

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36719/2706-6185/47/38-46>

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The Policy of Integrating People with Special Needs in Algeria: Between Reality and Future Prospects

Abstract

Education is a fundamental and sacred right for every individual. From the moment a child reaches school age, they should not face any form of discrimination based on their differences. It is the responsibility of society to ensure that every person has access to a suitable educational environment, the opportunity to enroll in school, and the right to receive formal education. This right is universally recognized by communities and organizations working in the field of education, reinforced by legal frameworks and supportive policies that promote educational inclusion while imposing penalties for any violations. This is especially crucial for individuals with special needs, who are often vulnerable to exclusion and discriminatory practices that deprive them of their fundamental rights—most notably, the right to education in an environment that respects their privacy and protects them from exploitation, discrimination, or unfair treatment. Ensuring access to education empowers them with the knowledge necessary for a dignified life, fostering a sense of belonging and social integration without barriers or feelings of inferiority. In this article, the author will explore the key milestones that have shaped the integration of individuals with special needs, examining its various forms, implementation conditions, and the current reality of inclusive education in Algeria.

Keywords: *inclusion, integration, special needs, rehabilitation*

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Əlcəzairdə xüsusi ehtiyacları olan insanların integrasiya siyasəti: reallıq və gələcək perspektivlər

Xülasə

Təhsil hər bir fərdin fundamental və toxunulmaz hüququdur. Uşaq məktəb yaşına çatdığı andan etibarən, fərqliliklərinə görə heç bir ayrı-seçkiliyə məruz qalmamalıdır. Cəmiyyətin məsuliyyəti, hər bir şəxsin uyğun bir təhsil mühitinə, məktəbə yazılmaq imkanına və rəsmi təhsil almaq hüququna sahib olmasını təmin etməkdir. Bu hüquq, təhsil sahəsində fəaliyyət göstərən icmalar və təşkilatlar tərəfindən ümumiyyətlə qəbul edilir, eyni zamanda təhsilin inklüzivliyini təşviq edən və hər hansı pozuntulara qarşı cəzalar nəzərdə tutan hüquqi çərçivələrlə dəstəklənir. Xüsusi ehtiyacları olan şəxslər üçün bu məsələ xüsusilə vacibdir, çünki onlar çox vaxt kənarlaşdırma və ayrı-seçkilik riskləri ilə üzləşir, nəticədə əsas hüquqlarından, xüsusilə də məxfiliyinə hörmət edən və onları istismardan, ayrı-seçkilikdən və ədalətsiz rəftardan qoruyan bir mühitdə təhsil almaq hüququndan məhrum olurlar. Təhsilə çıxışın təmin edilməsi onlara ləyaqətli həyat üçün vacib olan bilikləri qazandırır, mənsubiyyət hissini gücləndirir və maneələrsiz sosial integrasiyanı təşviq edir. Bu məqalədə müəllif, xüsusi ehtiyacları olan insanların cəmiyyətə integrasiyasını formalaşdıran əsas mərhələləri araşdıraraq, bu integrasiyanın müxtəlif formalarını, tətbiq şərtlərini və Əlcəzairdə inklüziv təhsilin mövcud vəziyyətini təhlil edəcəkdir.

Açar sözlər: *inklüziv, integrasiya, xüsusi ehtiyaclar, rehabilitasiya*

Introduction

Observers of integration strategies can clearly notice early efforts and practices that laid the groundwork for the emergence of inclusion in societies. The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed numerous initiatives in this regard, starting with the establishment of the first educational institution for individuals with special needs in France. This was soon followed by similar schools in Germany, Britain, and the United States, eventually spreading to other parts of the world.

The history of special education indicates that the earliest efforts to care for and rehabilitate individuals with special needs took shape through the pioneering work of the French physician Jean Itard in the early 19th century. He is credited as the first to attempt to educate and rehabilitate a child with special needs—known as the "Wild Boy of Aveyron"—by teaching him speech and social behavior. Although his experiment was not entirely successful, later researchers continued to build on his work, striving to improve the education and care of individuals with special needs (*Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011*)

Following Itard's efforts, Édouard Séguin established the first school for special needs education in Paris, France, before founding another institution in the United States after his migration. Similarly, the Italian educator Maria Montessori pioneered a therapeutic and rehabilitative approach to children's education, while the Belgian scholar Ovide Decroly contributed to this movement by establishing specialized schools in Belgium. This period marked a significant shift in societal perceptions, as individuals with special needs were, for the first time, placed in dedicated educational and care institutions—an unprecedented development in human history (Shach, 2016, p. 18).

Research

In the early second half of the 20th century, as criticism of segregation policies intensified, special education began shifting from isolating individuals with special needs toward integrating them with their peers. Education is fundamentally based on connection rather than separation, aiming to include individuals with special needs within the fabric of society as functional members and active citizens.

This shift toward inclusion was reinforced by legislation that guaranteed the rights of individuals with special needs. In the United States, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was enacted in 1975, affirming the right of individuals with disabilities to receive free and appropriate education through individualized educational programs in environments that minimize restrictions and isolation, even within specialized institutions. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Social Services Office of the Royal Court introduced an educational law that included provisions for individuals with disabilities. This law required educational districts in England to provide educational services to all individuals in need, including those with disabilities, in environments deemed suitable by specialized committees that also involved the child's guardian (Shash, 2016, p. 40).

The 1970s witnessed significant changes in societies' attitudes toward individuals with special needs and the services provided to them, both in terms of their nature and methods of implementation. Voices advocating for the inclusion of people with disabilities grew louder, emphasizing the need to integrate them rather than isolate them. This shift was accompanied by the establishment of laws requiring institutions in the fields of education and training to support and accommodate individuals with special needs without any form of discrimination or segregation from the general population.

The first clear emergence of the concept of inclusion occurred in 1981, which was declared the International Year of Disabled Persons. During this time, inclusion was adopted as an official slogan, marking the beginning of early global experiments in implementing inclusive education and social integration policies.

Hence, what does the concept of inclusion refer to? What are the key terms associated with it, and what conditions must be met to ensure its successful implementation?

How is inclusion reflected in Algerian society in general and in schools in particular? What are the main challenges it faces?

1. Study Concepts

1.2. The Concept of Integration

Ture Johnson (1994) defines integration as the realization of equality, participation, and the provision of opportunities for individuals with disabilities, ensuring they receive the same treatment as their peers in society while eliminating all forms of discrimination against them (Abu Marzouq, 2007, p. 318).

Kirk and Gallagher (1979) describe integration as a process that provides specialized services to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environments. This means that a student with a disability should:

- Be placed with their non-disabled peers,
- Receive specialized services within regular classrooms, and
- Continuously interact with non-disabled peers in the least restrictive setting.

Hagarty defines integration as educating students with special needs in mainstream schools, where they are provided with a natural learning environment alongside non-disabled students, ultimately helping them overcome social isolation (Al-Saeed, 2011, p. 62).

Massed and Slanin emphasize that integration requires individuals with special needs to spend the maximum possible time in regular classrooms while receiving specialized support as needed. Similarly, Kauffman views integration as a modern approach in special education, which involves placing students with mild intellectual disabilities in mainstream primary schools while implementing measures to ensure they benefit from the educational programs provided in these schools.

The Council for Exceptional Children in the United States defines integration as a concept that entails placing students with special needs alongside their peers in regular classrooms, either temporarily or permanently. This approach enhances opportunities for academic and social interaction. It also highlights the conditions and factors necessary for successful integration, particularly the responsibilities of school administrators, general education teachers, and special education professionals (Al-Saeed, 2011, p. 63).

Based on these definitions, integration can be understood as a structured and scientifically grounded process governed by methodological and practical principles. Its goal is to provide individuals with special needs the opportunity to integrate into regular classrooms alongside their peers, fostering social interaction and increasing psychological and social acceptance. Integration also maximizes opportunities for observational learning and the internalization of appropriate behaviors demonstrated by non-disabled students. To ensure the success of this process, general and special education teachers must collaborate in providing the necessary support, in line with the principles of equality and non-discrimination upheld by both religious doctrines and national legislation across societies and nations.

2.2. Integration and Related Terminology

Several terms are closely associated with integration and are often used interchangeably, even though they may differ in one or more aspects from the widely accepted definition of integration. It is essential to clarify these key concepts and related terms as follows:

2.2.1. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

This term refers to minimizing the isolation of students with special needs as much as possible by integrating them with their non-disabled peers in regular classrooms and schools (Butros, 2009, p. 29).

2.2.2. Regular Education Initiative (REI)

This concept emphasizes that general education teachers should take responsibility for educating students with special needs—especially those with mild to moderate disabilities—within mainstream classrooms. They should also collaborate with special education professionals for guidance and support.

2.2.3. Social Integration

Social integration involves including individuals with special needs in everyday social life, enabling them to participate in community facilities and activities, whether through employment, housing, or social interactions. Preparing society to accept them as productive and engaged members is crucial. Social integration complements educational integration and is equally important, as many

educators and researchers consider it even more beneficial than academic inclusion. It allows individuals with special needs to gain valuable social experiences (Ainscow, 2020).

2.2.4. Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming refers to placing students with special needs in regular schools or classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers while providing them with special education services and necessary support.

2.2.5. Full Inclusion

This term describes an educational arrangement where all students, regardless of the type or severity of their disability, are placed in age-appropriate classrooms with their peers in neighborhood schools to the greatest extent possible. This model ensures that support services are provided within the same schools rather than in separate institutions.

2.2.6. Integrated Inclusion

Some scholars use the term integration to describe the process of educating, training, and caring for individuals with special needs alongside their non-disabled peers. This perspective distinguishes four types of integration:

1. Spatial Integration – Placing students with intellectual disabilities in special classes attached to regular schools (Butros, 2009, p. 29).
2. Functional Integration – Enabling students with intellectual disabilities to use shared materials and resources alongside non-disabled students.
3. Social Integration – Allowing students with intellectual disabilities to participate in non-academic activities such as play, field trips, and art education.
4. Community Integration – Providing individuals with intellectual disabilities opportunities to engage in social life post-graduation, ensuring their right to employment and independent living as much as possible (Butros, 2009, p. 29).

2.2.7. Reintegration

Reintegration refers to reintroducing an individual who was previously excluded, marginalized, or removed from a system due to various reasons, facilitating their re-adaptation and reinclusion into their former environment. It can also describe a person or element attempting to integrate into a new system to which they did not previously belong while ensuring their successful adaptation within it.

3. Types of Inclusion

The methods of integrating individuals with special needs vary from one country to another, depending on available resources, the type of disability, and its severity. Inclusion ranges from placing students with special needs in special classes attached to mainstream schools to fully integrating them into regular classrooms with the necessary support services. Based on these factors, the forms of inclusion differ in terms of method, objectives, and target groups. The following are the most recognized types of inclusion in special education:

3.1. Academic Inclusion

Academic inclusion involves integrating students with special needs into mainstream schools while providing them with educational, pedagogical, and extracurricular services alongside special education support. It is divided into three types:

- ✓ Partial Inclusion: Students with special needs are placed in special classes within mainstream schools.
- ✓ Full Inclusion: Students with special needs are fully integrated into regular classrooms.
- ✓ Social Inclusion in Schools: Students with special needs participate in school activities but not necessarily in academic settings (Al-Saeed, 2011, p. 79).
- ✓ Partial Inclusion within Mainstream Schools
 - **Partial inclusion follows two main models:**
 - Dedicated Classrooms – Special education students are placed in dedicated classrooms within regular schools, where they receive tailored educational programs.
 - Hybrid Learning Model – Students with special needs, enrolled in special education schools, spend part of their school day in mainstream schools.

This type of inclusion is also known as spatial inclusion, where students with special needs are in the same school building as their peers but attend separate classes or specialized units. These students receive instruction from special education teachers while also participating in shared educational activities with their peers in regular classrooms. A well-structured schedule should be developed to ensure a smooth transition between special and mainstream classes, allowing students to interact with their peers throughout the school day (Al-Saeed, 2011, p. 79).

➤ **Full Inclusion in Mainstream Classrooms:**

Full inclusion means placing students with special needs in regular classrooms full-time, where they follow a shared educational program with their peers. Successful implementation of this model requires:

- ✓ Acceptance from non-disabled students toward their peers with disabilities.
- ✓ Specialized teaching methods to accommodate students with special needs.
- ✓ Support services to address academic and social challenges, including exam accommodations and curriculum modifications (Al-Saeed, 2011, p. 79).

➤ **Social Inclusion in Schools**

Social inclusion involves integrating students with special needs into extracurricular activities such as:

- ✓ Educational trips
- ✓ Sports and recreational activities
- ✓ Music and arts classes
- ✓ School camps and community events

This is the simplest form of inclusion, as students with special needs do not participate in regular classrooms but are included in social and extracurricular activities (Al-Saeed, 2011, p. 79).

3.2. Community-Based Social Inclusion

This form of inclusion extends beyond the school environment, ensuring the integration of individuals with disabilities into society by:

- Providing equal employment opportunities (also known as functional inclusion).
- Ensuring accessible housing and independent living.
- Facilitating full participation in social and economic activities.

The goal is to promote independence, social interaction, and active citizenship for individuals with special needs. This approach supports their right to work, move freely, and benefit from public services just like any other member of society.

According to Elliott & MacKenney, inclusion follows four main models:

- Consultation Services – Providing guidance to educators and caregivers on inclusive practices.
- Co-Teaching (Team Teaching) – Collaboration between special education and general education teachers in the same classroom.
- Support Services – Offering specialized services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and psychological support.
- Out-of-Class Support – Providing additional learning assistance outside the classroom (Sissalem, 2013, p. 107).

4. Inclusion Requirements

The successful implementation of an inclusion strategy depends on fulfilling a set of essential conditions. Without these conditions, the inclusion process cannot be effectively achieved. These requirements are related to the type of disability, the inclusion protocol, and certain qualifications of the specialist responsible for school inclusion. Below is an overview of the key conditions that must be met before and during the implementation of school inclusion:

4.1. Requirements Related to Children

- The child with special needs must belong to the same age group as the students in the school.
- The child should be from the same residential area and social environment as their peers.
- The child should have only one type of disability or a manageable combination of disabilities.
- The child should be capable of some level of independence in performing basic tasks.

- The child should have the ability to interact with classmates and should not exhibit severe behavioral disorders.

4.2. Requirements Related to Teachers

- General education teachers should receive training on how to implement school inclusion.
- The teacher should explain the child's condition to their peers and help them accept the child within the classroom.
- The teacher may require support while delivering lessons and can seek assistance from:
 - A special education teacher
 - The student's guardian
 - The child's family, which should be encouraged to follow up on their child's progress regularly.
- The general education teacher should collaborate with special education teachers, school counselors, and psychologists to ensure both the inclusion of the child and their acceptance by peers.
- The teacher should regularly present updates on the child's progress during school administration meetings and parent-teacher association gatherings, providing full details with **objectivity and transparency (Al-Adl, 2013, pp. 360-365).**

4.3. Requirements Related to the School

- The school should be close to the child's residence to facilitate attendance.
- The school must provide all necessary educational resources to support students with special needs.
- The school should be architecturally designed to allow easy access and movement for children with disabilities.
- A dedicated psychologist or school counselor should be available to provide support.
- The school should have a resource room and a special education teacher.

4.4. Requirements Related to the Inclusion Protocol

- The concept of inclusion should be clearly defined in a way that avoids ambiguity.
- The target group should be precisely identified, with clear criteria that align with the inclusion program.
- The program's objectives should be set in a realistic and measurable manner, covering both short-term and long-term goals.
- The duration of the program should be specified.
- The nature of the program should be determined, whether it will take place in:
 - A regular classroom
 - A special class within the school
 - A resource room
- The curriculum should be defined as:
 - Standard
 - Adapted to match the standard curriculum
 - Parallel to the standard curriculum
- The effectiveness of the inclusion protocol should be assessed at each stage, ensuring that no stage is progressed to without achieving the objectives of the previous one (Al-Adl, 2013, pp. 360-365).

According to Hala Al-Saeed (2011), the successful implementation of inclusion policies requires the following:

1. A shift in public perception of disabilities, including attitudes among individuals with special needs, their families, and their surrounding social environment.
2. The presence of legislation that protects the rights of individuals with disabilities, ensuring they receive the same opportunities as others.
3. The establishment of awareness campaigns to educate the public about individuals with disabilities and the services they need.
4. The development of predefined programs and protocols to integrate individuals with special needs into society (Al-Saeed, 2012, pp. 83-84).

To conclude, it is important to note that these requirements may vary depending on the type of disability, the target group, and the specific intervention or inclusion protocol adopted. This flexibility allows for modifications to the conditions to better suit the needs of each individual case, ensuring the successful implementation of inclusion.

5. The reality of inclusion policies in Algeria:

The Algerian education system has implemented policies for the inclusion of individuals with special needs since its inception. Adapted education was introduced as a specialized form of primary education during the 1981-1982 school year, following Administrative Decree No. 194 issued on October 10, 1982. This decree outlined specific procedures for establishing adapted education classes, with key conditions including:

- The presence of a specialized teacher trained at the Technological Institute in Algiers or Oran.
- A class size ranging from 15 to 18 students, with a maximum of 20 students.

Following this decree, ministerial circulars mandated the creation of psycho-pedagogical committees responsible for identifying and supporting these students within adapted education classes. These committees comprised a school principal, a school health doctor, a guidance counselor, an adapted education teacher, a parents' representative, and a social worker. Their role was to evaluate the case files of children with special needs and determine their eligibility for specialized classes. (Taouinet, n.d., p. 4)

Law 09-02, enacted on May 8, 2002, on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities, emphasized the need for early intervention and the provision of education and vocational training for individuals with special needs. It also underscored the importance of their social integration and the establishment of specialized classes within schools to facilitate their regular schooling. Based on this, the Ministry of National Education introduced specialized classes for students with learning difficulties, known as adapted classes in regular schools. These classes accommodated third-year primary students who had undergone remedial education and were later reintegrated into their regular classrooms after overcoming their difficulties. In 2014, a joint ministerial decision was issued to define the operational procedures for opening special classes for students with mild intellectual disabilities within the education sector, detailing their organization and management. (Bejadi, 2018, p. 52)

In addition to specialized classes for students with special needs, Algeria has allowed private entities to establish specialized care centers since 2018. These centers operate as private specialized kindergartens and can be created within private educational institutions exclusively for children with intellectual disabilities or intellectual disabilities accompanied by disorders requiring specialized educational and psychological care. These centers operate on a fee-based model and are established under Executive Decree 18-221, issued on September 6, 2018. They follow similar programs and schedules to those of the institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Solidarity. However, they are required to maintain a maximum capacity of 12 children, starting from age three until the completion of their designated educational path.

Private institutions for children require accreditation from the Minister responsible for national solidarity, unlike regular children's institutions, which are accredited by the provincial governor. The director of a private institution must hold a university degree in a relevant field with at least five years of professional experience in specialized education. Alternatively, individuals without a specialized university degree must have ten years of relevant experience.

Each institution must establish a psycho-pedagogical council, comprising the institution's director, a clinical psychologist, a speech therapist, and specialized educators. This council is responsible for managing the institution, designing programs, and approving children's enrollment.

Chapter five of the decree addresses educational care, while chapter six focuses on pedagogical and administrative supervision. The decree concludes with chapter seven, which includes final provisions and an annex outlining the model specifications. (Lazazga, 2019, p. 8)

It is also worth noting the ongoing efforts to establish integrated classes for children with Down syndrome and autism. Algeria is working towards a national program aimed at integrating these groups into regular classrooms. However, the most successful inclusion experience in Algerian

schools remains the integration of blind students. Unlike other special needs groups, whose inclusion efforts have not yet reached the desired level, the success of visually impaired students can be attributed to a structured inclusion process that begins with specialized centers, followed by adapted programs and specialized teachers, before transitioning to regular classrooms.

Several challenges hinder the inclusion process in Algeria, including:

- The lack of qualified professionals with academic and practical expertise in inclusion within Algerian educational institutions.
- The absence of specialized inclusion protocols tailored to the specific needs of different groups.
- The high cost of specialized educational tools and materials, leading to a shortage of resource rooms and adapted pedagogical materials in schools.
- Overcrowded classrooms, which make it difficult to accommodate even regular students, let alone those with special needs.
- The lack of clear laws and regulations for each special needs category, resulting in many school principals refusing to admit students with special needs due to legal loopholes.
- The inadequate architectural design of institutions, making access difficult for children with special needs. Additionally, most specialized institutions that cater to these students are concentrated in major cities, making daily attendance challenging for children living in distant areas.
- The reliance on disability type as the primary criterion for inclusion, without considering age and cognitive differences among children. Furthermore, regular students and their parents often reject the idea of sharing classrooms with students with special needs.

The most significant issue in Algeria's inclusion approach is the direct placement of students with special needs into regular classrooms without prior attendance at specialized centers. This violates a fundamental principle of inclusion, which requires that children with special needs first succeed in a specialized center, acquire the necessary skills and competencies, and then transition to regular classrooms. Furthermore, there are very few specialized centers for most types of disabilities, with the exception of a limited number of centers for hearing, visual, and mild intellectual disabilities.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the inclusion of students with special needs in Algeria faces numerous obstacles that prevent it from reaching the level it should achieve. Despite some successful experiences, particularly the integration of blind students, these successes are due to adherence to a structured inclusion process that includes specialized centers, adapted programs, and trained teachers before transitioning to regular classrooms. This structured approach should be adopted for all categories of students with special needs.

Finally, several recommendations can be made to enhance the success of the inclusion process in Algeria:

- Establish specialized centers for each type of disability to provide pre-school education for students with special needs before their integration into regular classrooms.
- Train specialized teachers who have received professional training in supporting students with special needs.
- Equip schools that receive students with special needs with specialized resource rooms and appropriate pedagogical tools, in addition to recruiting specialized staff, including special education teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, social workers, and doctors, to collaborate with regular teachers.
- Raise awareness within society, particularly among parents of regular students, about the importance of inclusion and the need to accept students with special needs without rejection, bullying, or discrimination.
- Introduce specialized university programs on supporting students with special needs at the undergraduate level and create more specialized master's and doctoral programs.
- Encourage national research on the care of students with special needs, focusing on developing diagnostic tools, treatment protocols, and educational content.

- Adopt successful international experiences using a selective approach rather than relying exclusively on the model of a single country. Additionally, retraining professionals in the field and promoting continuous education should be prioritized.

In conclusion, inclusion is, in itself, an integrative process that requires the full participation of all social, institutional, educational, and familial actors. It also necessitates the active involvement of all stakeholders, including parents, specialists, regular students, and students with special needs. The inclusion process is a continuous interactive endeavor that depends on the harmonious and positive collaboration of all its components.

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Received: 30.01.2025

Accepted: 05.05.2025