جامعة الأمير عبد القادر للعلوم الإسلامية قسنطينة – الجزائر

ISSN: 1112-4377, EISSN: 2588-2384
المجلد: 30 العدد: 02 السنة: 2026

مجلة المعيار
EL MIEYAR

The Reality of School Inclusion for Students with Special Needs in Mainstream Schools (A Field Study of Integrated Classrooms in Oum El Bouaghi)

واقع الدمج المدرسي لذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة في المدارس العادية (دراسة ميدانية بالأقسام المدمجة بأم البواقي)

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Received: 21/09/2025 ***published: 15/03/2026***
تاريخ الاستلام: 2025/09/21 **تاريخ النشر: 2026/03/15**

Article abstract:

The integration of children with special needs into mainstream classrooms is one of the fundamental rights recognized by organizations and institutions concerned with this group, as it has positive repercussions both socially and individually. It provides them with the opportunity to be ordinary people with the right to obtain educational services equal to their peers, thereby enabling them to break away from isolation and social withdrawal. Through this article, we aim to identify the reality of integrating children with special needs into regular classrooms and to explore the main problems hindering this process. To achieve this, we relied on interviews with 11 teachers working in integrated classrooms in the state of Oum El Bouaghi. Among the most important results obtained is that the process of school inclusion for this group faces many problems, some related to the material and human resources available for this group, the lack of documentation, and the absence of a dedicated annual program for integrated classrooms, and others related to the attitudes of others and their families toward the education of this group.

Keywords: *inclusion; school inclusion; children with special needs; mainstream schools*

ملخص المقال:

الدمج المدرسي للأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة في الأقسام العادية من الحقوق الأساسية التي أقرتها المنظمات والهيئات التي ترعى شؤون هذه الفئة ،لما له من انعكاسات إيجابية على الصعيد الاجتماعي وعلى الصعيد الفردي من خلال إتاحة الفرصة لهم ليكونوا أشخاصا عاديين لهم الحق في الحصول على الخدمات التعليمية المساوية لأقرانهم العاديين وبالتالي الخروج من العزلة والانكماش الاجتماعي. حيث نهدف من خلال هذا المقال إلى التعرف على واقع دمج ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة في الأقسام العادية والتعرف على أهم المشكلات التي تعيق الدمج .ولتحقيق ذلك اعتمدنا على المقابلة مع 11 من معلمين الذين يدرسون في الأقسام المدمجة بولاية أم البواقي،ومن أهم النتائج المتوصل إليها هو أن عملية الدمج المدرسي لهذه الفئة تعيقها الكثير من المشكلات منها ما تعلق بالإمكانيات المادية والبشرية المؤطرة لهذه الفئة وقلة التوثيق وغياب برنامج سنوي خاص بالأقسام المدمجة، ومنها ما تعلق باتجاهات الآخرين وأسرهم تجاه تعليم هذه الفئة.

كلمات مفتاحية : الدمج؛ الدمج المدرسي؛ ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة؛ المدارس العادية.

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Introduction

Disability, in its various forms, is one of the social problems experienced by different human societies. Society's views have varied from contempt and rejection, to pity and compassion. Recently, however, it has received wide and growing attention from researchers and specialists in order to guarantee as many rights as possible for this group, called people with special needs, as they are considered part of society and have the right to a decent life and a positive view of them just like other individuals. Among the fundamental rights that ensure this is the right to education alongside typically developing children, and from here school inclusion in mainstream schools emerged.

The integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools is one of the important topics in the field of special education today. This interest resulted from the sustained efforts of researchers and specialists, which stemmed from the change in the traditional view of educating this group, which used to take place in special schools and rehabilitation centers. Such practices contributed more to their isolation than to their integration, as they did not allow them to interact with members of society. This led those concerned with the education of this group to reconsider the educational approach adopted, and from here emerged the idea of integrating and unifying the educational aspect of children with special needs with regular children, in line with their legitimate rights, through creating special classrooms within mainstream schools equipped to meet their needs and characteristics. This would prepare them to be integrated into regular classrooms with their peers at a later stage, once they acquire basic principles of language, communication, and behavior, which would facilitate their interaction within the educational institution as a miniature society, and thus ease their integration into the broader society later on.

1. Research Problem

It is no longer possible to ignore the right of any child to education and active participation in society and social life, regardless of gender, age, background, or abilities. Everyone has come to realize that children with special needs have the same rights as typically developing peers. Many studies and modern trends in the education of individuals with disabilities have confirmed the necessity of providing life conditions as close as possible to those available to the general population, and of offering them opportunities to interact with their peers. These studies have also emphasized the importance of early intervention in the education of children with special needs and shaping their future to guarantee their rights.

A child who suffers from a particular disability or special need has many rights, just like any other child, especially the right to an education that suits his or her individual needs. He has the full right to have his human dignity respected, to be protected from any exploitation or degrading treatment, and to acquire as much independence as possible. He also has the right to belong to society, to social integration, and to participate in social activities as a member of society (Amer, 2015).

To support this group and guarantee more rights for them, especially in the field of education and the acquisition of academic and cognitive skills, the concept of inclusion in mainstream schools alongside regular peers emerged. It was a reaction against the practices that had prevailed in the past for long periods, which consisted in isolating them in special institutions—a practice that often caused their cognitive abilities to stagnate rather than develop.

Educational or school inclusion is one of the modern approaches in special education. It consists in educating children with special needs in mainstream schools with their peers, which works to strengthen their self-confidence and develop their awareness. School inclusion provides a sound educational and social environment, allows them to build social communication and friendships with their peers, develops their social and communication skills and their sense of belonging, and increases their motivation to learn. It also

gives regular children the opportunity to change their perception of children with special needs, instilling in them new convictions free from discrimination, prejudice, and condescension.

However, the process of including this group in mainstream schools requires many resources and specialized human capacities. Many studies have addressed this issue to understand the reality of inclusion, its problems, and the attitudes toward it, whether from parents or teachers—such as the study by Fatiha Haddadou and Fathi Qirra (2022), the study by Mohamed Qumari and others (2023), and the study by Mohamedi Fouzia (2019).

To investigate the reality of school inclusion for children with special needs in the state of Oum El Bouaghi, we conducted this exploratory study to answer the following questions:

1. Does teaching children with special needs in mainstream schools contribute to improving their skills and adaptability?
2. What are the main problems and obstacles hindering the process of school inclusion?
3. What recommendations could improve the process of school inclusion?

2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is reflected, from the theoretical standpoint, in its scientific contribution to the body of knowledge on the education of children with special needs for those interested in this field of research. From the practical standpoint, its importance lies in the possibility of benefiting from the results obtained regarding the reality of integrating children with special needs into mainstream schools.

We hope to present a vision that contributes to improving the conditions and reality of school inclusion and to providing the necessary resources and means, whether material or human, by those responsible for this group. Furthermore, we hope that the results of this research paper will draw the attention of the authorities to the most significant problems hindering and limiting the effectiveness of inclusion in mainstream schools.

3. Objectives of the Study

Through this research paper, we aim to:

- ¬ Identify the contribution of school inclusion in improving the skills and adaptability of children with special needs in mainstream classrooms in the state of Oum El Bouaghi.
- ¬ Identify the most significant problems facing the process of school inclusion in mainstream schools in Oum El Bouaghi.
- ¬ Present some recommendations that could facilitate the process of school inclusion in mainstream schools.

4. Definition of Terms in the Study

- ¬ **School Inclusion:** In this study, we mean placing students with special needs in mainstream educational institutions, in regular classrooms with their typically developing peers, either throughout the entire school period or for part of the time, within a specific type of inclusion, with the aim of developing various educational and social skills.
- ¬ **Children with Special Needs:** In this study, we refer to students who suffer from a deficiency in the ability to learn or acquire a particular skill due to genetic or acquired factors, compared to their peers, and who require special educational and rehabilitative programs.

5. Previous Studies

The issue of integrating children with special needs into society in general, and into educational institutions in particular, has received considerable attention from researchers specializing in this field. Many previous studies have examined the subject of inclusion and its challenges. We cite some of them below:

- **Study by Masouda Ben Essayah (2025):** This study aimed to identify the most prominent problems of including children with special needs in mainstream schools from the perspective of their teachers (a field study in the Wilaya of Laghouat). The researcher used the descriptive method and applied a questionnaire on the problems of inclusion from the teachers' perspective to a sample of 19 teachers (male and female). The study concluded that the main problems faced by children with special needs integrated into mainstream schools are related to relationships within the school environment.
- **Study by Mohamed Qumari, Maghnia Kouaich, and Houaria Yebo (2023):** This study aimed to examine the reality of inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools (a field study with primary education teachers in Mostaganem). The researchers relied on the descriptive method and distributed a scale to a sample of 141 primary school teachers. The study concluded that there are negative attitudes among the sample toward the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools.
- **Study by Soulaf Bouabdellah (2023):** Entitled *"Successful School Inclusion of Children with Special Needs: Between Theorists' Views and Regulatory Laws"*, this study aimed to identify the factors of successful school inclusion for children with special needs from the perspectives of theorists in the field on the one hand, and the content of laws on the other. Using the descriptive-analytical method, the study concluded that it is necessary to regulate and adapt a set of material and human factors—direct and indirect—across various organizational aspects to ensure successful inclusion.
- **Study by Fatiha Haddadou and Fathi Qirra (2022):** This study diagnosed the reality of including children with special needs in regular classrooms (a field study in primary schools in Djelfa). Using the descriptive method, a questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 40 teachers across different schools. The study found difficulties in inclusion related to non-specialized teachers, the absence of a specific program tailored to the abilities of children with special needs, and a lack of available resources.
- **Study by Ben Kharima Bouhafs and Ben Nasser Farhat (2020):** This study aimed to identify the obstacles to the inclusion of children with special needs and ways to strengthen it (a field study in Ouargla). Using the descriptive-analytical method and a questionnaire covering multiple dimensions, distributed to a sample of 68 teachers (male and female), the study concluded that the biggest barrier to school inclusion relates primarily to training curricula, followed by school buildings, support services, school administration, and obstacles related to parents.

Summary of Previous Studies:

Reviewing previous studies shows that significant efforts have been made by the authorities to implement the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools. However, these efforts remain limited and require adequate material and human resources to achieve this goal.

6. Theoretical Framework of the Study

6.1. The Concept of School Inclusion

Individuals with special needs are an integral part of the social fabric. The importance of activating strategies and means that improve the quality of services provided to them lies in enhancing their chances of rehabilitation and social integration. School inclusion is considered one of the most prominent mechanisms to achieve this, as it involves the participation of children with special needs alongside their peers in a unified educational environment. This type of inclusion fosters feelings of equality and non-discrimination, reduces social exclusion, and positively impacts their social interaction, communication, and sense of belonging, while also developing their social skills.

Some definitions of school inclusion include:

- The term *inclusion* refers to participation in the general educational environment when it is believed that the child is academically and emotionally ready (Margaret & Al, 2000, p. 16).
- The term *inclusion* also refers to placing students with special needs in regular classrooms, either full-time or part-time, without providing special education services (Martin , Robert S. , & Robert F. , 2013, p. 23).
- The goal of school inclusion is to place the child with special needs in a regular classroom with typically developing peers for certain periods and in certain subjects, which the child can cope with or benefit from depending on the nature, level, and severity of needs. This requires adapting the classroom environment to include elements that assist learning, such as equipment, tools, and teaching aids, so the child can learn and feel no different from others, or to study in mainstream schools within integrated classrooms.
- Integrated classrooms are defined as: *"Classrooms in mainstream schools to which children with special needs are initially admitted, giving them the opportunity to interact with typically developing peers for as much of the school day as possible."*(Meskine & Bouabdallah, 2022, p. 275).

Thus, inclusion in the educational context can be defined as the practice of educating children with special needs in regular classrooms during specified periods, based on their skills and abilities, alongside typically developing peers. This means educating them in mainstream schools—not in special centers—using adapted educational content suited to their capabilities.

6.2. Objectives of School Inclusion

The inclusion of children with special needs seeks to achieve multiple objectives, mainly: enabling them to interact socially, escape isolation, achieve educational and psychological adjustment, and modify the negative perceptions of their families and others about their limited abilities.

According to Tarek Abdelraouf Amer (2015), the philosophy of school inclusion for children with disabilities achieves the following goals:

1. Increasing opportunities for social interaction between children with disabilities and their typically developing peers, whether inside the classroom or within the school environment, through joint activities.
2. Modifying negative attitudes toward children with disabilities—especially rejection, non-acceptance, and exclusion—into positive attitudes characterized by acceptance and cooperation.

3. Reducing financial costs associated with segregated schools, which require separate buildings, specialized staff, and equipment.
4. Allowing a larger number of children with disabilities to access quality education in mainstream schools.
5. Reducing the negative stereotypes and stigmas prevalent in some developing societies, which leave harmful psychological effects.
6. Ensuring the civil rights of children with disabilities by affirming their right to equal educational services provided to typically developing peers (Amer, 2015, p. 18).
7. Improving the psychological and social adjustment of children with disabilities, enabling them to exit isolation, while also allowing typically developing students to interact with and better understand their peers with disabilities (Hanem, 2001, p. 232).

6.3. Types of School Inclusion

Inclusion has various types and forms, depending on the kind and degree of disability, the child's abilities, and his or her capacity for learning, communication, and behavior regulation. According to Khawla Ahmed Yahya (2006), inclusion can be classified as follows:

1. **Spatial Inclusion:** This refers to the sharing of facilities between special education institutions and mainstream schools, while each school retains its own curriculum, teaching methods, and staff.
2. **Educational/Academic Inclusion:** This involves children with disabilities and typically developing students attending the same school, supervised by the same staff and within the same program. It may involve differences in curricula and includes three forms:
   - **Special Classes:** The child is placed in a special class for children with disabilities within the mainstream school initially, while still having opportunities to interact with typically developing peers for as much of the school day as possible, as preparation for future integration into regular classes.
   - **Resource Rooms:** These are rooms within mainstream schools equipped with appropriate furniture, educational toys, and teaching aids, where children with disabilities receive targeted support for specific skills under the supervision of a special education teacher before returning to their regular class.
   - **Regular Class:** The child with disabilities is placed in a regular classroom under the supervision of a teacher with adequate training in special education, with slight modifications to the classroom environment to suit the child's needs (Yahya, 2006, p. 20).

6.4. Children with Special Needs

The term *children with special needs* appeared in the last quarter of the twentieth century in the United States to reflect a more positive and optimistic perspective toward children who differ significantly from their peers, whether positively or negatively, requiring modifications in educational practices, curricula, and services to meet their needs and to help them achieve optimal development across different personal aspects (Taha, 2014).

According to Hanafi, children with special needs are: *"those who have lost a sense, limb, ability, or skill—or more—that continuously prevents them from achieving successful performance, self-fulfillment, and meeting their needs independently, leaving them unable to support themselves or live a dignified life without the assistance of others."*(Hanafi, 2000, p. 27).

7. Field Study Procedures

We relied on the descriptive-analytical method, which is suitable for this type of research, since we are concerned with identifying the reality of school inclusion for children with special needs in regular

classrooms within mainstream schools, and investigating the most important problems and obstacles that hinder effective inclusion for this group.

7.2. Research Population and Sample

The research population consisted of teachers who teach children with special needs in integrated classrooms in mainstream schools (primary education institutions) in the Wilaya of Oum El Bouaghi. Since there are only two primary schools that contain integrated classrooms—and these classrooms are newly established—namely *Ghadiri Abdelkader Primary School* and *Adel Chafii Primary School*, the study sample included teachers working in these classrooms.

The sample consisted of **11 female teachers** distributed across the following specializations: speech therapy specialist, clinical psychology specialist, and educational psychology specialist, in addition to the principal of *Ghadiri Abdelkader Primary School*.

7.3. Research Tool

For this study, we relied on semi-structured interviews with the teachers of the integrated classrooms and the school principal mentioned above. This was done by asking a set of questions relevant to the research. We also relied on non-participant observation by attending integrated classrooms during teaching.

The interview questions were as follows:

- Has teaching children with special needs in mainstream schools contributed to improving their skills and adaptability? If so, how?
- What are the obstacles or problems hindering actual inclusion?
- How can the process of school inclusion be improved, and what are your suggestions?

7.4. Statistical Methods Used in Analyzing Results

We analyzed the interview results with teachers using both quantitative analysis (frequencies and percentages) and qualitative analysis of participants' responses to the interview questions (based on the unit of meaning).

7.5. Presentation and Analysis of Interview Results

7.5.1. Teachers' Responses to the First Question

Has teaching children with special needs in mainstream schools contributed to improving their adaptability and skills? If so, how?

By analyzing teachers' responses to the first question based on the unit of meaning, we obtained the results shown in the following table:

Table 1: Represents the teachers' responses to the first question

Percentage	Frequency	Statements
36.6%	4	Improvement in teachers' perception of this group
72.7%	8	Regular children in school got used to playing with them
63.6%	7	Children with disabilities acquired some simple language concepts
63.6%	7	Reduction of certain aggressive behaviors in some children

prepared by the researcher

From the above table, which shows the responses of teachers working in integrated classrooms to the first question, we find that most teachers believe that the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools helps them improve their adaptability with peers. Specifically, 8 out of 11 teachers stated that this process enables regular children to get used to playing with children with special needs during recess, thus allowing interaction and communication, making them feels no different from their peers, and fostering social and language skills.

In addition, this changes the perception of typically developing children toward this group, helping them accept them as they are, and not avoiding interaction with them. This improves the psychological and social adaptability of children with special needs and paves the way for their future social integration.

Teachers also indicated that school inclusion contributes to reducing and controlling some aggressive behaviour in certain children, thanks to the efforts of teachers specializing in speech therapy, clinical psychology, and educational/ school psychology, who are better able to work with this group due to their training in special education. These teachers help manage and correct children's behaviour as preparation for integrating them into regular classrooms.

Furthermore, 7 out of 11 teachers reported that inclusion contributes to the acquisition of language skills through interaction, contact, and practice. Meanwhile, 4 teachers noted that school inclusion provides teachers in mainstream classrooms with more knowledge about this group and changes their perception of the children's learning abilities, recognizing that they too can learn if given the right opportunities.

In conclusion, teachers' responses to the first question suggest that school inclusion plays a role in improving the psychological and social adaptability of children with special needs, while also fostering their communication, social, and language skills, and altering negative perceptions among teachers and peers toward this group.

7.5.2. Teachers' Responses to the Second Question

What are the obstacles or problems hindering actual inclusion?

By analyzing teachers' responses to the second interview question, a set of problems and obstacles hindering the process of inclusion were identified, as shown in the following table:

Table 2: represents the teachers' responses to the second question

Percentage	Frequency	Statements
100%	11	Lack of special classrooms dedicated to teaching this group
63.6%	7	Lack of pedagogical resources and teaching aids
100%	11	Absence of an annual program followed by teachers
81.8%	9	Lack of documentation
100%	11	Lack of teachers specialized in special education

Prepared by the researcher.

From the above table, we see that teachers working with children with special needs identified a set of problems and obstacles limiting the achievement of effective and quality inclusion.

All teachers unanimously agreed that there are no dedicated classrooms for teaching these children. Instead, empty classrooms not needed by the school administration were repurposed as integrated classes, but they lacked the necessary equipment to provide suitable learning conditions for children with special needs. Teachers emphasized that effective school inclusion requires classrooms equipped with teaching and illustrative aids that facilitate learning.

They also unanimously pointed out the absence of specialized teachers in special education to oversee the inclusion process. Children with special needs require teachers who have received comprehensive training in special education.

Furthermore, interviews revealed that there is no planned annual program that teachers can follow when teaching these children, as there is for typically developing children. Rather, each teacher relies on personal effort and improvisation based on their academic background (speech therapy, clinical psychology, educational/school psychology). This hinders the process of educating and rehabilitating children with special needs in line with their developmental requirements.

Nevertheless, teachers do work as a team, which is a positive factor in teaching this group, since they are familiar with the children's developmental characteristics and needs.

Additionally, 9 teachers confirmed the absence of documentation specific to children with disabilities, which is the responsibility of the supervising authorities rather than the school administration.

In summary, the analysis of teachers' responses to the second question highlights several problems hindering school inclusion for children with disabilities, such as: insufficient resources and teaching aids,

lack of specialized teachers, absence of an annual program to guide teaching in integrated classrooms, and the lack of dedicated classrooms.

7.5.3. Teachers' Responses to the Third Question

How can the process of school inclusion be improved, and what are your suggestions?

The teachers interviewed unanimously agreed on the great importance of school inclusion for children with special needs in mainstream classrooms under a specific type of inclusion. They suggested that the process could be improved through continuous awareness of the uniqueness of this group and their right to regular education with adapted curricula and training programs provided by specialists in special education.

They also emphasized the need to raise parents' awareness to accept their children as they are, rather than as they wish them to be. The first step toward rehabilitating and integrating children with special needs is parental acceptance, followed by acceptance from teachers and other members of society.

Furthermore, teachers highlighted that the success of school inclusion requires careful planning and organization by specialists and decision-makers, as well as preparing an educational environment suited to the cognitive, emotional, and social needs of children with special needs, thereby enabling them to benefit from educational services that foster their growth and unlock their potential.

From analyzing teachers' responses, we summarized their suggestions for improving inclusion as follows:

1. Providing material resources and pedagogical tools to facilitate teaching adapted to the needs of children in integrated classrooms.
2. Strengthening cooperation and complementarity between the work of teachers in integrated classrooms and parents of children with special needs.
3. Offering training sessions and professional development programs for teachers in the field of special education.
4. Developing a structured annual program to guide teaching, along with providing documentation related to children with disabilities and integrated classrooms.
5. Ensuring consistent supervision by the responsible authorities to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of school inclusion.
6. Creating permanent teaching positions for those working with this group, since all teachers are currently working under pre-integration contracts despite the significant effort and noble humanitarian work they perform.

8. General Results of the Study

From this study, we find that many efforts have been made to activate the process of school inclusion in a way that guarantees the right of children with special needs to benefit from educational services that help develop their various abilities.

The study concluded that school inclusion helps improve children's adaptive abilities by enhancing their language and communication skills through interaction and play with typically developing peers, as well as by increasing the chances of their acceptance and improving how they are perceived by both students and teachers. This result differs from the study of Qumari et al. (2023), which found negative attitudes among teachers toward this group.

Our study also found that there are many problems limiting effective inclusion, such as insufficient material resources, the lack of equipped classrooms, inadequate human resources, the absence of documentation, and the absence of an annual program. This finding supports the results of the study by Ben Kharima and Farhat (2020), which emphasized buildings, services, and curricula as major obstacles to school inclusion.

Furthermore, our study aligns with the results of the study by Soulef Bouabdellah (2023), particularly concerning the need to regulate and adapt the material and human factors that facilitate effective inclusion for children with special needs.

Additionally, this study highlighted a set of proposals emphasized by teachers to improve the process of school inclusion, including: strengthening cooperation between teachers and parents, providing an annual program to guide teaching, organizing training courses in special education, hiring specialized teachers, equipping classrooms with necessary teaching aids, and ensuring regular monitoring of the inclusion process by the responsible authorities to evaluate its effectiveness.

9. Conclusion

Through this study, we attempted to explore the reality of integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools. What we observed is that there are indeed efforts being made to achieve this process, as it contributes to improving the adaptability and psychological adjustment of children with special needs and helps them break free from the social isolation imposed on them by disability.

Inclusion also changes negative perceptions of this group into positive attitudes, recognizing their right to better education within mainstream educational institutions alongside their peers, rather than isolating them in special canter's that only deepen their disability and reinforce social isolation and withdrawal.

However, this process requires continuous monitoring and evaluation by the responsible authorities to assess the effectiveness of school inclusion and to generalize it across all educational institutions. It also requires strengthening the process with specialized teachers, as we must strive to secure a dignified life for children with special needs and defend all of their rights, just like their typically developing peers.

This commitment must not be limited to official occasions but should be pursued continuously and at all times.

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