



Exploring Barriers to the Implementation of Inclusive Teaching Practices in Moroccan Context

Fadel Naciri¹, Asmae Ourdi²

¹Abdelmalek Essaadi University, Morocco

²Moulay Ismail University, Morocco

Abstract

Years after the implementation of the National Program for Inclusive Education in Morocco, many difficulties are still facing the education of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. This research aimed to explore cultural barriers to developing inclusive teaching practices to guarantee quality learning for all students. We conducted a series of focus groups with teachers in three inclusive schools, located in the West-East of Morocco, we adopted a content analysis, and we found out that teachers were (1) adopting cultural background to a disability, (2) and they were not able to develop inclusive teaching practices based on human right's approaches, (3) consequently, they were unprepared to teach students with severe or mental disabilities, (4) However, they have promoted social abilities in school. Our research may help to design a contextualized training program for future inclusive teachers.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, disability, Inclusive teachers, inclusive practices.*

1. Introduction

Despite all the efforts to fulfil all students' right to quality education in Morocco to achieve the 4th Sustainable Development Goal 2015/2030, there are still many difficulties, some are related to the social perception of disability and others to teachers' professional training, which affected the nature of teaching practices within inclusive classrooms and consequently impacted the quality of learning of students with disabilities in mainstream schools.

In this research, we investigated the barriers that hinder the implementation of teaching practices in inclusive classrooms in poor areas. We chose the South-East of Morocco, and we focused on Zagora territory, especially three schools situated in three different villages. These schools contained the highest number of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, in some classrooms; they represented the third of all students. Teachers within the three schools have adopted a philanthropic background to disability and promoted social abilities, among students, to accept differences and diversity. However, they have not been able to teach students with disabilities, which led us to explore their background in disability and the way it affected their teaching practices.

2. Literature Review

Inclusive education is recognized as a fundamental human right for everyone (Ainscow 2021), it provides all learners with an equitable learning environment' and quality educational outcomes. In this perspective, inclusive education requires more than placing children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms; rather, it focuses on the socio-emotional and academic development of every learner. The implementation of inclusive education necessitates a paradigm shift in educational practices, including developing the non-academic skills of all learners as well as exploring diverse perspectives related to school contexts, such as parents' voices and contributions (Schwab et al. 2020). In Morocco, children with disabilities have enrolled mainstream schools after the ratification of the Incheon convention in 2016. However, many challenges impeded the implementation of adequate inclusive teaching practices in schools, like the blurred conceptualization of the inclusion in school context, the limited or partial inclusion of learners with disabilities, the poor quality of the training provided to principals and teacher, as well as the technical and financial constraints, and the lack of stakeholders' involvement, including parents. However, parental involvement is a crucial factor contributing to developing any academic inclusive system.

Additionally, Good and Trusting relationships between the family and school staff emerge when they see each other as trustworthy partners and allies, and when the family have multiple opportunities for purposeful engagement in its child's education (Hanssen N and Erina I 2022), which enhances learning, positive behaviour and decreases achievement gaps between students, including



the ones with disabilities. Furthermore, Good parents and school staff partnerships lead to the improvement of teachers' efficacy, family satisfaction and parenting skills. However, many parents have expressed concerns about the quality of teachers' instruction, classrooms' inclusive management, peers' bullying behaviour, social isolation (Lalvani 2015), teachers' and school staff's negative attitudes towards disability. Moreover, mainly teachers and school staff focused on informing parents instead of building a profitable relationship, which created different perceptions of what constitutes meaningful parent involvement.

Indeed, the contribution of parents of learners with disabilities to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive practices is important to ensure a successful evaluation and reform toward inclusive education, since parents are considered important actors and agents in the school context and should be involved in developing inclusive education.

We aim to bring to the fore parents' voices, exploring their view of the relationship between them and teachers on inclusive education for their children with disability. Inclusive education is recognized as a fundamental human Right, it provides all learners with an equitable learning environment and quality educational outcomes. Furthermore, inclusive education requires more than placing children with disabilities in the mainstream classroom and focuses on the socio-emotional and academic development of every learner. The implementation of inclusive education necessitates a paradigm shift in educational practices, including developing the non-academic skills of all learners and exploring diverse perspectives related to school contexts, such as parents' voices and contributions. In Morocco, children with disabilities have enrolled mainstream schools after Morocco ratified the Incheon convention in 2015 (UNESCO 2015a). However, many challenges have impeded the implementation of adequate inclusive teaching practices, like the poor quality of teacher training, technical and financial constraints, and the lack of parental involvement (CSEFRS 2019a), even though, it is a crucial factor contributing to developing any academic inclusive system (Connolly and Gersch 2016).

Good and Trusting relationships between the parents and school staff emerge when they see each other as trustworthy partners and allies and when the family maintain multiple opportunities for purposeful engagement in school life, which enhances learning and positive behaviour and decreases achievement gaps between students, including the ones with disabilities. Furthermore, Good parents and school staff partnerships lead to the improvement of teachers' efficacy, family satisfaction and parenting skills. However, many parents have expressed concerns about the quality of teachers' instructions, classroom management, peers' bullying behaviour, social isolation, and teachers' negative attitudes towards disability. Moreover, they have confirmed that teachers and school staff focus on informing instead of building a profitable relationship, which produced distinct perceptions of what constitutes meaningful parent involvement.

Indeed, the consent and contribution of parents of learners with disabilities to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive practices are critical. Therefore, parents are considered important actors and agents in the school context and should be involved in developing inclusive education.

We aim to bring to the fore parents' voices, exploring their view of the relationship between them and teachers on inclusive education for their children with disability.

3. Research Problem

Inclusive teaching practices require the removal of discrimination on the grounds of disability (Felder, 2019), the promotion of a positive school climate (Cohen, J. & Brown 2013), the modernisation of teaching approaches (Hulgin and Drake 2011), to removal of barriers to all learners' participation (Dovigo 2017), the improvement of the quality of the interventions with students and families (Heyer 2021), and the exploration of every learner's needs within the society's context (Ainscow 2020; Al-Shammari, Faulkner, and Forlin 2019).

Analogously to the 4th article of the United Nations' convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (U.N 2006), the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO 2015b), and the Moroccan Framework Law 51-17 (sgg.gov 2020), Morocco has engaged to include students with disabilities in mainstream schools (MEN and UNICEF 2019). However, without adjusting the infrastructure and teachers' training required for inclusion (CSEFRS 2019b), and without empowering teachers as agents of change (UNESCO 2020), able to visualize what can be achieved after removing barriers (Ainscow 2020, 2021). This led us to question the barriers that hinder the development of the adequate teaching practices within inclusive classrooms.



4. Research Methods

To explore the impact of the implementation of an inclusive education program in Morocco, we focused on inclusive teaching practices by conducting a series of focus groups with 24 teachers from three different schools in the south-East (Draa Tafilalet Academy) with the permission of the local educational board. We chose the schools with the highest number of students with disabilities within mainstream classrooms. We met the participants in schools, during the break, and we questioned them about their cultural background and understanding of inclusion, their teaching practices to include all learners, and their reflections on the inclusion of all learners in their schools. All the participants (19 males and 6 females) have not been engaged in any voluntary or mandatory training about inclusive education or inclusive pedagogy. However, they were open to talking about their attitudes, knowledge, skills, and readiness to teach in inclusive classrooms. After conducting the focus groups, we adopted a content analysis to extract the different barriers (cultural, institutional and technical) that hinder the implementation of a genuine inclusive teaching practice in mainstream classrooms in this area.

5. Results

After analysing the content of the teachers' focus group statements, we concluded that all teachers welcomed the access of children with disabilities to the local schools for the following reasons:

Firstly, they believed that the access of children with disabilities to mainstream classrooms was the consequence of the paucity of special educators and special education classrooms in their region, and they also expected that the education board will assign special educators to teach, separately, students with disabilities. This attitude, conveyed by teachers, uncovered the real and the concealed motives to accept students with disabilities in their classrooms, in other words, teachers couldn't refuse or criticize the official instructions and they considered the situation transient. This showed that they have not been sensitized or familiarized enough with the principles of inclusive education; and consequently, they have not felt the professional or ethical obligation to challenge and develop their current teaching practices.

Secondly, teachers' discourse about disability was predominated by both philanthropic background medical approaches to disability. Thus, such attitude prevented teachers from approaching disability as a social construct Jones 1996 and exploring the diverse personal potential of all students regardless of their impairment Le (Le Fanu 2014). This conclusion aligns with what (Winzer 2007) said about disability and philanthropic perspective and which considered the charitable action to people with disabilities as an opportunity to give alms and to please God; such attitudes maintain the inferiority with few rights for people with disabilities (Winzer 2007).

Thirdly, all teachers, in the three schools, have been promoting social abilities for all students based on religion as a component of the school curriculum; the aim is to enable students to accept each other regardless of differences, and to avoid labelling according to physical, ethnic or social circumstances. However, despite teachers' efforts, they were facing the uncooperative attitudes of families and the floundering decisions of the education board towards the conceptualisation and the operationalisation of inclusive education.

6. Discussion

Teachers' intentions to include all learners within mainstream classrooms couldn't change the fact that teachers were struggling to manage inclusive classrooms, which increase the gap between the discourses about inclusive education and the existing inclusive teaching practices within classrooms. Furthermore, teachers of the three schools confirmed their unpreparedness to teach learners with disabilities, especially the ones with severe or mental disabilities. Besides, they were all the time under pressure to deliver the official curriculum at a restricted timetable, which forced them to focus on "abled students" and to marginalize the ones with disabilities by keeping them busy (drawing or coloring) or silent to avoid the disturbance or interruption of the courses. However, at the end of the school season, and to prevent the school failure of "disabled students", teachers would elevate them to the next level and so on. Which, often, led to a poor quality learning, limited the learning opportunities, and established low expectations (OHCHR 2016).

In our research, teachers confirmed that the adoption of philanthropy as a background to disability was the result of a cultural legacy and the lack of genuine training based on humanistic and right-based approaches. Additionally, they revealed that they have been trained to promote standards



of excellence, by increasing competition between students based on ableism and similarity instead of exploring students' potential and differences. Indeed, the focus group's discussions were an opportunity for teachers to reflect on the problem of learners' marginalisation in schools and on the need to challenge and change ableism-based standards in schools and societies. Moreover, the analysis of the results showed that teachers' failure to teach all students lowered their self-esteem, their preparedness to manage inclusive classrooms, and their ability to explore the strengths of all students, which aligned with other researches' findings about the attitudes toward disability, self-esteem (Byra and Domagała-Zyśk 2021) and workplace wellbeing (Agran et al. 2020).

Furthermore, teachers were facing different barriers related to the feasibility of inclusion in rural schools, the adequate support for all students, the degree and quality of knowledge and skills required to, effectively, manage inclusive classrooms (Botha and Kourkoutas 2015). Consequently, some teachers criticised these requirements because of the uncertainty about what they need to believe, know and do to be able to support inclusive and equitable education for all (Florian 2014, 2021). Therefore, new teaching approaches are needed to respond to the differences in inclusive classrooms and to narrow the gap between teachers' knowledge and practices within their classrooms (Florian 2021). In other words, teachers need different values, beliefs, knowledges, understandings, skills, and abilities to be effective with diverse groups of students (EADSNE 2012; Florian 2021). They also need a framework to bridge coursework and practicum experiences about inclusive education as a way to synergize both of them (Rusznyak and Walton 2019), which means that teachers and researchers need to work collaboratively to develop context-based inclusive practices, which will, constantly, vary according to the individuality of the learners and the school context (Florian and Pantić 2017).

Indeed, Teachers in Morocco need to be aware of the cultural, institutional, and technical barriers that prevent them from changing their attitudes toward differences in mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, they need to critically analyze the injustice in the schooling system's structure (Tomlinson 2017), develop the habits of the head, hand, and heart linked to the core values of inclusive pedagogy (Florian 2021), and include the use of technology to and new methods to respond to students' different needs (Hardman 2019) (Magyar et al. 2020), (Mohamed 2018).

7. Conclusion

Morocco is engaged in including all learners in mainstream schools. However, some barriers are still hindering the achievement of this goal.

We have explored and examined those barriers from teachers' perspectives. We concluded that some of them are related to teachers' cultural background that forges their attitude to differences in general and to disability in particular, other barriers linked to the institutional conceptualization and operationalization of inclusive education in general and inclusive teaching practices in particular, and some barriers are related to the material and technical situation of schools. However, teachers have to manage inclusive classrooms without being prepared, which affected their practices and their expectations from all learners regardless of their ability.

Indeed, the access to mainstream classrooms is not enough to guarantee all students- right to quality education in Morocco, there is a need for the implementation of a genuine contextualized training program that takes in consideration the newest theoretical and practical research, on one hand, and the convictions and engagement of teachers, researchers, families, the educational board, the stakeholders and the local community, in another hand.

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