

GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN JORDAN: PRESENT AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

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Educating a student with special needs became an interest in Jordan at the end of the 1960s. This article provides an overview of the general and special education systems in Jordan. Historical and demographical information is included for the purpose of placing the education of children in Jordan within the context of its land and the population of Jordan. The general education system and special Education system in Jordan is reviewed in depth. Issues related to the current practices and limitations of services for students with disabilities in Jordan are discussed. Suggestions to improve the current system is provided

Background

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Jordan) is the home of some of mankind's earliest settlements such as: the Iraqian dominions (e.g. Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian); the Egyptian Pharoanic; the Nabateans; and the civilizations of Greece and Rome. Jordan is considered today to be a young and developed country with limited resources. Jordan is approximately 60,000 square miles and is located in the heart of the Middle East. It is Northwest of Saudi Arabia, south of Syria, southwest of Iraq and east of Israel and the Occupied West Bank. Also Jordan has access to the Red Sea via the port city of Aqaba, which is located at the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba.

The population of Jordan was estimated in 2004 to be approximately 5.4 million persons being composed of 2.8 million males and 2.6 million females (General Statistics Department, 2004).

Jordan is an independent Arab country. Amman is the capital, and the Jordanian people are part of the Arab nation. Islam is the official religion and Arabic is the official language.

An Overview of General Education

Basic and Secondary Schools:

General education principles in Jordan are derived from the Arabic Islamic civilization. These principles are contained in the Jordanian Constitution. Under the principle of *Everyone has a right to a free and public education*, the educational services in Jordan are introduced to everyone in Jordan equally and without any discrimination based on sex, language, ethnicity, and religion.

In 2003/2004 the statistics of the Ministry of Education (MOE) – indicated that the number of schools in Jordan reached 5526. Additionally, there were 76,946 teachers, and 1,515,315 students, of which there was almost equal representation of males (51%) and females (49%) (MOE, 2004).

Table 1
Ministry Of General Education Statistics 2004/2005

Total	Males	Females	Statistic
76946	30775	46167	Teachers
1,515,315	768475	746840	Students

The educational system in Jordan covers from Kindergarten to twelfth grade including basic (primary and middle schools) and secondary schools. The basic school consists of grades 1-10. Basic schooling is free and compulsory for all Jordanian students. At the end of the tenth grade the scores of each student for the previous three years (8th, 9th, and 10th) are combined to determine in which secondary stream (track) students will continue. Usually, the students' preferences are taken into account, but the final decision rests with the Ministry of Education.

The secondary cycle (grades 11 and 12) is divided into two main streams: one being an academic stream. This stream ends with a general secondary education examination called *Tawjihi*. The other is the applied (vocational) stream. This track consists of specialized vocational courses and prepares the student for skilled labor through apprenticeship programs, which are run by the Vocational Training Corporation and the Ministry of Education.

For the total student population in Jordan, 70.5% go to public school, 19.2% go to private schools, 8.9% go to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools, which are operated by the United Nations, and 1.4% go to other governmental institutions (MOE, 2004).

Table 2
Percentages attending educational services and school authority 2004/2005

Percentage	Type of authority
70.5 %	Ministry Of Education
19.2 %	Private School
8.9 %	United Nations School (UNRWA)
1,4 %	Other Governmental Institutions
100%	Total

Higher Education:

Higher education in Jordan was initiated in 1951 and has been developing continuously since the establishment of the first public university in 1962, The University of Jordan. Since then, many Jordanian universities have been established. Now there are 10 public universities, 13 private universities, and more than 20 public community colleges. All of these universities are under the supervision of The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

According to MOHE 2004/2005, there were 178,619 undergraduate students, of which males and females students are almost equally represented. There were 13, 937 graduate students, of which 35% are females and 65 % are males. In addition, there were 24,790 students in community public colleges, of which 61% are females and 39 % are males. (MOHE, 2005)

Table 3
MOHE, Enrollment Student Numbers 2004/2005

Total	Males	Females	Level
24,790	9649	15,141	Public Community Colleges Students
178,619	89,160	89,459	Undergraduate Students
13,937	9119	4818	Graduate Students

Fundamental knowledge and skills within the educational systems:

As a result of His Majesty King Abdullah II's vision for Jordan to become an international technology center in the region, the MOE launched a vision for education in Jordan. This vision will be met through developing a comprehensive planning strategy, which embraced a scientific method, international best practice, an effective use of technology, and an expansion of social participation. This reform movement in educational systems offers to every student the experience of mastery, and relies on human potential to contribute to society in a meaningful way (MOE, 2004).

According to the vision of his Majesty, Jordanian students are taught the fundamental knowledge and skills to function and formulate their contribution to the human family. Furthermore, all educational systems, programs, and plans should provide students the basic and needed technological, geographic, historical, global, religious, political, computer, economic, aesthetic, and interpersonal abilities and skills for their future life to carry out their future responsibilities.

An overview of Special Education Services:

Under the basic principle of education in Jordan, *Everyone has a right to a free and public education*. Educational policies in Jordan have to take into consideration the necessity to provide basic and comprehensive services for students with special needs in Jordan. The number of people with disabilities in Jordan is 54,747 overall (GSD, 2004).

Initial services for special education were started at the end of the 1960's. At this time, an institute was established offering services to persons who are Deaf, Blind, and Cognitively Impaired (Mental Retardation) students in Jordan.

The first governmental initiative was established in 1979, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) was established to be responsible for

- 1- Providing the educational, vocational, rehabilitation, care, and accommodations services for the disabled via institutions, schools, centers, and special classes under the immediate supervision of the Ministry and supervising institutions and service providers.
- 2- Implementing a rehabilitation employment program in the open market.
- 3- Providing duty free services and other tax exemptions for the disabled and institutions that provide services to the disabled in coordination with other service providers. (MSD, 2005).

In 1993, the law for the Welfare of Disabled Persons was passed and put into action. According to that law, The National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons was established. According to this law, the philosophy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for treatment of students with disabilities stems from Arab-Islamic values, the Jordanian constitution, the National Charter, the Laws governing education and higher education, the World Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Declaration of Disabled Persons. The law stresses the following principles

- A. The right of disabled persons to be integrated into the general life of the society.
- B. The right of education and higher education commensurate with his/her abilities
- C. The right of disabled persons to employment commensurate with their capabilities and qualifications, and their right to sports and recreation.
- D. The right of disabled persons to preventative health Care and medical treatment.
- E. The right of disabled persons to a suitable environment that allows them freedom of movement and transportation in a safe and secure manner.
- F. The right of disabled persons to obtain such aids, equipment and materials that assists them in education, training, movement and transportation.
- G. The right of those who have multiple and severe disabilities to education, training and rehabilitation.
- H. The right of needy parents with disabled dependents to relief, welfare and support services.
- I. The right of disabled persons to participate in decision making.(Jordan information Bureau/ DREDF, 2000)

Service Providers:

Beside the efforts of MSD, many other service providers took part in the introduction of special education, rehabilitation, vocational and community services for students and people with disabilities. Also, these services are practiced and offered all around the country with an outreach to most of the areas in Jordan.

Those service providers are:

1) Ministry of Education (MOE)

For realization of the general educational objectives in Jordan, the MOE paid special attention to special education by expanding its patterns in educational institutions to include programs for the gifted and those with disabilities. These programs were implemented in the following fields:

A. Education for the gifted

The MOE through the Directorate of Special Education and the Division of Programs for the Gifted, which was introduced in 1995, supports the gifted student, whereby a gifted student is promoted to a higher class suitable to his capabilities. This unusual promotion is not allowed more than twice for the same student during the basic cycle. Through the Noor- Al-Hussein Foundation the services for students who are gifted had been started by establishing the Jubilee School. This school is a coeducational secondary school where gifted students are grouped at the tenth, eleventh and twelfth class levels, and offers acceleration and enrichment programs.

B- Education for students with disabilities

The MOE, through the Directorate of Special Education (DSE) and the Division of Remedial Education (DRE), introduced in 1995, offers educational services to students with disabilities through 400 resource rooms distributed in the various districts of education. The MOE with the help of United Nation Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) succeeded in opening 18 integrated programs for students with special needs in public schools by accepting children with mild to moderate disability in regular schools. Also, the MOE, in cooperation with the MSD, chose 9 schools to integrate deaf students. (MOE.1996)

2) United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

This organization offers its educational programs in Jordan for students with disabilities through nine special education centers for students with disabilities and fifteen remedial classes for students with Learning Disabilities. This occurs in the basic second and third grades distributed among the schools. UNRWA opened ten special classes for deaf students. All of these programs are implemented under the supervision of MOE with cooperation with UNRWA.

3) Queen Alia Fund for Voluntary Social Work

This organization holds workshops and training courses for teachers and supervisors in the field. It financed the establishment of 5 new resource rooms in MOE schools in various areas during the academic year 1994/1995. It also supported the development of diagnostic tests in reading, writing and arithmetic for the basic classes 1-3 during the academic year 1994/1995.

4) Private institutions

These Institutions offer their services for students with different disabilities through private funds and under the supervision of MOE and MSD.

5) Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE):

MOHE established academic programs for the preparation of special education teachers. MOHE opened many training programs for undergraduate and graduate students to prepare them to be special education teachers. In 1991, The University of Jordan (UJ) established a new program in Special Education to prepare and educate undergraduate students to work with students with disabilities. Soon afterwards, UJ started its programs for graduate students for the Master and Ph.D. degrees. These programs placed emphasis on preparing leaders, professionals, and experts in developing special education programs. Now, five large public universities in Jordan prepare students to be teachers.

Special Education Ancillary Services for Student with Disabilities:

Through the joint efforts of all public and private institutions in Jordan, and under the umbrella of teamwork, Comprehensive Services were initiated. These services can be categorized as follows:

1) *Assessment and Diagnostic Services*

Psychological and educational services have been a big concern since the 1970's. Cooperation among professionals, paraprofessionals, and graduate students led to customized versions of intelligence and educational tests, social-adaptive behavioral scales and checklists used in the diagnoses of students with disabilities.

These tests empowered special educators to make decisions about eligibility and the offering of special education services. These tests also helped determine the least restrictive environment that is appropriate for the student with a disability. There are more than 17 centers for assessment and diagnosis that are focused on students with Cognitive Impairment, Learning Disabilities, Sensory Impairments, and Gifted and Talented.

A new concern is the cooperation among psychological, educational, and medical institutions to follow a team approach towards providing diagnostic services as early as possible for at risk children.

2) *Special Education and Related Services*

These services are delivered by many public, private, and international organizations. These services can be described as follows:

- Early intervention services for children with disabilities under the age of six offered at homes and through some integrated kindergarten classes in Queen Zein-Al sharaf Institute.
- Day Care services for students with disabilities through specialist centers. Most of these 48 centers specialize in educating students with Cognitive Impairment.
- Residential Services for students with disabilities through 28 centers. Twenty one of which are for students with Cognitive Impairment.
- Inclusion Services for students with disabilities through 400 resource rooms for students with Learning Disabilities, and 9 schools for Hearing Impairments.

All of these services follow procedures in delivering their services such as preparing and writing Individualized Educational Plans (IEP's) and Lesson Plans, applying behavioral management applications, and using effective instructional methods.

3) *Rehabilitation and Vocational Employment Services*

These services are introduced for adults with a disability through two institutions for training and hiring for many jobs in the community. The total number of employees now is around 1051 in different types of jobs.

4) *Community Based Rehabilitation Services (CBR):*

These services are provided to 1621 persons with a disability through nine centers under the supervision of UNRWA and the cooperation of MSD and MOE, in nine different areas in Jordan.

In conclusion, the total number of institutions in Jordan is estimated, according to the statistics of the MSD 2005, to be around 144 institutions and 400 resource rooms providing their services to about 13275 students, of which 7380 are females and 5895 are males. (MSD, 2005).

Table 4
Number of institutions for disabilities in Jordan

Total	International Organizations	Organization	Private	Public	<i>Type of Handicap</i>
69	1	30	25	13	<i>Cognitive Impairment</i>
23	0	11	0	12	<i>Hearing Impairment</i>
4	1	2	0	1	<i>Visual Impairment</i>
4	1	4	0	0	<i>Physical handicap</i>
7	0	6	1	0	<i>Cognitive/hearing Impairment</i>
2	0	0	2	0	<i>Autism</i>
23	9	9	2	3	<i>Multipley Handicap</i>
10	0	10	0	0	<i>Cerebral Palsy</i>

1	0	0	1	0	<i>Cognitive/Cerebral palsy Handicap</i>
144	12	72	31	29	¹ Total

Table 5
Special Education students' needs

Hearing Impairment & Cognitive Impairment	Multiply Handicap	Cerebral Palsy & Cognitive Impairment	Physical Handicap	Visual Impairment	Hearing Impairment	Learning Disability	Cognitive Impairment	Type of Services
7	22	11	4	N/A	22	N/A	48	<i>Day Care</i>
N/A	1	N/A	N/A	2	1	N/A	21	<i>Residential services</i>
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	9	400	12	<i>Inclusion services</i>
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	2	<i>Rehabilitation/ vocational Employment</i>
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	6	N/A	N/A	9	<i>Community Based Rehabilitation</i>

Table 6
Number of students with disabilities using special education services 2005

Number of disabled students	Type of Service
2956	<i>Day Care institutions</i>
432	<i>Residential institutions</i>
8410	<i>Resource Rooms in public and private schools</i>
400	<i>Other Types (e.g.. early intervention services in home, Kindergartens)</i>
13275	Total

(Al Hadidi, Al Kahteib, 2005)

Table 7
Number of disabled students and their ages/2005

Total	Age range
619	<i>Under 6 years</i>
9098	<i>From 6 to 12 years old</i>
3558	<i>Above 12 years old</i>
13275	Total

(Al Hadidi, Al Kahteib, 2005)

Challenges, Limitations, and Improving Services:

Like many other services, special education services in Jordan are facing many challenges and limitations. Much effort is being made to meet these challenges, however, these efforts are considered insufficient and must be reconsidered in any future plans. These challenges and limitations are:

1) Financial Limitations

Shortages in funding represents a vital challenge for the current delivery of services. Many services need to be revised, expanded, and improved to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Furthermore, new innovations in the field of assistive technology, technical aids, and communication services, demand an increase in financial input which might be difficult in Jordan.

2) Practices and Instructional Limitations

Many of the present practices used in providing special education services have quantitative, but not qualitative values. These practical limitations can be described as follow:

- Most institutions and centers for students with disabilities have limited resources to provide effective and suitable services. These institutions have problems not only in the basic fundamental educational components such as inadequate building construction, transportation, class space, staff, health insurance and salaries, but also in their professional practice issues such as teaching methods, disregard of the role of parents, ignoring the importance of in-service training, conducting research, providing assistive aids, and improving quality of services.
- Many of the teaching methods used have to be updated in order to improve the quality and quantity of services provided and to follow-up with any new supplementary instruction that increases the efficiency of services provided for a student with disabilities. Applications such as using new editions of diagnostic tools, applying sufficient behavioral management strategies, preparing IEP's with a good understanding of their roles, using variety of instructional methods, and improving teacher's evaluating strategies, must be included in any future improvement plans.
- The quality of services delivered for a student with disabilities especially new services like vocational rehabilitation, prevention services, early medical, social, technological support services, and family services must be encouraged throughout all public, non-profit and private service organizations.

3) Information Limitations:

This problem appeared in the absence of accurate and adequate data on the prevalence rate of disability. The effectiveness and efficiency of services need to be evaluated (e.g., placement and identification procedures, early intervention services, assessment and diagnosis practices, and related services applications) now better data is available, and to be used in the future as guidelines for future planning policies and improvements.

4) Public Awareness Limitations:

Lack of public awareness and insufficient involvement of local communities in supporting, introducing, and conducting services for student with disabilities. Families' needs must be canvassed and addressed by all levels of service providers.

5) Cooperation Limitations:

Lack of cooperation between service delivery systems. The absence of a higher authority to organize, unify, and integrate all efforts to provide comprehensive services and to accelerate the creation of an effective system of accountability is very noticeable in Jordan.

Suggestions and coping strategies:

In order to improve our services we have to take the following points into consideration:

- 1) Support and create new financial resources or funding opportunities to help current institutions improve their services and help in establishing new centers/institutions to expand the delivery of services. To realize that we can work cooperatively with international organizations, secure agreements with other countries, and get grants to support and improve services for people with disabilities.
- 2) Create a Central Agency as an umbrella, to organize, supervise, integrate, and direct the delivery of services. This authority might be part of the MOE or MSD, and its responsibilities would include improving, organizing, accounting, evaluating, and expanding the delivery of services for student with disabilities.
- 3) Expand the service delivery system and give further consideration to educational issues that support inclusion. Furthermore, it is necessary to re-evaluate current teacher preparation programs

in order to further meet the needs of students with disabilities. New technological innovations in the field of assistive technology and other related fields, and application of the philosophies of prevention, early intervention, and inclusion must be considered in program initiatives.

- 4) Support and encourage local communities to take part in the delivery of services through the use of public media (mass media, newspapers, and television) to increase public awareness. Furthermore, it is necessary to increase community knowledge about disabilities and disabled people, reasons for disabilities, medical issues and hygiene, prevention methods, early intervention, socio-cultural and family support resources.
- 5) Establish a widespread information database to include all information needed about a disability in Jordan. This will represent a basic data source for professionals, parents, political decision makers, researchers, and others. Additionally, this database must be updated annually and accessed easily.

Conclusion:

This paper provides insights into general and special education services in Jordan. In addition, the article emphasizes the challenges and limitations that are encountered in the delivery of services for students and people with a disability. Furthermore, the personal suggestions made to overcome specified limitations to the education delivery system may help to meet the challenges and continue the work in serving all students in Jordan as we move into the future.

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