

A Narrative Review of Inclusive Education in Abu Dhabi's Private Preschools

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Abstract

Inclusive education is an essential part of early year's education, ensuring that all students, including those with special educational needs, are provided with equal, quality learning opportunities. This narrative review examines the implementation of inclusive education in private preschools in Abu Dhabi by synthesizing findings from existing literature. Using JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar, the study employs a thematic analysis approach to explore key aspects such as implementation strategies, curriculum adaptation, assessment methods, and challenges. Findings indicate that while private preschools offer flexible curricula, inconsistencies in inclusive practices persist due to resource disparities. Assessment methods lack standardization, and teacher training remains inadequate. Financial constraints, parental attitudes, and administrative limitations further hinder inclusion. This study highlights the importance of enhancing support and resources to strengthen inclusive education in private preschools in Abu Dhabi.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Preschool Education, Special Educational Needs (SEN), Educational Policies in UAE, Early Childhood Inclusion

Introduction

Inclusive education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of modern educational reform, aiming to integrate students with special needs into mainstream education and adapt school systems to meet diverse learning requirements. Grounded in the social model of disability, it emphasizes that barriers are often found within the educational environment rather than within the child (Akbarovna, 2022). Globally, inclusive education has gained prominence as awareness of the rights of individuals with disabilities continues to grow (Qu, 2022). The United Arab Emirates (UAE), and particularly Abu Dhabi, has made significant strides in this area by implementing policies that promote inclusion across its educational system. Within the preschool context, inclusive education ensures that children with disabilities have the

opportunity to learn and interact alongside their typically developing peers during the critical early years of development (Al Badawi, 2024).

The global importance of early childhood education was reaffirmed during the 2022 World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education in Tashkent, which emphasized the inclusion of children at risk, including those with disabilities. The UAE, as a signatory, committed to advancing inclusive practices within its education system (Alnuaimi et al., 2024). In the UAE, early childhood refers to the preschool phase, encompassing structured care and learning for children from birth to six years old. The Emirati School model highlights the provision of high-quality educational experiences at this stage, with curricula tailored to children's developmental needs and cultural context (Al-Qinneh & Abu-Ayyash, 2022).

Despite these commitments, the implementation of inclusive education in Abu Dhabi's preschools varies significantly between the public and private sectors. Public preschools operate under national teaching standards that emphasize inclusivity, while private preschools often follow international curricula, resulting in diverse approaches to inclusion. Some institutions demonstrate strong inclusive practices, whereas others face difficulties due to limited resources, inconsistent teacher training, and varying levels of community awareness (Mohamed & Elhoweris, 2022).

The importance of this research lies in addressing these disparities. As a large proportion of children in Abu Dhabi are enrolled in private schools, understanding how inclusive education is practiced in these settings is critical. This study responds to that need by examining recent literature on inclusive practices in private preschools, identifying challenges, and highlighting strategies that have proven effective. Its significance extends to multiple stakeholders: educators can gain insights into practical strategies, policymakers can identify gaps that require intervention, and families can better understand the opportunities and barriers their children may encounter. Ultimately, strengthening inclusive education in Abu Dhabi's private preschools not only supports children with special needs but also promotes social cohesion and equity within the broader educational landscape.

Literature Review

Previous studies indicate that the differences in the curriculum, the qualification of teachers, and educational resources can affect the achievement of various results in the implementation of inclusive education (Woodcock et al., 2022). For example, Ayangco-Derramas (2022) showed that although public schools obligate to engage children with special needs, the support systems are sometimes not sufficient to ensure effective inclusion. On the other hand, private schools, which have more independence, may adopt more flexible methods but may not give priority to inclusion due to resource restrictions. These differences highlight the need to perform a comparative analysis to understand how to achieve inclusive education in different environments (Ayangco-Derramas, 2022). In addition, previous research has shown noticeable differences in the indicators used to assess the quality of preschool education in inclusive education services (Von Suchodoletz et al., 2022). For example, the study conducted by Philips and others (2022) highlights the importance of environmental factors, teacher efficiency, and early education programs when assessing preschool education. They point out that the quality of education at this stage includes several elements, where teachers, learning places, and curricula play a pivotal role in this.

Moreover, a study conducted by Page et al. (2023) indicates that the presence of structural and educational support effectively enhances inclusion, which includes training teachers and providing appropriate resources for students with special needs. Frantz et al. (2022) also demonstrated that improving policies related to comprehensive practices in early education requires specialized advocacy efforts and training for teachers. Often, the semester environment is an essential factor in achieving the quality of education. According to Debasu (2023), classrooms designed to meet the needs of all learners play a fundamental role in the success of inclusive education. The classroom environment is often considered a vital factor in achieving a well-rounded education.

According to Debasu (2023), classes that design to meet the needs of all learners play an important role in the success of educational inclusion. These classes are distinguished by a variety of seating arrangements, the presence of assistive technology, and curricula that are available to all students, including those with special needs. The involvement of parents and the community in promoting inclusive education is also necessary. Recent studies indicate that enhancing collaboration between families and schools would improve learning experiences for students and raises community understanding of the significance of educational inclusion (Eden, 2023). As a result, education policies in Abu Dhabi aim to reinforce this collaboration by implementing awareness and support initiatives for parents (Department of Education and Knowledge, ADEK, 2022). Within the context of the United Arab Emirates, and specifically in Abu Dhabi, research highlights the gap between policies and applications in the field of inclusive education in private kindergartens (Al Shamsi& Mohebi, 2023).

Their study highlights a lack of opportunities for teachers' professional development, as well as problems associated with resource distribution, which hinder the ability to fully implement inclusive education practices. Several challenges have been identified in the literature related to the implementation of inclusive education. Zickafoose et al. (2024) note that one of the core encounters is the accessibility of trained resources and employees. As well, the lack of a supportive strategy framework at the institutional level can be an obstacle to preschool education.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

The researchers conducted this study on ecosystems theory according to Bronenverrner (1979) and its components. This theory represents a comprehensive theoretical framework to understand how different environments interact and their effects on children's growth and learning. This theory is of special importance in the context of inclusive education with early childhood in private schools in Abu Dhabi, where the focus is on interaction between individuals, institutions and policies and its impact on children's learning experiences. This theory depends on five overlapping levels namely, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

Microsystem, which includes students, teachers, and colleagues, is an essential element, as positive assessments contribute to enhancing the inclusion. Teachers, colleagues and their ideas play a vital role in inclusion of special needs students (Swart & Pettipher, 2019). Mesystem supports home environments through cooperation between the family and the school, which helps students when the atmosphere of the house is compatible with those

in the school. The exosystem system includes indirect effects such as policies, training and workers resources, which are necessary for merge. The general system includes social, cultural and legal factors that constitute the attitudes and practices of inclusion, which are known as a macrosystem. Finally, Chronosystem explains how time contributes to children's growth, including political transformations and educational changes that affect the development of inclusive education initiatives (Al -Fazari and others, 2022).

By using Bronfenbrenner in the current research, interactions between the schools can be analyzed. Policies, teachers' training, parents' involvement, and government legislation can be studied for a comprehensive understanding of their common effects on inclusive education programs in private institutions in Abu Dhabi. This framework contributes to identifying challenges and also the factors that enhance the inclusion process, providing important visions to improve educational policies and support the effectiveness of comprehensive practices.

Methodology

This study adopts the narrative review method for collecting existing research on the application of inclusive education in the private preschools in Abu Dhabi. Careful research has been conducted through several academic databases, such as JSTOR, Eric and Google Scholar, with the aim of identifying articles studied by counterparts, official reports and scientific studies. Research, published in the past ten years, has obtained a priority in the review to ensure that the results reflect the current situation of inclusive education in Abu Dhabi (Alnuaimi et al., 2024). 10 sources have been evaluated, including research related to the United States. Each source was examined based on his contributions to understanding inclusive education policies, teachers training, evaluation frameworks, and school practices in special kindergarten in Abu Dhabi (Fiona, 2015). The study used the objective analysis method for organizing and explaining data from the literature that was systematically reviewed (ABAD, 2022). This method allowed identifying repeated patterns and topics related to inclusive education, which were divided into four main areas: implementation practices, curriculum content, evaluation methods, and challenges.

This study employs a narrative review approach to synthesize existing literature on the implementation of inclusive education in private preschools in Abu Dhabi. A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple scholarly databases, including JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar, to identify relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, official reports, and academic studies. The review prioritized research published within the last ten years to ensure that findings reflect the current state of inclusive education in Abu Dhabi (Alnuaimi et al., 2024). A total of 10 sources were reviewed, incorporating past research specific to the UAE. Each source was analyzed for its contribution to understanding inclusive education policies, teacher training, assessment frameworks, and school-level practices in Abu Dhabi's private preschools (Fiona, 2015). The study employed thematic analysis to systematically organize and interpret data from the reviewed literature (Ambad, 2022). This approach allowed for the identification of recurring patterns and themes related to inclusive education, which were categorized into four main areas: implementation practices, curriculum content, assessment methods, and challenges.

Findings

Implementation of inclusive education in private preschools of Abu Dhabi's

Abu Dhabi's private preschools have more flexibility in their adopted teaching methods, and it often chooses international programs such as the British curriculum for early years or the International Baccalaureate Program (Brown, 2024). These schools tend to adopt various and more specialized educational methods, which may have a positive impact on children who need additional help. However, the extent of involvement in private schools depends largely on the resources available (Cook & Ogden, 2022). Alhammadi (2024) note that although many private educational institutions provide ancillary services such as speech therapy and psychological counselling, other schools may not have the capacity to offer these options. In the UAE, particularly in Abu Dhabi, private preschools generally have better facilities and well-trained staff than public schools. However, the degree of inclusion varies significantly, with some institutions opting for partial inclusion rather than full inclusion. While this flexibility allows schools to adapt their approaches, it also results in inconsistencies in the quality of education across institutions (Mubarak, 2022).

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEK) has implemented a “staged” approach to inclusive education, ensuring that children with special needs receive appropriate support from preschool through secondary school. This model requires all schools to accommodate students within regular classrooms, with modifications made to meet diverse learning needs. Each school has a Learning Support Team, consisting of specialists such as the principal, social worker, classroom teacher, special education teacher, and school psychologist. These teams assess individual cases and develop personalized education plans where necessary. While these policies apply to both private and public schools, their implementation remains inconsistent at the preschool level (Fiona, 2015).

Table 1

Challenges of implementing inclusion education in private Preschool in Abu Dhabi

| Challenge | Description |
|--|--|
| Insufficient professional development for teachers | Many teachers lack training specialized in inclusive education strategies. |
| Limited resources | Certain private schools face challenges due to insufficient resources like assistance tools and expert teams. |
| Negative societal situations | A persistent negative view regarding the inclusion of students with special needs impacts the level of assistance offered. |
| Financial limitations | Private educational schools might struggle with funding inclusion and delivering suitable support services. |
| Absence of unified policies | There is a lack of consistent criteria for carrying out regional education, resulting in differences in the quality of implementation. |

Content and Curriculum

Private preschools in Abu Dhabi have greater flexibility in adapting their curricula to meet the diverse needs of their students. Many institutions implement a child-centred approach, incorporating play-based learning and personalized lesson plans to support students with special needs (AlQahtani, 2023). This flexibility contributes to facilitating the inclusion of students, as teachers can adjust learning experiences according to individual capabilities. However, there are noticeable differences in educational curricula between private schools, which affect the quality of mergers. Some institutions give more importance to academic

achievement rather than the inclusion of methods, which sometimes leads to the adoption of exclusionary practices (Al-Hendawi et al., 2023). Miri (2024) highlights that the school's resources and its commitment to inclusive education play a major role in determining the level of inclusion.

Inclusive education in early preschools in Abu Dhabi confirms the principles of comprehensive design, while embracing various learning methods such as visual, oral and text, and this system seeks to reduce the obstacles facing learning and ensure the existence of a inclusive educational environment. Moreover, behaviour management programs are included in the curricula to reduce negative behaviours and enhance positive interactions (Houella & Batrawi, 2023). In order to enhance inclusiveness, the Ministry of Education has developed policies that support the inclusion of children with special needs into regular classroom. Under Ministerial Resolution No. 647 of 2020, it obliges schools to provide educational programs and specialized educational services, such as individual treatment plans, to facilitate the inclusion of children with special needs. However, a disparity in implementation appears, as not all schools have the resources to achieve complete compliance with these policies.

Assessment and Evaluation

Private preschools in Abu Dhabi use a variety of evaluation methods, such as notes, governors, and informal assessments, to follow up on students' development. These methods provide valuable visions about children with special needs, allowing teachers to provide individual support (Al -Qahtani, 2023). However, the lack of a unified evaluation system led to differences in how to measure progress between private schools. Al -Hamdi (2024) indicates that many students with special needs are included in schools based on reports from government or private agencies, which makes schools depend on external assessments instead of implementing their own comprehensive assessments.

One of the basic factors that hinder the standardizing of the evaluation is financial issues. A large number of private educational institutions lack the necessary capabilities to adopt the internationally recognized evaluation systems, which reduces their ability to provide accurate and consistent assessments for students with special needs. These financial pressures affect the ability of schools to implement inclusive education effectively, as they cannot provide the necessary investments in specialized evaluation tools and experts trained to implement these assessments.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education

Despite the continuous efforts to enhance integrated education, private schools in Abu Dhabi face many great challenges, from the ability of teachers to resource restrictions and community opinions. One of the main obstacles is the lack of adequacy of teachers. Teachers' qualifications and qualifications are essential to achieving effective inclusion, but many special kindergarten teachers face difficulty in applying compact strategies due to poor training in special education methods. A study conducted by Meda et al. (2022) indicates that a large percentage of kindergarten teachers in Abu Dhabi do not have specialized training, which negatively affects the quality of integrated education. This is compatible with the opinions of pre -service education teachers who feel that they are not ready to deal with students with special needs (Youssef & Marzini, 2021). In some cases, the negative attitudes

of teachers towards inclusion, which result from the lack of training and experience, hinder more success in the application (Al-Zayoudi et al., 2021).

Limited resources and financial factors also represent a major obstacle. The absence of special education teachers, academic materials, and specialized educational tools greatly affects inclusion efforts. Mubarak (2022) highlights that in some preschools; these institutions lack the basic resources necessary to accommodate students with disabilities, which restrict their ability to provide the required individual support. School officials also face difficulties due to budget stress, which leads to a delay in developing comprehensive programs. Brines (2020) has discovered that financial restrictions often prevent private schools from allocating resources to invest in teachers training, specialized resources, and academic support, which creates gaps in providing service to students who need private support.

In the end, parents' opinions about totalitarianism contribute greatly. Parents' perceptions have a great impact on the effectiveness of inclusive programs. Some parents of children with special needs prefer specialized education settings, believing that private schools cannot fully meet their child's needs (Bock, 2015). Conversely, parents of typically developing children have mixed attitudes. Research by Dukmak et al. (2023) indicates that parents with lower levels of education tend to be more accepting of inclusion, while those with higher education levels express concerns about its potential impact on their child's academic progress.

Table 2

The differences between inclusive education in Government and private schools

| Aspect | Government schools | Private schools |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Curriculum | Subject to federal regulations that highlight the importance of inclusion. | Frequently associated with global programs that vary in how extensively they implement inclusion. |
| Government support | Supported by the government with direct funding and supervision. | It depends on self –financing, funding from students or tuition, influencing the resources that are accessible. |
| Teacher training | The government offers training initiatives for teachers focusing on inclusive teaching. | The level of training differs from one school to another, with some lacking sufficient habilitation options. |
| Support services | Government schools offer assistance such as employment support and counseling. | Certain schools offer assistance services, but they can be costly or may not be accessible. |
| The extent of the application | More mandatory according to national policies. | This is different from schools that depend on how they are run and the resources they have. |

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study show that inclusive education in private schools in Abu Dhabi is an important step towards creating fair educational environments for all children, including those with special needs. Although the inclusion of students provides opportunities for social and academic growth, its implementation is still unstable due to the difference in resources, the willingness of teachers, and the application of policies. To face these problems, it is

necessary to follow a comprehensive approach that includes educational institutions, decision-makers and societies in order to improve inclusive education practices.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides an important understanding of the complex interaction between environmental factors that affect inclusive education. This theory assumes that the child's growth is affected by several levels, from the direct school environment to the wider social structures. At the level of young people, the classroom and the effect of the teacher are decisive workers. Teachers play an important role in forming comprehensive environments, but a lack of training and support can significantly reduce their effectiveness. The dynamics of the semester, colleagues' interactions, and the use of individual teaching methods affect the success of the implementation of the inclusion. The media system, which focuses on cooperation between the school and the family, highlights the urgent need for good communication between parents and schools for the success of inclusion. Unfortunately, many parents express their concerns about inclusive education, and these concerns are often the result of cultural beliefs or a lack of confidence in the ability of private centres to meet their unique children's needs.

By moving to the exosystem, policies and institutional support, it is very important despite the presence of government policies such as Ministerial Resolution No. 647 (2020), but the lack of authorization and non-equal resources in the pre-school stage often hinders effective implementation. Schools need great financial and administrative support to ensure the amendment of the curricula, provide comprehensive training for teachers, and provide the necessary auxiliary technologies. Finally, the macrosystem, including cultural and societal ideas, is of great importance. Cultural attitudes towards disability and inclusion greatly affect the expectations of parents and practices in schools. A greater societal change is needed to enhance awareness and accept inclusive education as a useful model for all children. Using a Bronfenbrenner's Theory, it is clear that inclusive education is not just an isolated practice; rather, it is formed through a complex network of interconnected factors, which requires comprehensive and multi-sided intervention strategies.

To enhance inclusive education in the private school in Abu Dhabi, there are many important aspects that need attention. First, teachers training and professional development should be at the top of the priorities. This requires the provision of continuous and specialized training programs that help teachers gain the necessary skills to meet various learning needs. In addition, teachers' preparation programs must include units related to inclusive education as a basic standard. The standardizing of inclusive education practices among schools is also necessary. Private schools must follow national and international standards related to inclusion, to ensure consistency in practices. The government should implement monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the success of the implementation of inclusion policies within schools.

Finally, promoting resource customization for inclusive classroom is another major field that must be focused on. Schools need financial support to invest in educational technologies and the necessary supplies, and the mechanisms for modifying classrooms in proportion to the needs of everyone. Partnerships with government agencies and private organizations can contribute to facilitating financing and resource exchange initiatives.

Limitations of the Study

The research reviewed in this study covers the period between 2015 and 2024, focusing on new studies related to the implementation of inclusive education in private preschool. This review contains forty studies carefully selected to cover the topic of inclusive education in kindergarten, providing a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities and challenges in this field. Most research is focused on international contexts, but some studies are specifically relevant to Abu Dhabi. Some researchers point to private schools in Abu Dhabi, while other studies review regional and global contexts. Although some of the research was conducted in different regions such as the United States and Europe, its findings highlight issues that may be relevant to the local context in Abu Dhabi, with some modifications possible.

Conclusion

The implementation of inclusive education in private preschools in Abu Dhabi presents both opportunities and challenges. While policies promote inclusivity, gaps in teacher training, resource allocation, and community perceptions continue to hinder full inclusion. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory illustrates the interconnected nature of these challenges, emphasizing the need for multi-level interventions. Moving forward, improvements in teacher training, resource distribution, policy standardization, and community engagement are essential to ensuring that inclusive education becomes an effective and sustainable practice in Abu Dhabi's private preschools.

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