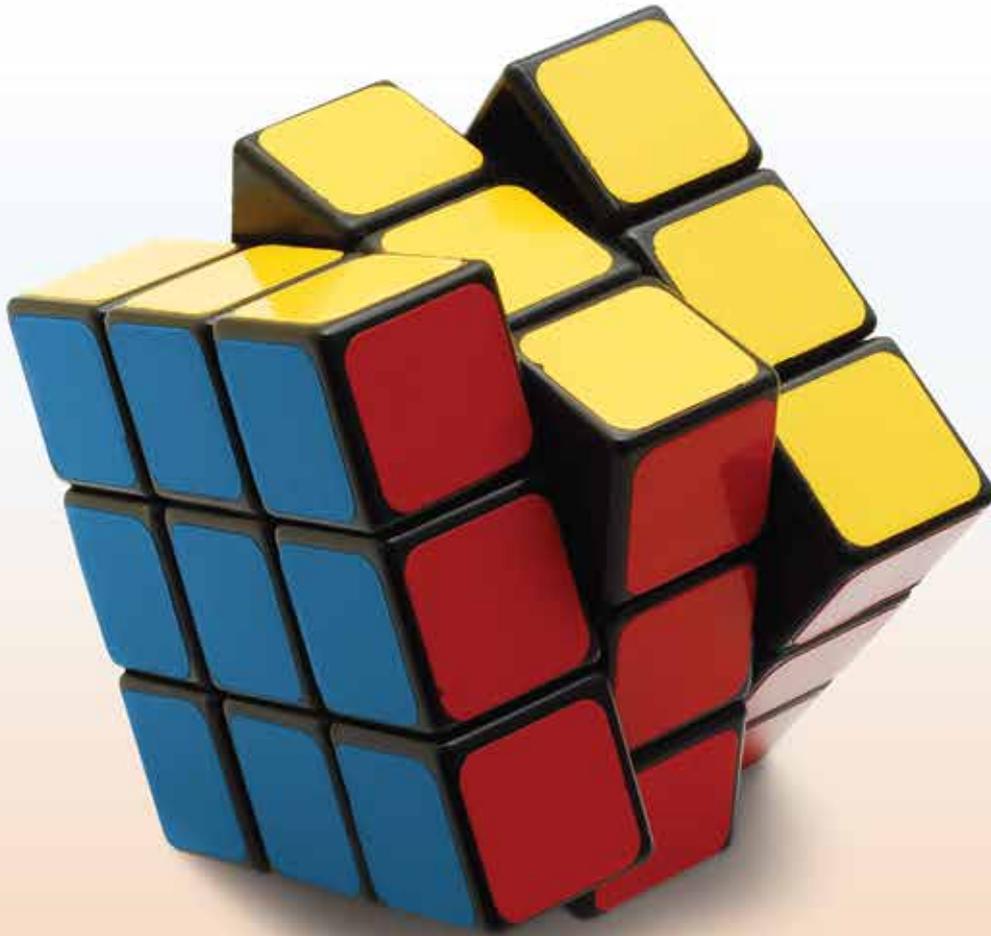


POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN TURKEY





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ERI, is an independent and not-for-profit think-and-do-tank that contributes to systemic transformation in education for the benefit of the child's and the society's development through sound evidence, constructive dialogue and innovative/critical thinking. Evidence-based decision-making processes in education concerning stakeholder engagement and ensuring the access of all children to quality education are the key elements of systemic transformation. ERI, established in 2003, is a good example for the Turkish civil society, since it is an initiative supported by leading foundations in Turkey. ERI carries out its' research and education activities through ERI Education Observatory unit and Education Laboratory, a collective initiative with ATOLYE Labs.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of “inclusive education” has emerged out of UNESCO’s well-accepted definition of inclusion as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the state to educate all children”.²

In practice, inclusive education refers to a wide range of strategies, activities and processes that seek to make a reality of the universal right to quality, relevant and appropriate education.³ Setting off from these definitions, this document will proceed by drawing upon the results of the needs⁴ and situation⁵ analyses conducted through collaboration between Education Reform Initiative (ERI) and UNICEF⁶. Inclusive education is, in fact, a concept that encompasses a variety of aspects such as the structure of the education system, governance and financing, teachers, course materials, learning environments and processes. However, due to limited data and to enable a more refined analysis, the methodology adopted for this study has been to assess Turkey’s current situation with regard to inclusive education focusing on language, religion and ethnic identity, gender, disability and socioeconomic status. Other components referred to here have also been discussed with the aforementioned focal points in mind.

Inclusive education is a process that requires educational institutions and processes to be restructured in a way to address the needs of all children, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, language, religion, residential area, state of health, socioeconomic status, or other circumstances.

The main purpose of inclusive education practices is to do away with the exclusion and discrimination likely to arise from prejudices and negative attitudes towards individuals’ distinct attributes and circumstances. Since education has direct influence on all individuals of society, an inclusive education system will be central for a high quality education experience and a society without discrimination. Although there has been more awareness about inclusive education lately, the fact that children are still being excluded from school and are suffering from negative education experiences indicate the need for further improvements in this area. This document will summarize the important steps that need to be taken for inclusive education to become a policy priority in Turkey.

1 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

2 UNESCO, 2005.

3 Stubbs, 2008.

4 Ayan Ceyhan, 2016.

5 ERI, 2016.

6 United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund.

TURKEY'S CURRENT SITUATION WITH REGARD TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Aside from being a general principle that needs to be adopted for the education system to include all children, teenagers and adults, inclusive education is also a children's rights issue, as well as a prerequisite for community development.⁷

One of the goals of UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) movement is to achieve free, compulsory and quality primary education on a universal level, particularly for girls and ethnic minorities.⁸ A number of international agreements that Turkey is a party to prohibit discrimination based on gender, language, religion, disability and race. Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey stipulates that no individual shall be deprived of their right to education and learning, and that primary education shall be compulsory for all citizens and free of charge in public schools.

Turkey currently has in place extensive legislation regulating education of children with disabilities; however, it is hard to say that the legislation is equally comprehensive with regards to differences in ethnicity, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.⁹

Gender based discrimination has been prohibited by the constitution and various other documents, but the current regulation intended to make education environments inclusive for girls remains inadequate. For children with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, no such legislation has yet been introduced. Moreover, the question of how inclusive legal regulations have been practiced up to now needs to be investigated. As far as the reports drawn up by monitoring committees indicate, there are still some obstacles to be overcome when it comes to implementation.¹⁰ Creating the suitable circumstances and taking the necessary measures for all children to receive quality education without being subject to discrimination is a fundamental prerequisite for inclusive education.

7 UNESCO, 2009.

8 Ibid.

9 ERI, 2016.

10 Ibid.

HOW SHOULD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS BE DEvised?

Progress in inclusive education depends on creating an environment of social discussion and reconciliation, supporting and multiplying positive examples and developing an educational framework in compliance with demand in this field.

This, in turn, will require educational resources, processes and environments to be developed in a way that will empower students and teachers alike, supporting schools as well as the system. The success of these methods is directly linked to policymakers' will, the resources allocated, and the current policy development and implementation capacity regarding children who are at risk of discrimination. Building a widespread commitment to inclusive education practices is meant to be a process that extends over a large period of time, requires significant amount of planning and resources, is built upon certain principles, and through which different practices are monitored, revised, and improved when required. In this regard, inclusive education provides an opportunity for transformation and socioeconomic development that concerns every member of society. Overcoming obstacles while working in line with this purpose is possible through continuous collaboration and dialogue between stakeholders led by policymakers, educators, parents and students. Furthermore, media and local administrations also have important roles in informing, disseminating and encouraging engagement. The important steps to be taken in this direction, as supported by successful international examples are outlined below.¹¹

- Building social consensus on the definition and importance of inclusive education,
- Identifying the shortcomings of the regulations regarding inclusive education based on international standards, and making necessary legal reforms,
- Speeding up capacity building efforts on local and national levels;
 - » On the local level, analyzing the current situation with regards to inclusive education and reviewing available resources,
 - » Identifying children and teenagers who are, for one reason or another, excluded from school, and providing support for their sustainable return to education,
- Informing and supporting teachers about the critical role they play in this matter; making sure that the differences of students are seen as opportunities rather than as obstacles by all teachers.

¹¹ UNESCO, 2009.

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ERI and UNICEF conducted a series of studies throughout 2014 and 2015 based on the above framework in order to understand the state of inclusive education in Turkey, as well as teachers' needs in this regard. Based on the results of the analyses in these studies and the international implementation experiences, the priority to make inclusive education widespread and sustainable in Turkey should be given to:

- Accelerating efforts to inform students, teachers and parents and raise awareness about inclusion,
- Updating curricula and education materials in a way to support inclusive practices,
- Devising and implementing teacher trainings.

SHARING INFORMATION AND RAISING AWARENESS

Adopting an inclusive approach for education by all stakeholders, particularly educators, students and parents, is a prerequisite for progress in this field.

While conveying the importance and the scope of inclusive education and practices, it is extremely important to inform teachers about different socioeconomic/cultural backgrounds and diverse student needs as well as enabling them to improve their skills in communicating with all children. It would be useful if the teachers who attend awareness events or workshops share what they learn with their fellow teachers and school administrators. This would trigger a more efficient and organic progress towards sustainable inclusive practices in schools. In addition, as emphasized by teachers interviewed for the needs analysis conducted by ERI and UNICEF, it wouldn't be possible to talk about inclusive education in an environment where parents' support and active participation could not be mobilized.¹² Thus, creating resources focusing on inclusive education practices and developing guidance and support platforms for all parents would be effective ways for the culture of inclusive education to become well established in schools.

Efforts to mitigate the lack of information, awareness and support regarding inclusive education in communities such as local and national learning events, dialogue, and information sharing among peers are other important steps for progress.

¹² Ayan Ceyhan, 2016.

A good example is the national and international seminars held by a public university in Mexico to train special education teachers. These events brought together teachers from different regions of the country as well as from outside the country; good practices were shared in workshops, poster presentations and stakeholder meetings.¹³ Another example is the annual Good Practices in Education Conference¹⁴ held by Education Reform Initiative in Turkey since 2004. Bringing together good practices under different topics each year; the conference allows teachers from different parts of Turkey to come together and share good practices. This activity provides a suitable model for making progress in inclusive education awareness since it allows teachers to learn from each other, with each good practice holding the potential to trigger another. National conferences and local workshops on inclusive practices may lead the way for the topic to remain on the education agenda and become subject to widespread discussion. For instance, in Norway, as part of the 'Zero' and 'Respect' programs, teachers from selected schools were offered seminars on inclusive education; events for information sharing among educators and parents were held; hands-on trainings were provided in the classroom, schoolyard and hallways. Under these programs, teachers also attended a six day course on discrimination and bullying.¹⁵ Another similar experiment was conducted in Austria. Nurseries, primary schools and institutions of non-formal education were presented with an opportunity to form a common network with the municipalities they function under, and an Index for Inclusion was created allowing schools and municipalities to assess how inclusive they are.¹⁶

Encouraging student participation in the policy development processes may also help reduce discriminatory practices.

A successful example of this are the sessions organized in 2003 and 2007 by the European Parliament and supported by the European Union (EU) countries' ministries of culture that had brought high school students together half of whom had special needs. During the sessions, students discussed the challenges they face at school, the obstacles before inclusive education, and developed some policy recommendations.¹⁷ This experiment is important because it revealed the relationship between what students experience at schools and other concerns such as professional life, wealth and accommodation for these students. In addition, activities like this reach policymakers directly and have the potential to make an impact on policy making processes.

A holistic approach built on collaboration of all stakeholders intending to secure the right to education is a very important requirement for the success of efforts towards informing and building awareness.

Efforts towards strengthening the collaboration between teachers and parents of students with high risk for exclusion hold immense importance for the internalization of inclusive education in the immediate surroundings of the child. Organizing seminars for parents at schools and providing parents information and support about their children's needs would contribute to prioritizing inclusive education. In addition to these, educational public service announcements (PSAs) may be designed in collaboration with central and local administrations, universities and non-governmental organizations. These videos need to be interesting and informative in nature. For instance, Portuguese Ministry of Education produced a PSA on the constitutional rights of

¹³ For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=274>

¹⁴ More information on the conference can be reached on egitimdeiyiornekler.org

¹⁵ For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=244>

¹⁶ For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=115>

¹⁷ For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=218>

children with special needs by showing different students in an inclusive classroom environment. The PSA featured deputy heads, students, teachers and parents; and underscored the necessity of cooperation for a widespread inclusive education practice. These PSAs were later used in schools and various meetings, as informative materials.¹⁸

INCLUSIVE CURRICULA AND EDUCATION MATERIALS

Curricula and education materials hold vital importance in promoting inclusive education practices. A curriculum flexible enough to respond to different needs would not only improve the quality of academic knowledge transfer, but also enhance teacher-student relations and the development of students' critical thinking skills.

The main focus of an inclusive curriculum would be students' cognitive, emotional, social and creative development. Curricula built largely on academic knowledge will not provide suitable settings for inclusive learning. Therefore, it is necessary to support learning and assessment methods that will address all students' requirements, and allow teachers more flexibility to teach and interact with students.¹⁹ Flexibility may involve reviewing lessons with student needs in mind, allowing teachers more freedom with regard to teaching techniques, or developing ways to encourage more group work in class. The teachers interviewed for the needs analysis study mentioned flexibility in their day-to-day schedule and the pace at which they apply the curriculum to enable a more effective communication with students would help internalizing principles of inclusive education.²⁰ An example for this would be the program developed at Western Kentucky University. The curriculum was used for two years with 80 preschool children with different physical and verbal disabilities, and featured dance, language, drama, mathematics and music-intensive lessons. The program resulted in each child's progress in at least one artistic field, establishing the role of incorporating curricula designed with an interdisciplinary approach. This approach taught through creative artistic methods proved effective in increasing educational participation of children with disabilities.²¹

Opinions and other contributions from different stakeholders and experts in curriculum building and development would enable flexibility, as well as more engaging inclusive education practices.

It would be ideal if teachers and education professionals consulted for their opinion and expertise during curriculum development and assessment are from different disciplines, with different kinds of experience, and are familiar with different cultures. Expanding the NGOs and academic experts the Ministry of National Education works with and increasing contributions in fields such as children's rights, child development and pedagogy would help teachers use the curriculum with an inclusive approach. A school in Finland with special education classes and integrated classes brought teachers together for pedagogic collaboration to contribute to the content of education. Taking into consideration the essential role socializing plays for the adjustment of students with disabilities into society, more inclusive classrooms were formed where teachers took turns to

18 For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=216>

19 Ayan Ceyhan, 2016.

20 Ibid.

21 For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=249>

teach. As a result, students were divided into various groups such as “slow learners” and “visual learners,” and the learning methods were adapted to different needs. Following the trial period, teachers discussed the problems they encountered and their teaching techniques.²²

Changes that are intended to make curriculum more flexible and engaging might not be effective in the absence of differentiated materials for teachers to use in the classroom. Therefore, it is crucial to present teachers with course materials and innovative tools that would facilitate inclusive practices.

Development of different materials for students with different needs would support teachers when it comes to instruction. Having these materials and tools in every school library and every classroom would naturally increase their use. An example of this would be the pilot undertaken in Spain with the purpose of overcoming the challenges students with developmental disorders face in adapting to their classroom and school, as well as of providing teachers with the resources and materials on special education. The positive steps taken under this project include implementation of efficient, interesting and motivating activities for students with disabilities; development of visual tools (pictures, journals etc.); providing classrooms with education materials in line with students’ needs, and rearranging of the classroom in a way that best serves educational and recreational purposes.²³

SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

Students with a positive relationship with their teachers seem less likely to be absent from school, to drop out, experience feelings of dislike or not belonging in school compared to those with negative relationships with their teachers.²⁴

The effectiveness of the teacher plays a significant role in increasing students’ academic achievement. No matter how suitable the educational legislation, curricula and course materials have become to fit the purposes of inclusive education; unless teachers have the necessary skills and support to utilize these tools, it would not be possible to make inclusive practices widespread.

The first step in supporting teachers to put inclusive education principles into practice is to inform them about what inclusive education means and entails.

It is essential to convey to teachers the different needs students may have and the possible ways to address these in a way to prevent interactions that might result in discrimination in the classroom. In fact, the teachers who have been interviewed as part of the needs analysis pointed out that the presence of teachers who have internalized discrimination in the education system remains one of the major impediments to promotion and implementation of inclusive practices.²⁵ It has been stressed that these teachers should be included in informative programs regarding inclusive education, their skills should be upgraded, and a process that will lead to change in their

²² For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=208>

²³ For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=184>

²⁴ Gürkan vd., 2014.

²⁵ Ayan Ceyhan, 2016.

attitudes should thereby be supported. This is the only way teachers' perspectives can enable social justice and equality.

During this process, both pre-service and in-service training programs will have to be revised based on an inclusive approach to education.

Informing teacher candidates, offering different courses or seminars, and creating environments for discussing issues related to inclusive education should become an integral function of university and education faculty curricula. Annual in-service trainings would also be beneficial for maintaining the support provided to teachers in this area, making the practice widespread and sustainable. This is how teachers can be prepared for diverse student groups and can internalize inclusive education principles. Teachers can attain the ability to turn the differences in their classrooms into learning opportunities, rather than perceiving them as obstacles. An example for this is the professional development program offered by the Irish Department of Education and Skills in the academic year 2008-09 to teachers on a national scale. Under this program, teachers were trained to communicate with students with different needs. This training was delivered through brief seminars, workshops, distance education programs, various publications and resources, and support within the school. Teachers who participated in the program have reported receiving positive feedback from students afterwards.²⁶

As a complement to policies to impact teachers, steps towards improving the social status and conditions of the teaching profession would help provide the necessary motivation for practicing inclusive education.

Measures that may be taken in this direction include assuming a more selective approach in student admission to education faculties, providing higher quality pre-service and in-service trainings for teachers' development, customizing these trainings in accordance with teachers' needs and implementing widespread public advocacy efforts for enhancing the reputation of the teaching profession.

²⁶ For more detailed information, see. <http://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/iea/index.php?menuid=25&reporeid=212>

CONCLUSION

The methods that will enhance the commitment to inclusive education and its practices should be a priority of education policy. The main steps for making inclusive education widespread and sustainable in Turkey revealed to be acceleration of efforts towards raising awareness of students, teachers and parents; updating curricula and education materials in a way to support inclusive practices and devising and implementing teacher trainings. These recommendations carry a holistic perspective that will lead to improvements in the entire education system. In order for this to happen, all actors in education need to work in collaboration. Each and every step in this direction is valuable, and holds the potential of becoming a significant turning point in the establishment and internalization of an inclusive culture in education.

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