilities but he was not happy there”. All participating parents seemed extremely relieved that the public school is catering for their children’s needs for free and they all praised the administration and the teachers.

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When asked whether their children experienced any difficulties when they were first included in the classrooms, they all praised the cordial school atmosphere and the acceptant behavior of the learners: “They all like him, they try to help him”. One parent though mentioned that “at the beginning, the students were surprised, and he was a little scared, but later they accepted him.” The notion of “help” was a recurrent theme throughout the meeting, where there was more emphasis on helping rather than interacting. This theme is further elaborated below in the section on learners without disabilities.

Asked about what kind of services their children are receiving at school, all participating parents listed in detail the types of services and activities. All participating parents seemed to be very aware of their children’s condition and needs.

Asked about the level of collaboration and coordination with the school, terms such as “great coordination” and “continuous collaboration” were recurrent throughout the meeting, even when it was not the subject of discussion. Asked about the quality of collaboration that has been going on since school closure, one parent said “they call and ask about us”. No further comments were given to this question.

As the meeting further proceeded and the subject shifted to online teaching, parents’ views started showing a different pattern: The socio-economic differences between the participating parents were clear, and it was evident that greater parental satisfaction with the online services was associated with the availability of technological resources and facilities to their child. In this context, it was noted that one of the learners has not benefited from any online intervention for the past 4 months while another parent mentioned that they do not have access to the Internet. In general, all parents called for the “return to school” because they felt the negative impact of online teaching on their children’s condition. A recurrent theme was: “Physical attendance is very important”.

4.2.2. Focus Group Meetings with Learners

Because learners, like their teachers, are the primary stakeholders in inclusive schools, it is important to listen to their views on inclusive education. Usually, any school reform model rests on adult perspectives. In inclusive education, where learners are led to feel and experience inclusive classroom culture, policies and practices on a day-to-day basis, their perspectives can contribute to improve the educational practice (Bates et al., 2014; Shogren et al., 2015).

The present case-study is based on models used in previous research using focus groups with learners in inclusive schools. However, previous models merge learners with and without disabilities together in a single focus group. This was not appropriate in the present study due to the fact that the sessions were to be held online, in light of the lockdown measures imposed by COVID 19.

Learners have been selected by their teachers and school principals from the 6 schools after securing parental consent to participate. For learners with disabilities, the following types of difficulties/disabilities were included: mild intellectual disability, motor disability, speech disability, learning disability and behavioral disorder.

Each focus group lasted approximately one hour. The first group consisted of 6 learners without disabilities, while the second group consisted of 7 learners with disabilities (including 2 siblings) alongside their respective

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mothers. All learners belonged to the same age group, namely 8 to 10 years old. Both groups consisted of both boys and girls. Both groups were facilitated by 2 consultants, audio-recorded, and transcribed. A thematic analysis was then conducted whereby themes were identified by analyzing instances of repetition and the similarities/differences in the responses of the participants. A summary of the thematic analysis of both groups is presented below.

Group 1: Learners without learning difficulties

The literature is clear in saying that inclusive education fosters tolerance and acceptance of difference in learners without disabilities (Loreman et al., 2008). This was very evident throughout the focus group session. All six learners were very engaged in the session and seemed to be impatient to voice their ideas and comments. They all showed great empathy toward their peers with learning difficulties, and as in Shogren et al.'s study (2015), most of them appeared to view "help" as a critical element of inclusion, and there was less discussion of any reciprocal relationship with learners with disabilities, and more discussion of helping and, to a certain extent, patronizing: "if they need help, of course I will help". It was evident that most of the learners perceive their role as a facilitator of help and support. Since "help" was a recurrent theme, we wanted to inquire more into it and asked the learners what they mean by help. One learner replied: "if he is hungry, I give him my sandwich, or I can give him money". That same learner seemed to associate disability with poverty as this was expressed more than once and in different contexts.

When asked about the meaning of disabilities, all learners with the exception of one, gave terms related to illness, or "they have something missing", or "they don't understand", or "his legs are cut".

Asked whether they would invite these peers to their homes to play or for a birthday party, they all enthusiastically said yes. When asked "what kind of games will you play with X if X is on a wheelchair", one learner genuinely offered creative alternatives to fit X's condition: "We can play video games".

Asked about any problems they may have with peers with disabilities, one learner kept repeating: "There is nothing wrong with them, there is nothing wrong with them". However, that same learner later added that "sometimes they lose their temper", and then added: "it's because they are ill".

We wanted to explore the learners' understanding of the functional aspect of IE, so we asked them a question about the "pull-out" procedure: "Sometimes, these students leave the classroom and go with another teacher. Where do you think they go?" One learner automatically replied: "to the hospital", while most of the others were aware of the existence of a "resource room" in the school. Asked if they have ever visited that resource room, only 2 learners said they did, "because the teacher took us there for a visit", and they said that they liked that room because "it contained a lot of toys and pictures". Asked if they would like to spend some time in the resource room, like their peers with disabilities, most of the learners saw no objection to it. They called it "the room of help"¹³ – most likely, that was the terminology used by their teachers. Unlike the students in the Shogren et al.'s study (2015) who seemed to object to the pull-out practice because they felt this limits friendship building between students, none of the learners in our case-study seemed to object to that practice. Such an attitude is expected given that the concept of inclusion that they seem to have constructed in their minds is clearly associated with the concept of help.

13. Term used by both learners and parents to refer to the "resource room" غرفة الموارد Or "support room" غرفة الدعم

4. RESULTS

Another interesting reply made by one of the learners to the question of "pull out" was that "the teacher takes him to the playground". Assuming that a peer is taken in the middle of a lesson to the playground has a lot of significance: This implies that the peer with disabilities does not belong to the class, is not a member of the class, since he/she is pulled out to go out and play while all the others are working and studying. Thus, full classroom membership is not assigned to that peer. In other words, he/she is different from "us". This is an area that deserves to be further looked into. As expressed in the Needs Assessment Report presented by the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD, 2020), one of the most important determinants of the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools relies on the level of knowledge possessed by peers and adults about disabilities; in this context, teachers play a crucial role in providing knowledge about disabilities to students. What knowledge is conveyed and how that knowledge is conveyed are among the most important elements of the kind of training teachers need to have prior to any inclusive education initiative.

Group 2: Learners with learning difficulties

This focus group consisted of both the learners and their mothers. This formula proved to pose a serious limitation as most of the questions addressed to the learners were immediately answered by their mothers, so there was no substantial data related to the learners' perceptions to analyze. In sum, the learners seemed to be more excited about participating in this online meeting experience, than about answering our questions. The few comments that transpired from this session are: "I am very happy to go to that school", "I have many friends and they all love me", "They help me if I am in trouble", "I play with them in recess", and "I want to go back to school". The session was often interrupted by technical accidents (cameras and microphones being turned off and on alternately, electricity power cuts, etc.) and this resulted in a chaotic session where only the mothers' comments were heard (see section above on Parents of Learners with Disabilities).

4.2.3. Focus Group Meetings with Non-Governmental Organizations

The purpose of these meetings was to gather information on the degree to which cooperation and collaboration were ensured between the public sector (MEHE) and the non-governmental sector, namely the different NGOs working in the field of disability, in the IE Pilot Project. Six organizations participated in 2 focus groups (see Table 32).

Table 32
List of NGOs participating in two focus groups

Non-Governmental Organization	Abbreviation	Focus Group	Brief Description*
Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities	LUPD	1	Advocacy, relief work, social inclusion
Friends of the Disabled Association	FDA	1	Advocacy, service provision to people with disabilities
Lebanese Association for Self-Advocacy	LASA	1	Advocacy
Youth Association for the Blind	YAB	2	Advocacy, relief work, social inclusion and inclusive education
First Step Together Association (North Lebanon)	FISTA	2	Specialized disability organization for children with disability
National Rehabilitation and Development Center	NRDC	2	Specialized disability organization for children with disability

4. RESULTS

LUPD who has had intensive experience in IE in a number of public schools in cooperation with MEHE, expressed the fact that in spite of the accomplished objectives (training school principals and teachers on the concept of inclusive education, providing school personnel with awareness workshops and consultation sessions, etc.), the road is still long, arduous and thorny before full inclusion of people with disabilities can be achieved. LUPD emphasized the role of school leadership in the implementation of IE, for if school principals do not have a clear vision of what IE is, this has negative repercussions on school functioning, on parents' and on teachers' attitudes toward IE.

LASA insisted that the prerequisite for the implementation of IE in public schools was to work on attitudes: Attitudes stem from the community, and the community is stigma-ridden against disability. Hence, the right way for MEHE to proceed is to focus first on elaborating an inclusive culture at the community level since school principals, parents and teachers are all members of the community. Implementing a rigorous inclusive legislation is the second step, and ensuring the right monitoring mechanism for legislation implementation. The third step, according to LASA, is systemic, and this is where schools can start modifying their curricula, their teaching methodologies, etc.

FDA, LUPD and LASA all agreed that for the IE Pilot Project to succeed, MEHE should collaborate more with NGOs who can offer their expertise and their consultation in matters related to advocacy and community awareness.

NGO Focus Group 2

Similarly to the point made by LUPD, YAB who had already collaborated with MEHE over the last few years by organizing training workshops for public school staff as well as SEN coaches insisted that the key player in inclusive school education is the school principal, and the success of IE in any school depends on the appropriate selection of the school principal according to some criteria, the most important of which is acceptance of the concept of inclusion.

FISTA, who had participated in the training of public school teachers, emphasized the importance of teacher training on the principles of school inclusion.

NRDC suggested that maybe a partial inclusion plan could be considered in the first phase, where learners with disabilities may be included in arts, sports, and other recreational school activities, to be followed by a full inclusion strategy. Such a suggestion was not favored by the other two NGOs; for them, inclusion cannot be partialized, it is a human right and it has to be fully embraced.

Concluding remarks on the two focus groups

Driven by their belief in inclusive education, and by their history of several decades of advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities, these NGOs willingly participated in the focus groups to voice their relentless support for MEHE's efforts in the implementation of inclusive education in the public sector, a dream come true for many....

If MEHE's plan is to scale up the present project and extend it to another new 30 public schools, it is therefore imperative that it listens to suggestions and recommendations of NGOs and reaches out for their proven expertise and consultation.

4. RESULTS

4.3. Observation of Online Teaching and Intervention

While it was agreed for the Consultants to observe real-time online classroom teaching and intervention sessions for the purpose of triangulation, only one real-time online intervention session was provided for observation, and no real-time nor pre-recorded online classroom teaching sessions we made available for us. The only real-time online session we were able to observe was an intervention session in speech-therapy, while the remaining two online intervention sessions were pre-recorded. In addition we were provided with four transcripts of observations completed by the Education Specialist and the Inclusive and Outreach Education Assistant at UNICEF of 4 different online intervention sessions.

Real-time online observation:

This was a session grouping 2 adults (one speech therapist and one special educator) and 3 female learners with reading difficulties of the same age-range (8 – 9 years). The session was in the Arabic language and its purpose was the deciphering of Arabic letters and the discrimination between different phonemes. The session also incorporated a video on a related subject. Both interventionists were very warm and affectionate, with several instances of TT1, TT2, TT3, TT4 and TT6 (see Table 14 for the coding system used for observations, based on FIACS). The learners used several ST1 with no instances of ST2 being noted. Throughout the session, there were no instances of S, except for the few times some of the learners got disconnected. In sum, it appeared as the learners had already mastered this task from previous sessions and this was more of a revision session; so there were a lot of repetitions over the same material while it was felt that the interventionists could have moved to a more advanced level or to a different context to make sure the skills were generalized. The coordination between the 2 interventionists was remarkable.

Pre-recorded online sessions:

These were also intervention sessions with different scenarios:

- One-on-one speech therapy session focusing on deglutition exercises with a male 8-year old learner with cerebral-palsy. The speech-therapist used several instances of TT1, TT2, TT3, TT4 and TT6 in her communication with the learner who seemed to be extremely excited about the lesson. Here too, it felt like the learner was already familiar with the contents of the lesson. In this session, the learner did show both ST1 and ST2, and there was not one single instance of S throughout the session.

- One joint speech-therapy and special education session with 3 learners (2 females and 1 male) with reading difficulties of the same age-range (8-9 years) focusing on a spelling lesson in French. Here too, it felt like the learners had already mastered the concepts being taught and one learner said that he learned it last year. Most of the session was conducted by the speech-therapist, while the special educator was mostly providing verbal praises to the learners. An excess of TT2 instances (praises) was noted even in the case where one of the learners made a mistake. In sum, the lesson was not very well-organized with an alternation between two different learning outcomes (semantic versus phonemic). The three learners were distracted, but nevertheless happy to be part of this experience.

The UNICEF team's observations on the online sessions revealed to a great extent the same impressions as the ones described above.

4. RESULTS

4.4. Data about Online Teaching and Intervention Services

Data collected from the questionnaire section on online teaching and intervention services revealed a lot of contradictions among participants' perceptions of the reality of online IE. First, data showed that a very low percentage of learners with LD had access to technical facilities and online services across all schools (Figure 12).

Technical facilities available to learners with LD?
34 responses

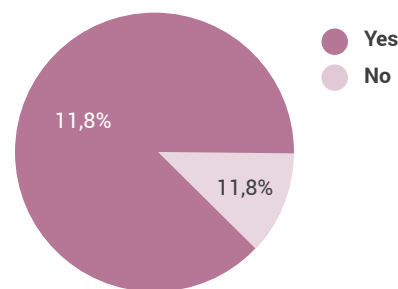


Figure 12
Learners with LD's access to technical facilities and online services, as perceived by all participants, except SEN coaches, across all schools.

However, figures differed when participants from all categories except SEN coaches were asked to provide an estimate of the percentage of learners with LD in their respective schools who have access to technical and online facilities (see Figure 13); for example, one notes the sharp contrast between these estimates ranging from 30% to 80% for the category of school principals across different schools.

% of learners with LD who have access to technical facilities

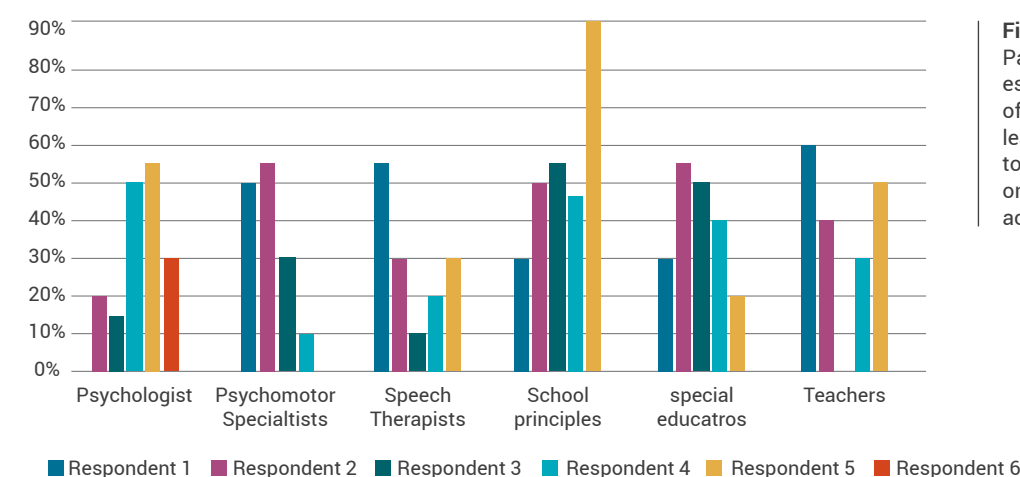


Figure 13
Participants' estimates of access of learners with LD to technical and online facilities across all schools

4. RESULTS

Interestingly, while 67% of all participants, except SEN coaches, said they were provided with technical and online facilities in their schools (see Figure 14), more than 70% of school principals, special educators and classroom teachers said learners with LD do not benefit from online teaching as learners without LD (see Figure 15), and 98% of paraprofessionals across all schools said that learners with LD do not benefit from online services as much as they benefit from regular intervention sessions (see Figure 16), although only 21% of all participants, except SEN coaches and school principals, said that they have difficulty delivering online teaching and intervention (see Figure 17).

Technical support available to you for doing your job?
40 responses

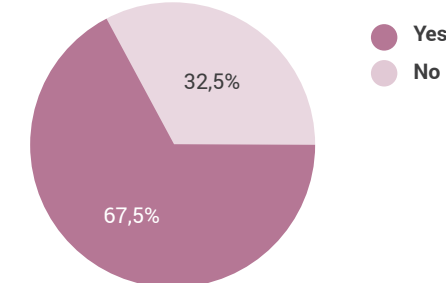


Figure 14
Percentage of availability of technical and online facilities for participants in all schools for all participants, except SEN coaches.

Do learners with LD benefit from online teaching as much as learners without LD??
17 responses

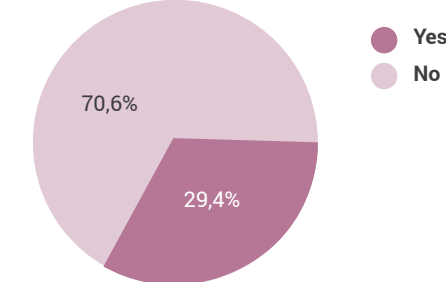


Figure 15
Percentage of learners with LD who do not benefit from technical and online facilities across all schools, compared to learners without LD, as per school principals', special educators' and classroom teachers' estimates.

Do learners with LD benefit from your online service as much as from regular services?
16 responses

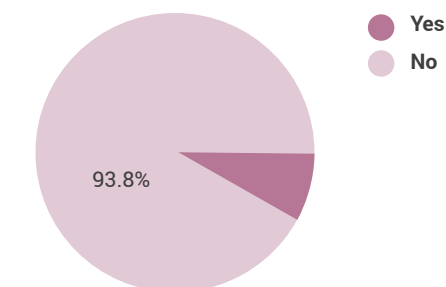


Figure 16
Percentage of paraprofessionals' responses as to whether learners with LD benefit from online services as much as they benefit from regular intervention sessions, across all schools.

Do you have any difficulty delivering your services online (teaching + interventions)?
28 responses

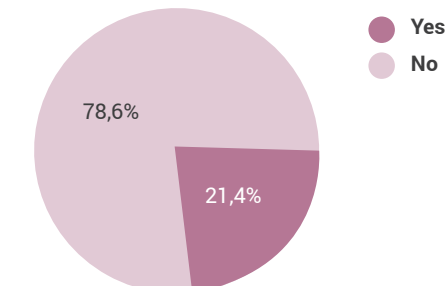


Figure 17
Percentage of perceived difficulty in delivering online teaching and intervention per all participants, except SEN coaches and school principals, across all schools.

4. RESULTS

During the focus group meeting with parents of learners with LD, it was revealed that one of the learners had been for four months without any intervention because of the lack of online facilities. On the other hand, data from the questionnaires reveal that 6 out of 6 school principals said that a plan was designed to ensure that online teaching and intervention were provided for learners with LD. In light of the above inconsistencies in figures between schools and contradictions of reporting, it may be concluded that in spite of the fact that there has been an emergency plan for ensuring distant teaching and distant intervention for learners with LD, there was no proper mechanism to implement this plan effectively, and this has drastically affected learners with LD as well as their parents.



5.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of the case-study's findings is organized according to seven rubrics which serve as recommendations for further improvements of the IE Pilot Project. These rubrics have transpired from the data (questionnaires, focus groups, online observations), and the desk review of the internal MEHE documentation regarding the IE Pilot Project (annual reports). The contents of each of the 7 rubrics reflect all three dimensions of our analysis: culture, policy and practice.

The present case study revealed many indices as to the extent to which MEHE is ready for a full-scale implementation of the IE project. As revealed by the data, the concept of an inclusive culture is well ingrained in the surveyed schools, including parents of learners with and without disabilities, given the systematic planning of MEHE and the determination of all stakeholders for making IE possible, in spite of all the challenges and difficulties that the country is going through.

Specific inclusive policies seem to be in place, accompanied with a fair application of inclusive practices. The six surveyed schools are representative of the 30 schools that have been included in the IE Pilot Project, and data from these 6 schools revealed several strengths to build on, as well as several opportunities to learn from if the project is to be scaled up to a higher level. The below recommendations highlight the areas that will need to be improved before MEHE decides to move to full-scale implementation.

The past three years have proven to be exceptionally difficult, with multiple strains on Lebanon as a country, let alone for the Lebanese educational system. The suggestion of scaling up the project to a new set of 30 schools in the next scholastic year (2021-2022) is a wise option to consider. Based on the data obtained from the present study, and on the following recommendations, it appears that Lebanon is ready to draw its road map toward the establishment of a national inclusive education policy to be implemented at the national level in all public schools in Lebanon.

Rubric 1: Definition of Inclusive Education

Recommendation 1: For consistency purposes, it is recommended that MEHE adopts the UNICEF definition of inclusive education (UNICEF, 2017a and UNICEF, 2017b) as a unified definition to be used among all stakeholders, including MEHE, schools, parents and learners with and without disabilities.

Such a definition is based on the CRPD Article 24 and the associated General Comment 4 which emphasizes that persons with disabilities, historically viewed as welfare recipients, are now recognized as right-holders, with a claim to the right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities (United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, General Comment No. 4)¹⁴.

The definition also emphasizes the active consultation with and involvement of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities and their families, through their representative organizations (OPDs), in all aspects of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education policies¹⁵.

14. "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 1, para 2).

15. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4, Introduction, para 7.

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 2: The definition of inclusive education should be reflected in all aspects of the life of the school (classroom teaching, students' relationships, parental involvement, etc.) and in the language and narrative used by all school stakeholders, including parents, when talking about IE.

Inclusion is an elusive concept, and for the last decades, multiple definitions of the term have been suggested¹⁶. With the exception of definitions provided by the paraprofessionals and the SEN coaches emphasizing the rights dimension, child-centered education and least restrictive environments, the present case-study revealed that a single acceptable definition of inclusion has not yet been fully articulated across all school stakeholders:

- The focus group discussion with learners without difficulties revealed that IE is associated with helping peers with difficulties, a vision that is embodied in their use of the expression "help-room" to refer to the resource room (or support room) for pull-out purposes¹⁷.
- For parents of learners with disabilities, IE seems to be defined more as a tool for service-provision where their child is perceived as a recipient of services from the school in an "accepting environment" than as a concept that fulfills a fundamental human right for their child.
- Parents of learners without disabilities did incorporate a human rights dimension to their perception of IE, with however a touch of "sympathy" and an insistence on the helping dimension ("we tell our children to be nice and helpful to these students").
- IE had different meanings for different school principals, ranging from "it is the opposite of segregation" to a traditional view of education where the emphasis is on the learner with difficulties adapting to the school environment instead of the school adapting to the learner.
- Classroom teachers provided different definitions of IE, most of them focusing on a service-provision approach, or a "giving a chance" approach.

Such a diversity in the definitions of IE across the different categories of school stakeholders urges for a more unified definition of IE. Because language matters, attention must be paid not just to the terms that we use to identify and describe "different others", but also to the effects these terms and expressions have on people who are perceived as "different". To this purpose, we recommended to design, develop and deliver, in partnership with persons with disabilities, awareness raising activities targeting all school staff so as to mainstream the concept of inclusive education, in addition to training workshops targeting teachers, parents and learners and embodying the following:

- Open discussion of disablism¹⁸
- Explaining the medical versus the social model of disability (practice avoiding the use of medical labels which promote the view of people with disabilities as patients, practice the use of person-first language¹⁹, and emphasize the discussion of external barriers rather than the individual's impairment, etc.) to help shift perceptions of disability toward an inclusive dimension.

16. Winter and O'Raw (2010) list at least ten different definitions of IE and note that such variations in definition and interpretation imply that the meaning of inclusion will take different forms depending on the context

17. See footnote 13 on page 72 of the present report

18. Disablism is a relatively new word defined as discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities whereby young people with disabilities report that the use of disablism language is widespread in schools and colleges and is rarely challenged. Disablism language has a negative impact on their self-esteem, and serves to further isolate them (Anti-Bullying Alliance, n.d., p. 5).

19. It is recommended to say a "person with epilepsy" not an "epileptic", a "person who has cerebral palsy", not a "spastic", or a "person with Down's syndrome", not a "Down's".

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Charity and disability²⁰.
- Discussion of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Hands-on activities, such as introducing equal-rights issues to the class by inviting an adult or youth with disability to talk to learners; including examples of people with disabilities in all areas of the school curriculum (arts, literature, math, science, history, etc.); using stories, songs, music, drama, role-play, and art to explore issues of difference; organizing "community trips" for students to map barriers for people with disabilities; assigning projects for students to come out with ideas on environmental adaptations; designing and making posters showing why access is good for everyone; practicing writing speeches of advocacy; etc²¹.

Rubric 2: Disability Terminology and Criteria

Recommendation 3: Lebanon needs a unified terminology and a CRPD-aligned classification system for disabilities to be used by the Ministry and in schools so as to ensure a shift from the medicalized approach toward a human rights based approach. In this context, it is recommended to adhere to the terminology and criteria used in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (WHO, 2001)²².

The ICF provides a clear framework for non-restrictive eligibility procedures to be used in the assessment and the design of services for learners with disabilities; it identifies the learner's "requirements" in terms of adaptation, special assistance, accommodation, support or environments that would maximize both the academic and social support for the learner, within the context of inclusive education. Further, the ICF identifies the extent to which any particular learner with disability may benefit from these supportive services²³.

Recommendation 4: Because the ICF is a multidimensional, functional and context-sensitive tool, adherence to the ICF is recommended to ensure that different data collection instruments and sources use the same concepts, criteria and frameworks, thus enabling the generation of a strong, integrated national data base for disability statistics in line with the principles of the CRPD.

20. In the context of intellectual disability (ID), Merhej (2020) explains that "in Lebanon, children, youth and adults with ID, as well as their families, are perceived with a sense of pity that leads to acts of benevolence, often translated in abundant material donations especially during religious occasions such as Christmas or the month of Ramadan. This charity-oriented attitude contributes to the persistence of the cultural stigma regarding intellectual disability; it relieves the feeling of guilt for not including people with ID in one's circle by reinforcing one's sense of self-satisfaction associated with one's generosity" (p. 4).

21. Readers are recommended to review the Anti-Bullying Alliance's Teacher's Guide (n.d.) for an extensive list of ideas of classroom activities

22. ICF is the WHO framework that was officially endorsed by all WHO Member States in 2001 as the international standard to describe and measure health and disability: International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (who.int)

23. A full description of ICF eligibility procedures is provided in Hollenweger, J. (2011), Development of an ICF-based eligibility procedure for education in Switzerland, BMC Public Health, 11(Suppl 4):S7. <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/11/S4/S7>

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rubric 3: Unifying, Sharing and Disseminating Data

Recommendation 5: Close collaboration between different organisms (MEHE, MoSA, CERD) which collect data on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in schools of Lebanon is recommended so as to establish a unified data bank on IE that may be shared by a wide range of concerned stakeholders (service providers in the public and private sectors, policy makers, donors, academicians, researchers, NGOs, etc.) for making informed policy choices and effective planning.

The desk review that was performed for this case study has allowed us to gather additional statistics on the schooling of learners with disabilities in Lebanon, both in the public and private sectors. Such a research has brought to the surface some noteworthy differences in listed disabilities (see Rubric 2, above) and in statistics pertaining to enrollment numbers, between two different data sources related to MEHE. It is strongly recommended to reflect on those reported differences coming from official sources, and to urge such sources for more convergence in the delivery of much needed data on disability for promoting any policy change to the benefit of the inclusive education project in the country. For future data collection efforts, it is therefore recommended to adopt a standardized and validated approach, such as the Child Functioning Module (CFM)²⁴, so that comparisons can be made longitudinally.

Rubric 4: Capacity Building

Recommendation 6: MEHE-DOPS in collaboration with CERD needs to further invest in teacher training on developing skills for teaching in inclusive environments, promoting tolerance and recognizing non-discrimination as a human right. As an example, Universal Design of Learning (UDL) is one of the modern approaches to learning that has proved high efficiency in the context of inclusive education. Since inclusive education involves varying degrees of change in teaching practice, it is important that training be accompanied with on-going support (through mentoring, coaching, etc.). UDL may also be applied at the level of pre-service training, ensuring that future teacher cohorts have the requisite skills.

In the MEHE-DOPS 2020-2021 Annual Report, information is provided as to the variety of support activities and techniques (videos, games, calls, Power Points,) that were introduced to a wide variety of learning profiles, not just the learners with disabilities. This is one example of merging Response to Intervention (RtI) and Universal Design of Learning (UDL) into Tier 1 teaching of the MTSS model, already used in the 30 public schools: UDL principles are about being proactive when designing learning goals, instructional materials, instructional methods, and assessments. Teachers can be trained to use multiple options for instruction (visual, auditory, vocabulary supports, graphic organizers, checklists, assistive technology, etc.), and to become savvy in the

24. The CFM tool, developed by the UNICEF/Washington Group on Disability Statistics, focuses on basic, everyday activities to assess functioning of a child. It covers several ICF domains including vision, hearing, mobility, self-care, communication, learning and memory, as well as social and psychological domains (Zia et al., 2020). For more information: <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wgunicef-child-functioning-module-cfm/>.

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

use of modern technology so they can meet the needs of the widest range of learners at the level of Tier 1. In sum, UDL, an instructional framework for teaching learners with and without disabilities, is a perfect tool for inclusive education.

The MEHE-DOPS 2020-2021 Annual Report dedicates a big section to the description of the procedural action plan that was developed by the SEN unit to support learners with disabilities and their parents during the period when teaching went completely online. Teachers were provided with online interactive teaching methods and material (Microsoft TEAMS and other types of télé-practice), especially at the level of Cycles 1 and 2. This is an excellent initiative that should not stop if teaching were to resume in classes starting the new scholastic year. In spite of the fact that infrastructural, connectivity, technological and often financial challenges obstructed the training process, several teachers are reported to have been able to create an accessible distant learning environment for their students. This is indeed a good training investment that should be further elaborated in the next months, in preparation of the new school year. In addition, MEHE is recommended to make use of UNICEF's recently launched Accessible Digital Learning Portal to support their online activities²⁵.

Recommendation 7: MEHE needs to consolidate in-service teacher training and coaching with a goal to systematize inclusive education. Teacher training must be on-going through the application of a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) model to ensure sustainability. Teachers should be made to feel that their training is part of a larger reform project directly linked to making their school more inclusive.

Recommendation 8: MEHE needs to establish agreements with Education and Special Education departments in local universities for providing teaching-assistants (TAs) for school teachers, as part of their degree requirements.

Recommendation 8 is based on the literature findings related to the role and impact of teacher assistants in inclusive education: Webster and De Boer (2019) say that positive learning outcomes have been observed in learners with difficulties (a) when provided with structured curriculum intervention by TAs, and (b) when teachers and TAs plan and work together effectively. However, they warn against the "unintended consequences" of the presence of TAs in mainstream settings, namely interaction reduction between learners with difficulties and teachers and peers, and the learner's dependence on adult support. An earlier study by Gerber et al. (2001) investigated the relationship between TAs and students' academic achievement, and revealed that TAs have little, if any, positive effect on students' academic achievement, and that the types of tasks TAs performed had no bearing on student achievement. Gerber et al. (2001) issued several recommendations to improve TAs' contributions in the classroom (p. 139), of which we retain the following: - Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of TAs (routine paperwork, lesson planning and preparation, routine student activity such as bus duty, lunch duty, etc., individualized instruction, small-group instruction, or whole-class instruction).

25. The Accessible Digital Learning Portal is a hub for technology focused information, content, tools, products and resources that support inclusive education in remote and classroom settings (Source: <https://accessibledigitallearning.org/about/>)

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identifying clear standards pertaining to the TA profile.
- Subjecting TAs to an institutionalized program of continuing professional development and training, with formal ongoing evaluation.
- Training class teachers and administrators to make best use of TAs' skills

Similarly, Butt and Lowe (2012) urge for a clarification of TAs' roles and responsibilities and emphasize the benefits of skills-based training for TAs in terms of increasing their confidence and self-esteem; however, they warn against falling into the "Training Trap" which occurs when class teachers relegate primary instruction tasks to minimally trained TAs (p. 215).

A systematic review by Sharma and Salend (2016) of the roles and impact of TAs gathered from 11 countries clearly shows that non-clarity of roles, poor collaboration with class teachers, and limited TA training inadvertently undermine the learning, socialization and independence of learners with disabilities. The authors call for a re-examination of the TA practices and policies in inclusive classrooms to make informed decisions about whether the use of TAs is a viable solution to support both learners and class teachers in the inclusive classroom (p. 126).

More recent studies show that TAs can be effectively deployed to complement the work of the class teacher. Johnson et al. (2019) stress the importance of TA training as they compared learners' outcomes for 2 different modes of TA intervention delivery (TAs trained on computer-aided instruction versus traditional instruction). Their findings show that training of TAs is an effective way to improve learners' outcomes, and that although both modes of delivery showed positive outcome effects, traditional instruction yielded a stronger and more enduring effect. They conclude by saying that TAs can be used to better effect within schools, and at a low cost (p. 21). Hemelt et al. (2021) believe that using TAs for preparing classroom activities, working on instruction with individuals and small groups, performing clerical tasks, managing student behavior, and helping to evaluate student work has the potential to free up time for class teachers to focus on their main task of teaching and to make it easier to differentiate instruction within classrooms (p. 283). The authors assert that, compared to past research which did not favor the deployment of TAs in schools, theirs as well as recent experimental evidence from Denmark confirm positive effects of TAs' presence in classrooms as "part of a professional team who share responsibility for a classroom rather than help with practical tasks" (p. 299).

Recommendation 9: MEHE needs to provide adequate staffing for schools with staff shortage. MEHE should ensure that the needed number of paraprofessionals and special educators for the inclusive schools (the available 30 schools and the additional 30 schools for the new academic year) are well trained and ready to assume their functions.

The present case study revealed that in some schools with high enrollment figures, more paraprofessionals and/or special educators are needed to secure a good service provider/learner ratio. In other schools, the number of working hours of paraprofessionals needs to be re-examined. These are important matters MEHE needs to look into for improving the quality of service delivery in the schools.

Recommendation 10: MEHE needs to make sure that psychologists are very well trained in PBIS so they can train other paraprofessionals, special educators and classroom teach-

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ers on the implementation of PBIS inclusive practices in their intervention and teaching strategies at the Tier 1 level. This is evident in the literature on IE where students' behavioral difficulties are identified by school teachers as a major barrier and challenge to inclusion (discipline problems, disruptive behavior, lack of motivation, etc.).

Data from the present case study showed an almost unanimous trend toward recommending better teacher training. SEN coaches, special educators and paraprofessionals are surely aware of the nature and quality of teaching that is taking place at Tier 1 level of MTSS in their schools. Since the consultants' observations focused on real-time and pre-recorded online Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention sessions (small groups of learners and individualized specialized intervention respectively) and there was no opportunity to observe any real-time or pre-recorded Tier 1 online classroom teaching sessions, there is an information gap in the present study as to the teachers' strategies and teaching modalities within the classroom. An important question to raise in this context is whether teachers apply strategies in line with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which, as per the literature, have been recommended for Tier 1 level of MTSS.

We speculate that training teachers on how to apply UDL strategies (such as offering multiple modes of engagement, representation, action and expression to all learners, and empowering them to take responsibility of how they learn) may be a great help for classroom teachers in addressing the needs of all learners in the classroom, and eventually believing that IE is more feasible and generalizable than they thought it was. The need for teacher training was a recurrent theme throughout the questionnaires across all participants from all 6 schools. All paraprofessionals, SEN coaches, special educators, and to some extent school principals, called for increased and improved training for the teachers. The collected data showed, on several occasions, a call for more cooperation from teachers with other members of the team. In other cases, the data showed teachers' resistance to paraprofessionals' instructions.

It appears that the needed training is not to be restricted to teaching strategies and classroom practices; a deeper level of training seems to be needed, targeting perceptions and attitudes. Khochen and Radford (2010) say that before any major measures towards IE are taken, it is important to survey the attitudes of those who will be involved in the day-to-day implementation of IE: The more positive their attitudes, the more likely that IE will be accepted and implemented effectively. As observed previously, only 1 out of the 6 teachers gave a rights-based definition of IE. None of the teachers seemed to have high expectations of learners' progress or success; three teachers said they would choose to leave their present school to join a regular school with no IE program, and the reasons they gave had to do with a feeling of incompetence in dealing with learners with LD ("having to deal with several types of students and having to use several teaching strategies") and they do not seem to be confident about their ability to manage a classroom with learners with LD.

As has been documented in research, when teachers are made to feel more confident about their abilities and more competent, they will develop more positive attitudes towards the inclusive process. Teacher empowerment can be achieved through the creation of a team culture where there are learner-centered teams comprising of teachers, professionals, parents and the learner. This helps to eliminate a perceived threat when roles and expectations are clear, and this becomes the normal way of working. It also creates a sense of shared accountability and responsibility around the learner, which can go a long way.

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rubric 5: Support within Schools

Recommendation 11: Granting school principals a reasonable leeway for exerting their authority to respond in a prompt and efficient way to their schools' needs. This would also entail holding school principals accountable for the success or failure of IE in their respective schools.

Recommendation 12: Empowering school principals to serve as role models, enforcers and advocates of inclusive education for school staff, parents and learners, as well as for the immediate school community.

Recommendation 13: Parents of learners with and without disabilities should be more involved in the inclusive school project as potential support resources within the school, and in the community as IE advocates.

The culture of inclusion within the school environment is crucial to the success of inclusive education in that school. Thus, the support of the school principal who occupies a critical leadership role is essential to making this happen. The stand school principals take on values of inclusion is strongly associated with school staff's engagement toward accepting and valuing difference (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). And for the proper application of MTSS in any given school, principals are tasked with developing the right kind of supportive organizational environment (Forman & Crystal, 2015). This is reflected in the finding that (a) 5 out of 6 school principals "completely agreed" that IE was feasible and generalizable (a unique pattern of responses among all categories of participants), and that (b) most participants across all categories rated their school leadership favorably.

Scanning the questionnaire data across all participant categories, including principals, reveals that school principals in all 6 schools are driven to make IE happen in their schools, in spite of the many challenges that they face, such as insufficiency of resources and materials, or insufficient training of teachers, or even insufficient monitoring on behalf of MEHE.

However, determination is not enough: The collected data from different participants seem to imply that school leadership must be more assertive in setting up inclusive policies in the school, clarifying those policies to all school staff, and exerting more authority on the monitoring of such policies; in addition, data from the questionnaires reflected the need to have school principals well-versed in inclusive education so they can better monitor school activities and keep school personnel accountable. School leadership must also be able to respond more promptly to personnel's demands in terms of resources and materials. Moreover, the finding that the majority of the schools were not properly equipped to cope with the sudden shift in education to distant teaching raises questions as to the extent to which school principals acted in a proactive and responsible manner in managing this crisis. For example, one may wonder why a learner with LD has spent 4 months without receiving any kind of intervention since school closure.

Excluding school principals from policy making in schools has negative repercussions on the level of daily practice in the school: The data revealed a wide disparity among all 6 schools in how participants within and

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

between different categories perceive the importance of their roles, how they describe their responsibilities, as well as other practices such as the frequency of coordination meetings, meetings with parents, etc. When school principals are involved in school policy making (for example: policies about the number of students enrolled per class, or policies about the schedule of paraprofessionals, etc.), they will feel more directly concerned with making sure these policies are being properly implemented in their schools, and more accountable for a systematic monitoring of how IE is being applied. Moreover, they will feel more empowered to attend to their school's needs, which will in turn lead to more job satisfaction among the school personnel. In addition to school principals, parents play an important role in school support. Both parents of learners with and without disabilities must be more involved in advocating for inclusive education both at the school and community levels. A systematic plan for fostering this involvement must be put in place, with fixed agendas for action, and incentives for participation, and close coordination with school principals.

Rubric 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

The following recommendations are generated from the discussion of the previous recommendations, and should be seen as complementary to them.

Recommendation 14: MEHE needs to implement an empowering "self-monitoring" system for teachers so they hold themselves accountable for contributing to IE: Such a system may consist of the distribution of a monthly tool for self-monitoring, self-assessment and impact assessment of the activities teachers implement in the classroom, the findings of which are to be discussed and evaluated with the schools' respective SEN coaches, with good practices and areas that need improvement being highlighted and compared on a monthly basis for progress tracking.

Recommendation 15: MEHE needs to standardize and unify practices across all schools regarding learners' preliminary assessment and progress assessment (who does what, when, and how), and to develop the proper mechanism to monitor the implementation of such practices across all schools.

Recommendation 16: MEHE needs to standardize practices across all schools regarding intra-school meetings: fixed schedules, required deliverables, required attendance, status and responsibilities of all attendees including parents, standardized meeting outcomes (via standardized forms for minute-taking, and outcome reporting).

Recommendation 17: MEHE needs to convert to digital reporting, documentation and monitoring of all standardized practices.

Recommendation 18: MEHE needs to enhance its digital documentation system so as to include data (social background, diagnostics, IEP, performance monitoring at multiple levels) on every learner with disability to track his/her development into adolescence and young adulthood to ensure proper transition planning across school levels and appropriate vocational or employment placement within inclusive settings.

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rubric 7: Awareness Raising: Promotion of Respect for Diversity

Inclusive Education should not be a concept limited to schools, and an inclusive school should be the main vehicle for challenging negative attitudes and prejudice against children with disabilities not just at the school level but also at the community level. To this end, the following recommendation is set:

Recommendation 19: MEHE needs to ensure that all school stakeholders (principals, SEN coaches, teachers, special educators, paraprofessionals, parents and other school staff):

- (1) Are adequately trained in order to work in unison to promote the rights of learners with disabilities for quality education and for full integration in society
- (2) Understand their responsibility as agents and promoters of change within the community.

Recommendation 20: MEHE needs to join forces with different NGOs and OPDs in the design and implementation of awareness campaigns about the benefits of inclusive education to all learners, not just learners with disabilities. Such awareness campaigns need to be on-going, as opposed to “seasonal” or intermittent. They also need to be evidence-based, documenting the positive impacts on different levels, as opposed to appealing to feelings and pathos.

Recommendation 21: For a more persuasive and more efficient promotion of the benefits of an inclusive society, an inter-ministerial and inter-sectorial approach is recommended whereby different concerned ministries (education, social affairs, public health, environment, culture, transportation, information, labor, youth and sports) join efforts to draw a unified strategy for promoting the concept of inclusion in Lebanon, each according to its specialization. Expertise and good practices from the private sector should be an integral part and play a functional role in this global initiative.

For example, the Ministry of Labor may be showcasing the feasibility of inclusive employment of people with disabilities and its benefits through the promotion of good employment practices and their positive impact on particular businesses and on the country’s economy at large. Successful inclusive initiatives in the private sector should be highlighted and their replication encouraged via a variety of media channels.

Recommendation 22: At the academic level, social psychological research on the efficacy of “Contact Theory” in reducing stigma and prejudice against people with disabilities should be encouraged and possibly funded, and research findings are to be disseminated to the public across different media channels.

Disability is much stigmatized in Lebanon and this stigma leads the families of people with disabilities to segregate them from full community participation. Such segregation serves to (a) further widen the knowledge gap that people have about disability, (b) increase the apprehensions and negative expectations people have about the behavior of people with disabilities, (c) reinforce the de-prioritization of the rights of persons with disabilities, and (d) render any form of eventual contact with persons with disabilities undesirable, embarrassing and often unacceptable (Merhej, 2020, p. 5).

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research clearly shows that contact with people with disabilities (e.g., having a disabled relative, or having cared for a disabled person) increases positive attitudes toward disability. Even indirect contact with people with intellectual disability for example, through exposure to a short film on intergroup contact has been effective in causing attitude change (Walker & Scior, 2013). A systematic review of 75 studies by Scior (2011) on attitudes regarding disability reveals that contact with people with intellectual disability is generally associated with more positive attitudes in several cultures (Japan, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States). Allport’s seminal work on prejudice proposes that familiarity breeds liking through the hypothesis that intergroup contact reduces prejudice between groups. Allport’s theory has received substantial empirical evidence across a variety of societies and situations beyond the traditional racial and ethnic research contexts (including among others, disabled people).

Allport’s theory can be used to further emphasize the role of contact in promoting the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools as well as adults with disabilities in mainstream labor markets. Research on contact theory in the context of disability is absent in Lebanon. Hence the need to encourage such research and invest in its findings to further consolidate the concept of inclusive education in Lebanon.



6.

LIMITATIONS



6. LIMITATIONS

In spite of the fact that the 6 schools that were selected for the present case-study were representative of the population of the 30 public schools where the Pilot IE Project was being implemented, a limitation of this study is that selection bias may have affected the recruitment of the individuals representing each of the schools, and this restricts the generalizations that can be made from the present findings.

Another limitation is that participants may have been influenced to provide socially desirable responses and may have been reluctant to express negative views about the process of IE or about disability in general. This limitation applies to both the questionnaire administration and the focus group sessions.

In terms of procedures, sending the questionnaires by email and allocating such a long time for responding (10 days) should be avoided. In the future, we propose that paper-and-pencil questionnaires be handed to each participant in the school, and have them fill them out during 1 hour in a separate room, and return them in anonymous sealed envelopes to the school principal who would in turn send them for data analysts. We noticed that some participants were not very familiar with the use of the computer and changed the formatting of some of the questions while trying to respond, a fact that led to some errors in data recording. Others had to rely on someone else to fill the questionnaires for them, and in the process, many questions were missed. Moreover, we also noticed that on several occasions, there were “copy-pasted” answers from various participants across categories and across schools. Finally, several participants exceeded the deadline for returning their questionnaires, and when they were reminded, we speculate that these were filled in a hurry and thus several questions were missed.

In focus group sessions with the parents, it seems that parents had been informed that a MEHE representative would be attending the sessions. In the future, we propose to omit such an information. Furthermore, we propose not to hold any focus groups online. All focus groups, including those with learners, should take place in the schools.

Last, but not least, considering that learners had been out of school for a long time (security conditions of the country in addition to the COVID-19 lockdown), and that most of the discussion with learners in both groups necessitated that they reflect in retrospect on the inclusive experiences they had when in class and in school, the data we collected from such group meetings may not reflect the reality of their experiences and their attitudes toward IE. Neither the parents nor the learners may have been in the best position to answer questions about actual classroom practices.

We finally propose for the future to generate questionnaires that would yield more quantitative data as the number of participants will have increased to include participants from 30 additional schools.

APPENDIX A

THE LEBANESE JOURNEY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In Lebanon, the year 2000 seemed like a good year for people with disabilities, as the Lebanese Parliament, after extensive lobbying by disability non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society actors, approved Law 220, which provides a legislative framework for the basic rights of people with disabilities (Wehbi, 2006), including the right to equal educational and learning opportunities (Articles 59 and 60). It is important to note that before Law 220, there have been several efforts to introduce the concept of inclusive education in Lebanon in the private sector. The collaboration between NGOs and the private sector led to several consecutive pilot initiatives in inclusive education during the period from 1982 to 1995, where learners with different types of special needs (intellectual, sensory and motor) were included in private schools and nurseries of different geographical areas of Lebanon. The final report on these initiatives stressed that the collaboration between the parents and the schools contributed to their success, even if it was only on a small scale (El Zein, 2009).

Because the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) back then did not have a strategy to implement Law 220 and monitor its implementation, the main providers of educational services for learners with learning difficulties (LD) and/or special needs were NGOs, many of whom were founded by people with disabilities and/or by parents of children with disabilities (ElSaheli-Elhage & Sawilowsky, 2016), and, in the process, educational matters of youth with disabilities were in the hands of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) which emphasized care rather than education. Unfortunately, such a policy contributed to promote a culture of exclusion and segregation of people with disabilities (Wehbi, 2006). According to Human Rights Watch (2018), in some of these specialized segregated institutions funded by MoSA, the educational resources are often of such poor quality that there are serious concerns about whether these institutions fulfill children's right to education. As for the private sector, there were only about 20 private schools nationwide that catered, with very limited curricular adaptations, to learners with special needs (Faour et al, 2006).

The new Law triggered much impetus among disability activists and social change advocates on the Lebanese scene, among whom a group of four NGOs who developed the National Inclusion Project. This was a comprehensive project which advocated for a sustainable inclusive society. Its overall objective was to establish the appropriate infrastructure for social, educational and vocational inclusion in Lebanon, namely to empower people with disabilities and their families to advocate for their rights in instituting inclusive policies, to reinforce the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream schooling, and to disseminate and promote an inclusive culture (National Inclusion Project Final Report, 2007). Documentation on the National Inclusion Project shows that, with respect to inclusion in education, there is (a) a general lack of awareness of the rights of people with disabilities, (b) a real shortage of qualified educators, and (c) a great need to reconsider the relationship of parents to the school and the relationship of school administration to the concept of inclusive education (Wehbi, 2006). A follow up study on the National Inclusion Project by Khochen and Radford (2012) further reveals reservations of school teachers about including all students with disabilities, especially those with severe emotional and behavioral difficulties, and concerns about insufficient in-school training, non-availability of qualified specialized educators, and the high cost of supporting inclusion in schools.

In December 2016, MEHE, supported by UNICEF, the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD) and the Faculty of Pedagogy at the Lebanese University organized an academic symposium to initiate discussion on inclusive education in Lebanese schools. Theoretical, legal, professional and pedagogical perspectives and challenges of inclusive education were tackled, emphasizing the rights of every child to education and the important role schools play in preparing them for life in an inclusive society, as “an inclusive society cannot be built without inclusive schools” (UNICEF, 2016). This symposium was a first step forward.

On May 22, 2018, MEHE in collaboration with UNICEF launched the Pilot Inclusive Education Project in 30 public schools spread across all the Lebanese governorates to encourage the enrollment of young learners who are facing learning difficulties and ensure accessible and quality education for all learners in Lebanon.

APPENDIX B

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT (MTSS)

Sailor et al. (2021) describe MTSS as a transformational experience in contemporary schooling to achieve inclusive education. Hence the critical need to prepare teachers and administrators to “enter the education workforce with the complex, transformational components of skills, new knowledge, and dispositions needed to effectively and efficiently implement MTSS” (Sailor et al., 2021, p. 24). Moreover, MTSS being a school reform initiative, it requires that teachers modify, adopt, and/or abandon certain traditional practices (Freeman et al., 2017).

A literature review on the efficiency of the MTSS model shows that the MTSS framework offers the potential to create systemic change and yield significant improvement both in academic and social outcomes for all learners in any given school when thoughtfully designed and executed. (Higgins Averill & Rinaldi, 2013). Weisenburgh-Snyder et al. (2015) recommend that for an effective implementation of MTSS in any school, the following variables need to be taken into consideration: sensitivity of instructional procedures, use of high quality teaching methodologies, depth and breadth of teacher training and support initiatives, and adequacy of student assessment.

Coyne et al. (2018) examined the effects of providing MTSS Tier 2 intervention to small groups of students with reading difficulties by professionally trained “reading interventionists” who are monitored and supported on a regular basis by school coaches. Findings revealed that Tier 2 intervention significantly improved learners’ performance in skills that are fundamental for reading fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension.

Choi, McCart & Sailor (2020) compared progress in math for two groups of learners with math disabilities from different public schools and classes. The first group was exposed to MTSS-based interventions while the comparison-control group benefited from education in the form of business as usual practices. Findings supported the benefit of MTSS over traditional special education practices.

Forman and Crystal (2015) and Eagle et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of the role of the psychologist in MTSS implementation: School psychologists are the key experts in MTSS and have the skills necessary to assist in the development of school staff competency, and together with school principals who are tasked with developing a supportive organizational environment for MTSS, they should both assume a leadership role in the implementation of MTSS.

According to Forman and Crystal (2015), good MTSS implementation should ensure that the needs and characteristics of learners as well as the needs and characteristics of the implementing school are taken into consideration in order to maximize goodness of fit. This would include, for example, identifying school-based resources prior to implementation, utilizing personnel who are familiar with the learners, standardizing practices for all teachers and aligning these practices with school-wide expectations and routines. Successful MTSS implementation requires rigorous skills-based training and on-going provision of technical assistance through proper scaffolding, coaching and consultation. School teachers are key stakeholders in any MTSS implementation; their contribution is essential for the development of positive attitudes and the necessary conditions that can help MTSS implementation.

A longitudinal study by Harn et al. (2015) assessed the effectiveness of the implementation of the RTI component of MTSS in learners at-risk for LD in 5 different schools. In the first year of the study, the authors noted the absence of Tier 3 support, inconsistency in instructional approaches and absence of coordination of instructional support across all tiers. When in the second year of the study, MTSS was enhanced by (a) increasing training to teachers, instruction time, systematic practice skills and engaging activities, (b) decreasing group size of learners, and (c) coordinating instruction across tiers, the authors noted a significantly improved performance of at-risk learners. Over the four years of the study, some learners had so much improved that they had to be moved out of Tier 3 support. Other learners made progress but not enough to warrant decreasing support across the year. And some students continued to display significantly low reading skills. The authors attributed the absence of progress to factors such as differences in teacher demographics, program type, instructional approach and instructional intensity, as well as family-related factors.

APPENDIX B

Many studies have shown that learners at-risk for or with LD often exhibit emotional or behavioral issues that interfere with their academic instruction. Briesch et al. (2020) describe the conceptual model of MTSS as a “double triangle” (see Figure 1) which simultaneously targets academic and behavioral outcomes. However, the authors note that in most schools, much of the implementation has focused on the academic dimension, leading school personnel to believe that those procedures addressing academic concerns should work for behavioral concerns as well. There are essential differences between these two components, namely in (a) the types of intervention used, (b) the assessment tools, (c) the frequency in assessment, and (d) the criteria for assessing responsiveness to intervention (with less well-defined standard benchmarks for performance in the behavioral domain than in the academic domain).

Several studies have shown the effectiveness of the MTSS model integrating both the academic and behavioral components: Recognizing that academic and behavioral difficulties are often interconnected, Eagle et al. (2015) see that RTI and PBIS mirror one another, with both models emphasizing prevention, data-based decision-making, problem solving, and evidence-based interventions. Such integrated approaches have been associated with greater improvements in both academic and behavioral outcomes.

Utley and Obiakor’s study (2015) focused on the behavioral component of MTSS. The authors examined the effect of a targeted PBIS-based behavioral intervention at Tier 2 of the MTSS on teachers and students with behavioral problems in an urban elementary school. Successful reduction of problem behaviors in schools depends on teachers’ positive behavioral expectations, their proactive monitoring of students’ behaviors, their use of a contingency (reinforcement) management system, and appropriate methods to measure outcomes. Although students’ behavior did show improvement as a result of the implementation of social skill strategies, the authors found only a slight increase in teachers’ ability to give appropriate, contingent, and behavioral feedback to students. The authors attribute this finding to the low intensity and short duration of the program, and to the inability of the teachers to perceive such an intervention as an integral, necessary and critical component of the teaching-learning program. Another possible reason has to do with the school culture, whereby a school could either reinforce positive social skills or aggravate behavioral problems for students with diverse learning needs.

Scott et al. (2019) strongly recommend the use of a multi-tiered framework for positive behavior interventions not just to improve students’ behavior, but also to create a positive school culture and improve the learning environment for all students. Through such a tier strategy, cases of school suspension/expulsion have been minimized, and so were poor school attendance and school dropout rates. The relationship between improved school-wide discipline and improved academic performance is more evident in schools implementing both the academic (RTI) and behavior (PBIS) components of MTSS, than in schools that do not.

In sum, the vast majority of the reviewed studies confirms the effectiveness of MTSS implementation in inclusive education for achieving better academic and behavioral outcomes for learners with difficulties. It may be considered as a revolutionary approach in education, a change in the way traditional education has always been conceptualized. Like any change, the MTSS model is prone to be met with resistance. One should keep in mind that inclusive values cannot be imposed externally; they need to stem from a deeply-rooted commitment from those who are or will be directly involved in the process.

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

The Right to Inclusive Education: Zainab’s Story



There is Hope: Hisham’s Story



Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities: Angham’s Story



“Every child has the right to learn”

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

The Right to Inclusive Education: Zainab's Story

Children with disabilities are one of the most marginalized and excluded groups. Inclusive education allows students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side, for the benefit of all.

September 2021 | To promote the development of inclusive education in Lebanese public schools and ensure quality education for all children, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in collaboration with CERD and with the support of UNICEF, is implementing a pilot programme in 30 public schools across all Lebanese governorates. The results and the lessons learned from the programme will inform the development of the Inclusive Education Policy of Lebanon. Each inclusive school is assigned a special educator and a team of paraprofessionals (psychologist, psychomotor therapist, speech and language therapist). Zeinab is one of over a thousand children across Lebanon who attend an inclusive school.

Zainab Zalgout, 14, has a severe hearing impairment and currently wears a hearing aid in each ear. Her hearing loss resulted from a severe ear infection that was not correctly treated. Before joining second grade, Zainab attended Hariss Public school in South Lebanon, where her father, Jihad Zalgout, taught and which, at the time, was not an inclusive school. She had no difficulties at school and thrived academically. After the infection and based on an audiogram and medical examination, Zainab was diagnosed with severe hearing impairment at around 75% - 85%.

Her father explained how he was advised to send Zainab to a specialised institution that supported children with severe disabilities in a village nearby. Zainab was excluded and segregated from society and placed in an institution with "children like her". At this point, her hardship and difficulties grew and impacted Zainab's academic abilities. The form of exclusion that Zainab faced after being removed

from school led her to experience withdrawal and a sense of powerlessness, which resulted in acute mental difficulties. Zainab remained in the centre for approximately two years until Hariss Public school became inclusive. He was quick to reregister her in the hope of providing her with a system to support her recovery at both the academic and psychological levels.



© UNICEF/UN/Zainab Zalgout Portrait

As Zainab transitioned back to Hariss inclusive public school, a multidisciplinary team was ready to make the necessary interventions, support teachers, and develop Zainab's individual education plan (IEP). The team played an essential role in raising awareness in terms accepting differences and encouraging unity among the learners. They also engaged all teachers, the school staff and parents and provided the

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

necessary guidance to ensure an appropriate learning environment was sustained for Zainab's educational performances and psychological situation

As part of Zainab's IEP, the special educator supports her in keeping up with the rest of the class, reviewing lessons, and adapting examinations to ensure a tailored and fair approach. She also receives individual interventions by the speech and language therapist. Zainab's language skills have improved in terms of distinguishing converging sounds, understanding and using long and complex sentences, learning new concepts, improving reading and understanding. This helped improve her oral language skills. Most importantly, Zainab's mental health has progressed significantly. She has become more self-confident and self-receptive, has made many new friends and is being accepted by her peers. She does not hesitate to take on initiatives and responsibility when the opportunity arises.



Zainab's father, Jihad Zalgout, guiding Zainab in writing sentences

Today, Zainab has begun grade five and has continued to learn through face to face and remote modalities. While studying online has been difficult with access to only one digital device that she and all her siblings use when attending their online Microsoft Teams classes or retrieving content from the WhatsApp

group classes, her biggest supporter and mentor – her father - is also by her side every day. Given his profession as a teacher, he has facilitated and coordinated the academic requirements and lesson planning with each of his children, including Zainab. She has come a long way, and she now speaks with clarity, writes paragraphs, and understands the reading content. Zainab shows enthusiasm every time she acquires new skills and knowledge; equally, her mental health has improved significantly.



Zainab reading content from one of her classes

Today, inclusive public schools in Lebanon have provided children like Zainab with a fair chance to go to school, learn, and develop the skills they need to strive. Zainab's right to education also includes her right to be part of a school with real learning opportunities and diverse groups of people.

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

There is Hope: Hisham's Story

It has been estimated that 93 million children worldwide live with disabilities. Like all children, those with disabilities have ambitions and dreams for their futures. Like all children, they need quality education to develop their skills and realise their full potential. Every child has the right to quality education and learning.

September 2021 | To promote the development of inclusive education in Lebanese public schools and ensure quality education for all children, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of Lebanon (MEHE) in collaboration with the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), and with the support of UNICEF, implemented an inclusive education pilot programme in thirty public schools across all governorates in Lebanon. The aim of having inclusive schools is to reach all learners by removing barriers within education and responding to the diverse needs and abilities of the enrolled children, providing education to all children, and changing social attitudes that promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in schools.

Hisham El Soussi, 10, is currently in grade three and dreams of becoming a pilot one day. Hisham was diagnosed with a developmental disability and there was a noticeable delay in his language and speech. His delayed language acquisition affected his ability to read, write, and speak at school and in his everyday interactions. However, it all changed when he enrolled in an inclusive school, and this made his dream of becoming a pilot one day possible.

In 2019, Hisham was enrolled in Zokak El Blat Public Inclusive School in Beirut, where his academic milestones, language abilities, and mental health were evaluated. As part of early detection and specialized intervention, Hisham's oral language – on both receptive and expressive levels – was assessed, and an individual education plan (IEP) was developed

by the multidisciplinary team and the teachers at the school in collaboration with the DOPS SEN coach. An individual education plan is developed to ensure that a child with an identified disability attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialised instruction that complements the child's academic performance, appropriate educational accommodations, and measurable goals and objectives for the child's education.



© UNICEF/UN/ Hisham El Soussi Portrait

Before enrolling in an inclusive school, Hisham's educational journey was a difficult one. Due to the lack of a tailored approach to his developmental delay, he fell behind in his previous school, and this eventually led to disengagement and adverse effects on his mental health. He was not able to distinguish between different letters, connect letters, nor compose complete sentences. His academic performance took a toll on his self-confidence. He disconnected completely in class by not participating or taking the initiative to answer questions due to his fear of making mistakes.

The multidisciplinary team assigned to each inclusive school consists of a special educator and paraprofessionals from different fields, including speech and language therapy, psychology, and

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

psychomotor therapy, who intervene individually with each child with a disability or difficulty. In Hisham's case, once the individual education plan was put in place, his special educator ensured the necessary support was provided to teachers, peer learners, and Hisham's parents to support him, build awareness, and facilitate his learning. Specific adaptations were applied, these include ensuring adequate time during exams to give Hisham a fair chance to complete them and attain a score that reflected his true academic abilities. Six months later, Hisham's education milestones were reassessed and showed significant improvement in identifying and connecting letters, sounds, and words. His vocabulary range increased, he began mastering specific reading strategies, and he showed improvement at the level of pronunciation.



Hisham and his mother, Maha El Moghrabi, reviewing class assignments delivered online

The multidisciplinary team provided coaching sessions to parents, teachers, and school staff, in coordination with the SEN unit at MEHE, to raise awareness on disability inclusion within the schools and identify the critical role and effectiveness of the involvement of parents in their children's learning experience. Likewise, the multidisciplinary team involved learners and helped them understand their role in creating and accepting an inclusive environment in their school. Hisham's ambition to attend school and socialise with peer learners grew positively with a more welcoming and supportive environment. Notably, his self-confidence and participation also increased, consequently, when questions were raised by the teacher he would

answer them in a clear and confident manner. Today, Hisham is academically performing at the same level as the rest of his peers in grade three.



El Soussi Family

"With all the difficult times Lebanon is going through today, a hand of hope was given to our son, Hisham"
-Bahjat and Maha El Soussi

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, Hisham's learning continued in the same tailored approach but through an online modality. He would attend his Microsoft Team sessions with the rest of his class and later receive one-on-one support from the special educator. Furthermore, his mother, Maha, became his support system at home and guided him in his day-to-day learning and online sessions. His mother and father expressed their gratitude to the multidisciplinary team and school principal at the Zokak El Blat Public Inclusive School, for they gave all their dedication and time to support Hisham. With all three children at home learning online, the atmosphere was often busy as everyone tried respecting and supporting all three children's school schedules. Accessibility in terms of technology and connectivity is also deemed an issue faced by many children in Lebanon.

Access to education and ensuring a tailored support system for all children is essential to building a community of inclusiveness. For children like Hisham, inclusive schools have been able to provide this positive learning environment thus allowing him to thrive today and give hope for all his ambitions and dreams for the future.

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities: Angham's Story

Disability is one of the most severe barriers to education across the globe. Like all children, those with disabilities have ambitions and dreams for their futures. Like all children, they need quality education to develop their skills and realise their full potential. Inclusive education allows students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side to benefit all.

September 2021 | Inclusion promises to leave no one behind – ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. This promise holds strong with 15-year-old Angham Nazer, who knows exactly what she wants to be when she grows up. “I want to become a lawyer because I want to defend human rights for all,” shared Angham. She explained her ambition to continue and reach the highest levels of education.

Angham was involved in an unfortunate incident when she was playing outside in the snow during winter in her village; a hunter accidentally shot her in the eyes, and this caused total loss of vision. Although several surgeries were performed, there was no hope to save her sight. Angham was only 12 at the time, and in the middle of the academic year, in grade 6. The incident ultimately caused her to fall behind and eventually leave her studies altogether. Angham had her family's full support—a lovely mother and father, three sisters, and two brothers who continue to stand by her side.

During the 2017-2018 school year, Angham returned to repeat the sixth grade, yet she still struggled to adapt to her new way of life and experienced bullying from her classmates. This further took a toll on her mental health and academic performance, and was the main reason why she did not pass grade 6.



© UNICEF/UN/Portrait Photograph of Angham Nazer

In 2018, Angham's family was delighted to hear that the Al-Qubayat Al Zouk Mixed Public school was one of the selected public schools for the inclusive education pilot project in the North Governorate. To promote the development of inclusive education in Lebanese public schools and ensure quality education for all children, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of Lebanon, in collaboration with the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), with the support of UNICEF, implemented a pilot programme in 30 public schools across all governorates in Lebanon. The aim of the inclusive education pilot project is to provide access to education for all learners by removing barriers within education and responding to the diverse needs and abilities of the enrolled children, providing education to all children, and changing social attitudes that promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in schools. Angham is one of over a thousand children who have disabilities and attend an inclusive pilot school today. In each pilot school, MEHE has assigned a multidisciplinary team

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encompassing paraprofessionals from various fields and a special educator to support and encourage the enrolment of young learners who are facing learning difficulties, with or without sensory, intellectual, and motor disabilities, into public schools.

At this point, with the aim of responding to Angham's need, the special educator at her school coordinated with the Special Education Unit (SEN unit) at MEHE to develop a more tailored approach for Angham's visual impairment. Simultaneously, MEHE arranged for the Youth Association of the Blind (YAB) - which strongly commits to ensuring persons with visual impairment have full access to their human rights, including education - to intervene. YAB worked closely with Angham as she learned to read and write using braille and learned to use a laptop with accessibility features that cater for visual impairment. YAB also provided a printed copy of Grade 6 in Braille.

Amer Makarem, YAB Manager, describes Angham as a quick learner and states that “within 30 hours of hands-on training, which is an extremely quick period, Angham was able to learn to read and write braille in Arabic. This indicated her willingness to learn and surpass any difficult situation she faces.”



Angham Nazer on her Braille Typewriter

Strongly and confidently, Angham began the following academic year and successfully passed grade six. After the training she received from YAB, she returned to achieving high grades in all subjects.

The multidisciplinary team at the Al-Qubayat Al Zouk Mixed Public school in collaboration with the DOPS SEN coach, continued to work closely with Angham's teachers who made great efforts and strongly advocated against any form of bullying or exclusion. The special educator and paraprofessionals developed an Individual Education Plan (IEP) tailored to Angham's learning pathway, through which special education instruction, support, and other services were established to ensure Angham progresses and thrives in school. The role of the principal, Roula Sarkis Zeytoun, was essential to Angham's success where the former supported and advocated for her rights and voice at school. Angham's participation in class, with both the teachers and her classmates, improved, and she began making new friends.



Angham Nazer, with her sister Ahlam Nazer reviewing a lesson on Laptop with accessibility features

During these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the road closures, and the socio-economic crisis Lebanon has been going through, schools were forced to close and adapt to distance and online learning modalities. While this has been a struggle for the global community, children with disabilities faced further challenges and difficulties in their access. After finally adapting to the school environment, Angham was compelled to adjust to online learning within her home. However, during this transition to the online modality, the special educator and psychological counsellor continued to communicate

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with Angham regularly and individually. Angham explained that she continued to feel supported by the multidisciplinary team. The braille training she has received from YAB was deemed to be even more essential through these difficult times. She was able to join her Microsoft Teams sessions with the rest of her classmates and participate to the best of her abilities. Like all children in Lebanon, she also faced internet connectivity issues and limited electricity access.

Having spent more time at home, Angham had her family by her side every step of the way. Angham is closely supported by her sister Ahlam Nazer, 22 who would review all online sessions with Angham; moreover she answered and guided her in any concepts or topics that she did not understand during the online sessions. Although some parents of children with disabilities experience difficulty with positive interactions and sustained engagements, Angham's parents, Moustafa and Fadila Nazer, were highly responsive and supportive in searching for the best options for surgery, school, training, services, and daily life opportunities to ensure their daughter achieved her educational goals.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis in Lebanon, parents became key learning agents in supporting their children in continued learning, especially in the distance learning modality. Despite the many difficulties faced, Angham's parents stay positive and committed to supporting their children in their educational pathways and goals Angham's father claimed,

“Even if I had to sell this house, I will stand by my daughter”.



The Nazer Family

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A Project of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education,
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Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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