

In the name of God

**An Evaluation of an Experimental Programme of
Inclusive Education in Iran**

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Abstract

An inclusive education plan was initiated in three regions of Iran. This report presents a summary of the evaluation results. The objectives of the evaluation were to examine the academic achievement of normal students and students with special educational needs; to examine the facilitation of grade promotion of normal students and students with special educational needs; and to examine attitude changes of teachers, parents of children with special needs and normal children towards accepting students with special needs. The results showed that there was no significant difference in the academic achievement of the students with special needs in the experimental group and the control group in one province, but that there was a difference in the other. The implementation of this plan had no effect on the academic achievement of other students as compared with the control group, except for the ordinary students in the experimental group of one province. Secondly, the results showed a positive change in attitude in teachers, although the teachers of the experimental group in both provinces expressed uncertainty of sufficient provision for special needs. The parents' attitude of normal children in the experimental group in one province showed a positive significant difference compared with the control group. In the other province, the parents of the experimental group showed no significant preference over the control group but the attitude of both groups of parents was positive.

For the purpose of quantitative and qualitative improvement of education system as one of the most essential tasks of the Ministry of Education, and in line with the commitments of this Ministry undertaken in the World Conference of Education Institutions called Education for All within the treaty of Dakar, Senegal (2000), (especially Clause 2, Article 7 and Article 19 of the descriptive notes, and also Part 5, Clause 3 of the Education for All statement drawn up in Jomtein), the Special Education Organization (SEO) of Iran launched a project on a probationary basis in two provinces. The preparatory measures started since 1998 with the collaboration of two international institutions (i.e. UNESCO and UNICEF) in order to provide the insight and the required knowledge for planning toward inclusive education in the country, with the aim of tolerance and consideration to individual differences and meeting specific needs of learners.

In coordination with Community-Based Rehabilitation plan in welfare departments of the relevant provinces, the Special Education Organization (SEO), upon cooperation with UNICEF and responsible organizations in the Ministry of Education (Basic Education Deputy, Education Departments of Esfahan and Gilan Provinces), took measures to facilitate education for the children with special educational needs (children with borderline intelligence, mild to moderate hearing, visual, physical and motor impairments). This took place on an experimental basis in three districts (including rural and urban regions) in each province through expanding support to the schools and teachers welcoming these children and by training experts of the education departments, school principals and teachers in the use of UNESCO's Teacher Education Resource Pack, "Special Needs in Classroom", and providing some strategic instructional recommendations.

As evaluating the efficiency of these measures in the experimental phase was believed to be a necessary step toward improvement and expansion of the plan. The Educational Planning and Human Resources Deputy of Special Education Organization evaluated the effects of the plan with the collaboration of UNICEF and the education departments of provinces implementing the plan. A summary of this evaluation project and the results thereof is presented in this paper.

Methodology

In order to evaluate the efficiency of interventions taken by the plan in three districts in Isaac Province, and three districts in Golan Province (namely Najafabad, Shahreza and Khomeinishahr regions in Isfahan Province and Talesh, Langrood and Astaneh Ashrafieh regions in Gilan Province), the following factors and indexes were assessed:

- 1- Academic achievement evaluated through annual average of normal students and the students with special needs in the subjects of mathematics, Persian reading and spelling, the average of these three subjects and the annual G.P.A.;
- 2- Facilitation of grade promotion, which was evaluated by the frequency of the normal students and students with special needs who passed, re-examined or failed;
- 3- Improvement of welcoming teachers' attitude toward accepting students with special needs in their classrooms which was evaluated through quantifying their replies to the researcher-developed questionnaire;
- 4- Attitude improvement of the parents of children with special needs toward the education of their children in mainstream schools and classrooms which was evaluated through quantifying their replies to the researcher-developed questionnaire;
- 5- Attitude improvement of the parents of normal children toward the education of their children in schools and classrooms accepting

students with special needs which was evaluated through quantifying their replies to the researcher-developed questionnaire.

As proper data were not available on the input situation of the concerned indexes in the target groups, three districts were determined for selecting a control group. The cultural, social and economic characteristics were considered as pairing factors, as determined by Province Education department and Governor Generals Office. The volume of sample was 25% of schools in each district. Thus, the study sample comprising about 150 students with special needs, 150 normal students, 140 parents of children with special needs, 150 parents of normal children and 100 welcoming teachers in Esfahan Province and about 55 students with special needs, 90 normal students, 60 parents of the students with special needs, 60 parents of the normal students and 40 welcoming teachers in Gilan Province.

The academic scores of students with special needs and the normal students in welcoming schools (the sample group), in both pilot and control areas, were extracted from the transcripts prepared by the official computerized system of school examinations and were analyzed by SPSS software.

The parents and teachers answered the questionnaires administered by trained experts of Special Education Organization in the absence of school teachers and principals (for parents), and in the absence of principals or other authorities (for teachers). T test and Chi Square (X^2) test were used to analyze the results based on the type of gathered data. The summary of the results is as follows:

Summary of the results

Academic achievement

The achievement of special needs students in **Esfahan**, as evaluated by students' scores in Persian reading, spelling and mathematics, average of the three subjects and G.P.A., showed no significant difference in any of the indexes comparing with that of the control group. This can in itself show the fact that the more strict standards of Isfahan Province teachers in evaluating students have reduced the chance of emerging change in the progress of students with special needs. However, the training offered by the on-the-job courses has improved the teaching skills of teacher and this has led to higher scores of normal students. In **Gilan** Province, however, the results show that the intervention taken under the experimental plan of inclusive education had positive effects on the academic achievement of students with special needs in all indexes. The overall results of the two provinces show the efficiency of the intervention of all indexes, except that of "Persian reading". It is important to mention that the results for the two provinces are mainly affected by the overall results in Gilan Province.

As far as the normal students are concerned, the results show that the interventions conducted in **Esfahan** Province within the framework of experimental plan of inclusive education was more positively effective on the academic achievement of this group of students rather than the students with special needs. In general, the scores of the normal students in the cities covered under the plan in the field of "Persian reading, dictation, mathematics", "average of the three basic subjects" and "G.P.A." were higher than those in cities not included in the plan. The results in **Gilan** Province are the opposite, so that there is no difference between the scores of normal students in the

said subjects, their average of three basic subjects and their G.P.A. in cities covered under the plan and cities where the plan was not introduced. The **overall results of the two provinces** show that the scores of normal students in the concerned subjects in cities covered under the plan are significantly higher than the scores of normal students in control regions and this difference is mainly due to the effect of the results obtained in Isfahan Province on the overall results of the two provinces.

Regarding the effect of the intervention on **grade promotion**, as examined by the frequency of students who passed, re-examined and failed, there was no significant differences between experimental and control groups. The only difference observed was the number of normal students who passed the examinations in experimental regions in **Gilan** was higher.

It is important to mention, however, that the number of re-examined and failed students was generally very limited and is insignificant due to the very low number. In total, the results on academic achievement of students with special needs and the normal students in experimental and control regions as confronting to the survey results on teachers opinion poll of teachers about the quality of their on-the-job training indicate that although, as viewed by the teachers, the content of the courses provided good information, the courses were poor in providing practical methods needed by the teachers. Therefore, although these courses improved the attitude of teachers toward accepting students with special needs in the ordinary classes, as observed in all teachers' attitude improvement, they do not put apprehensible effects on the performance of students where the educational evaluation standards are stricter and the quality of education is higher (Esfahan Province). Also, since about 97% of the students covered under the plan were 1st or 2nd graders of primary school, the ease of learning concepts and educational promotion in these grades might have acted as an impediment toward proper manifestation of the effect of the measures conducted under the plan.

Attitudes of teachers

As for the effect of the interventions conducted under the plan on the attitude of teachers of students with special needs, the results show that in **Esfahan** Province, the said teachers had significantly more positive attitudes toward the provision made for special needs, their own skills, the future of the students with special needs, and the relationships of special and normal students with each other in the cities covered under the plan as compared with other regions. But the attitude of both groups is identical on confirming the results of pre-school assessments i.e. both groups are unsure about the accuracy of the results of the said assessments. As for accepting special needs by school and parents, the said teachers, in both regions (experimental and control), agree to some degree that the school and the parents acknowledge the special needs. As for sufficient provision of special needs, although there is a significant difference between teachers of the two groups of experimental and control regions, the results show uncertainty of teachers in both groups toward sufficient provision for the special needs of students. However, this uncertainty is less strong in teachers in control group as compared with the teachers in the plan territory. This can indicate higher sensitivity of teachers in the plan territory toward the needs of special children.

The teachers of the plan territory in **Gilan** Province had a more positive attitude toward provision of special needs, their own skills, the future of the students with special needs, and the inter-relations of students as compared with their colleagues in control regions. Although no significant difference was observed between the two groups on the results of pre-school assessments and provision of special needs, the teachers in the control group showed a more positive attitude, in that the teachers in the control groups were more agreed with the results of assessment than the teachers in the study territory.

In regard to accepting the special needs by the parents and the schools, both groups agree to some degree that the school and the parents have acknowledged the special needs and there is no difference between the two groups in this regard. Both groups are uncertain if such needs are sufficiently met.

The analysis of the results obtained from these **two provinces** showed that the teachers in the study territory in **Isfahan and Gilan** provinces had a more positive attitude toward provision of special needs, their skills, the future of students with special needs and the relationships of students together as compared with the teachers working in cities not included in the plan. Although there is no significant difference between the two groups in view of accepting the results of the preschool assessment plan, the group teaching in control regions are more agreed with these results.

With regard to the acceptance of special needs by the school and the parents, the teachers in both groups agree that the school and the parents have accepted such needs and no significant difference was identified between the two groups. As for sufficiently meeting the special needs, although no statistically significant difference was observed between the two groups and the results show that both groups are uncertain if these needs are met sufficiently. This uncertainty is higher in the group working in the areas covered under the plan.

Attitudes of parents

As to the attitude of the parents of students with special needs in the cities covered under the plan and the control regions, in **Esfahan** province, no significant difference was observed between the parents of students with special needs on accepting the differences of their children with normal children between the two groups. That is, both groups are relatively opposed to the idea of their children being different from the others. As for satisfaction of required supports, both groups are uncertain if their child benefits from required supports or not. In relation to receiving enough supports so far, no significant difference was observed between the two groups and none of the groups are satisfied with the services offered. As for optimism toward the future of their child, the group covered under the plan are significantly more optimistic toward the future of their child, comparing with the other group.

In regard to satisfaction over the educational progress of their child, no significant difference is observed and both groups are relatively satisfied with the educational progress of their children. The group covered under the plan are significantly more satisfied with the performance of the school staff as compared with the control group. In view of more comprehending and accepting attitude toward the differences of their child with ordinary children, the group covered under the plan has a more accepting attitude than the other group.

In **Gilan** Province, the parents of both groups are “relatively opposed” to the idea that their children are different from other children. However, the control group expressed significantly more open opposition.

With regard to the satisfaction of their child from required supports, although both groups are “uncertain”, the group covered under the plan shows significantly more certainty. As for receiving enough supports, the group covered under the plan are significantly more satisfied. In relation to optimism toward the future of the child, the difference observed is not significant, in that both groups are optimistic but the degree of optimism is higher in the group covered under the plan. In regard to satisfaction over academic achievement of the child, there is no significant difference between the two groups and both groups are satisfied to some degree. However, the average scores of the group covered by the plan show that they are definite on the academic achievement of their child and are satisfied, while the other group is not sure.

As for satisfaction over performance of the school staff, no statistically significant difference is observed between the two groups, however the group covered under the plan is more satisfied. In regard to tolerant and accepting attitude toward differences of the child, the difference of the two groups is not significant and both groups have “relatively admitting” attitude toward the differences of their child with the normal students.

In general, the analysis of data obtained from the **two provinces** shows that there is no significant difference between attitude of the parents of students with special needs in cities covered or not covered under the plan in **Esfahan and Gilan** Provinces on accepting differences of their child with the normal children, i.e. both groups are “relatively opposed” to the idea that such differences exist. As far as satisfaction of required supports is concerned, no significant difference is observed between the two and both groups are “uncertain” of the satisfaction of their children from required supports. In view of receiving enough supports, although no statistically significant difference is observed and both groups are relatively satisfied, the degree of satisfaction of the group covered under the plan is higher. On the issue of optimism toward the future of the child, a significant difference arises, i.e. although both groups are optimistic, the group covered under the plan are more optimistic. In regard to satisfaction over educational progress of their child, there is no significant difference between the two groups and both are relatively satisfied. In view of satisfaction over performance of the school staff, the difference is significant. The group covered under the study is fully satisfied while the other group is relatively satisfied with the performance of school staff. As far as accepting attitude toward difference of their child with normal children is concerned, there is no significant difference and both groups have a relatively accepting attitude toward this issue.

In **Esfahan** Province, there is no significant difference between the parents of normal students in schools covered under the plan and in other schools in regard to satisfaction over performance of the school staff and both groups are fully satisfied. As for their attitude toward special needs, although there is no significant difference between the two groups and they show a more accepting attitude. In regard to accepting the relationships of normal students and the students with special needs, a

significant difference is not observed i.e. both groups agree with such relationships. The group covered under the plan shows a higher degree of agreement. The two groups don't show a significant difference in view of satisfaction over the academic achievement of their child and both groups are "relatively satisfied" with the academic achievement of their child.

In **Gilan** Province, there is no significant difference between the parents of normal students in schools covered under the plan and in other schools in regard to satisfaction over performance of the school staff and both groups are equally satisfied. As for their attitude toward special needs, there is no significant difference between the two, and both show a relatively admitting attitude. In regard to the relationships of ordinary students and the students with special needs, no significant difference is observed and both groups agree with such relationships "to some degree". The two groups don't show a significant difference in view of satisfaction over the academic achievement of their child and both groups are "relatively satisfied" with the academic achievement of their child.

In general, the data resulted from the study in **both Isfahan and Gilan** provinces showed that there is no significant difference between the parents of ordinary students in schools covered under the plan and in other schools in regard to satisfaction over performance of the school staff and both groups are relatively satisfied with the performance of them. As for their attitude toward special needs, a significant difference is observed between the two, in that the group covered under the plan shows a more admitting attitude as compared with the other group. In regard to the relationships of normal students and the students with special needs, a significant difference is observed between the two groups in the sense that both groups look positively at such relationships, but the group covered under the plan takes a more positive attitude. There is no significant difference between the two groups in view of satisfaction over the academic achievement of their child and both groups are "relatively satisfied" with the academic achievement of their child.

