Improving Inclusive (Teacher) Education in Iraq – A Multiplier System Approach in Teacher Training to Enhance Inclusive Education

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After several wars and the conflict with the terrorist group ISIS, it is one of the most challenging tasks in Iraq to reconstruct the educational sector. Following the goals of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, German Scientists were supporting five Iraqi universities to implement inclusive teacher education to their academic offer. The support was realized using a multiplier approach with the aim of preparing the multipliers by expanding their knowledge in the areas of special needs and inclusive education, enabling the acquisition of skills in dealing with inclusion and to reflect on the necessary attitudes.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Special Needs Education, Multiplier System Approach, Teacher Training in Inclusive Education

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, United Nations, 2015) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) strive for sustainability and inclusion. The goal of an inclusive process is to increase the participation in education and society of every person. Teachers and their qualifications are seen as an essential tool for achieving the goals (UNESCO IBE, 2008). Thus, on national and international level, it is indisputable a key challenge to prepare teachers for inclusive education. And finding ways to firmly integrate inclusive education into teacher training as well as other formal and informal educational settings is a central task. Still, country specific educational policies and

education systems as well as profession-related framework conditions remain challenging factors for inclusive education systems and their successful implementation.

However, some evidence suggests, that the higher education system and in particular centers of teacher training in Iraq suffer from a lack of expertise in that field. The ongoing project starts right here. In collaboration with various universities in Germany, Iraq and the autonomous region of Kurdistan and their researchers /lecturers in the field of special education and teacher education we reached out to support the development of an inclusive educational system. The overarching objective is to develop appropriate support options by using a so called cascade model of professional development of teachers (Lange, 2014) as a type of multiplier system. In such models trainers are qualified to be multipliers and to spread knowledge and competences for professionals in service. The project is running for two years (2019-2020) and is funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The Article presents the aim of the project explains the concept and gives some insights into predictors of success, challenges and first outcomes.

Global Political, Social and Inclusive Background

After 2003, following the military intervention of the USA and the downfall of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime, ethnic and religious conflicts did not only result in the death and displacement of thousands, but they also caused deterioration of infrastructure and public order in Iraq. During this period, an autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government was established alongside the Iraqi government in 2005 (NUFFIC, 2015). Both the Kurdistan Regional and the Iraqi governments attempted to recover and improve their internal structures until 2014, when a significant part of Iraq's territory was invaded by ISIS. However, after the long-standing conflicts, ISIS's attacks shook the not-fully-settled order even more. This situation has caused many young people to leave their homes to live a life under safer circumstances in which they can also continue their education. Many Iraqis, like others, affected by the existence-threatening conflicts in the Middle East, ended up in Europe or internally displaced (Idris, 2018). European and German politicians therefore call for the stabilization of the situation in the crisis areas.

The current security situation in Iraq is still instable, despite the steady decline in violence across a large part of the country. This instable situation has negatively affected most of the institutions such as the health system and the educational system as much as the people's perceptions about the future. The confidence of the population in the political system and the democratic institutions is weakened, due to territorial and religious-based conflicts. The state structures and institutions, especially the education system, are sustainably damaged and chronically underfunded (MADRE, 2015). People's level of education contributes sustainably to the improvement of the living situation in the region. Additionally, proper education opens the door for societal changes. It leads to a long-term improvement of local living conditions. Education in this context is especially important since approximately 50% of the Iraqi population is under 19 years old, meaning, most of them are school age (Idris, 2018). In addition, 15 percent of those between 2 and 14 years old are living with disabilities (UNAMI/OHCHR, 2016, p.10), and yet, many children and adolescents (e.g. children and adolescents with disabilities) are currently not able to attend school in Iraq. Hence, there is further need for action here.

School attendance rate has decreased on further educational level, following primary school, due to the insufficient financial resources and educational budget as well as the poor condition of buildings after the war (UNAMI/OHCHR, 2016, p.11). The two main reasons for dropouts are, along with other reasons, the fact that families do not get enough financial support and that there is not enough capacity to reside schools.

In addition, protective tendencies of parents and stigmatization of the disabled are factors which affect the participation of students with disabilities and special education needs. Hence, the participation of children with disabilities and special needs in school is lower than the participation of their non-disabled peers. The rates decrease significantly when the severity of disability increases. The study of Alborz et al. from 2011 has shown that rates for attendance to compulsory primary education was 97.3% for children with no difficulties while it was 95.4%, 75% and 49.4% for children who have difficulties

with mental health only, functional health only and both mental and functional health, respectively. These children are deprived of educational access although it is a constitutional right [2005 Iraqi Constitution: Articles 32 & 34] (Alborz et al. 2011). One of the reasons why students with disability and special educational needs are victims of this education system is that the vast majority of them attend mainstream schools along with their non-disabled peers without any provision of essential facilities. In such a context, they are not provided with any additional support for their needs, they cannot access the materials they need and the existing syllabus is not inclusive. Moreover, teachers' qualifications and training for this type of education is below these children's need (Khochen- Bagshaw, 2018).

To sum up, the level of education in Kurdish and Central Iraq schools is, in addition to infrastructural restrictions, extremely problematic, especially with regard to students with disability and special educational needs, because of teacher didactic and methodical expertise being weak (Sinemillioglu, 2015). What is needed, for instance, is a different and new kind of syllabus to educate the children in a better way in combination with better educational abilities of professionals. However, teachers in Iraq do not get sufficient training for new syllabuses or evidence based teacher trainings even though the bachelor's degree needed for becoming a teacher does provide extra training for inclusion and disability (Khochen, 2018).

There have already been changes in society that are operationalizing through special education courses and an increasing expansion of institutions for children and young people with disabilities. However, the aim of an inclusive process is to increase participation of all children and young people in education and society, which becomes evident by school attendance at general schools by children and young people with disabilities. So far, however, the teachers in Iraq do not have sufficient expertise regarding inclusive education.

The Situation of Children With Disabilities in Iraq
In all parts of Iraq life has been affected for decades by several wars and an economic situation that is limited and affected by these wars. It provokes that the situation of children with disabilities is characterized by very little or no support by public institutions and the society. Children with disabilities often are not attending school, they are hidden by their families and sometimes they are living in abusive environments, in which, for instance, they experience violence or deprivation of (parental) care. On the other hand, in consequence of the wars and the economic and governmental instability in Iraq, a big need of improvement of the attention and the support for individuals with disability exists. The number of people born with disabilities or people who acquired a disability during the war and the number of children and adults with mental disorders like posttraumatic stress disorders have increased dramatically (OHCHR, 2019).

Even though in 2013 the government of Iraq signed the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities up until now just a small and statistically not covered number of children with disabilities attend an inclusive classroom. In the initial report submitted by Iraq to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations it was underlined that in the school year 2014/2015 13 special institutes for persons with disabilities in the three provinces of Kurdistan Region existed. In these 13 centers the Directorates-General for Social Welfare and Development in the governorates provided education and rehabilitation to 927 students (CRPD, 2017, p. 23). At the same time 15.208 students with disability were attending special education classes in 1.249 schools (CRPD, 2017, p. 22). There are no numbers reported for students with disabilities in regular classes. Comparing these numbers with the population of the Kurdistan Region it becomes apparent that this can only be a small part of the children with special needs. Surely disabilities are a high risk factor for being excluded from school. About eight percent of primary aged children and 26 percent of secondary aged children did not attend school in Iraq in 2013 (UNICEF MENA OOSCI, 2015, p. 3). As mentioned before a large proportion of students not enrolled in school are children and adolescents with disabilities (UNICEF MENA OOSCI, 2015, p. 54). The major barriers for school absenteeism of children with disabilities are the lack of awareness of the importance of education of children with disabilities, poverty, living conditions (e.g. insecurity, housing, infrastructure), a lack of school places, facilities and well trained teachers (Ortmann & Thies, 2018, p.

55). School places which means having the possibility to attend a certain school, are missing because of a lack of school buildings and teachers, due to the fact that school buildings were destroyed during the war, and the economic situation doesn't permit any enhancement. The lack of school is especially high in the Iraqi camps for refugees and internally displaced people. Already in 2015, UNICEF stated that 650.000 internally displaced school-aged-children lost at least a year's worth of schooling (UNICEF MENA OOSCI, 2015) and in 2016 still 355.000 internally displaced children in Iraq were not going to school (Government of Iraq & UNICEF, 2017, p. 22).

Furthermore, there is a major lack of teachers and other pedagogical professionals with the expertise to teach children with disabilities and to include them in the regular classroom. Since 2013, the University of Duhok in the Kurdistan Region in northern Iraq in cooperation with the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg has been working against this in the field of Special Needs Education. As a result of this cooperation, the University of Duhok established a unique and innovative Bachelor's degree program in Iraq in 2014. This program is called: *Disability studies and rehabilitation.* At the end of 2018 the first 42 students of this study program obtained their Bachelor's degree. The degree enables them to work as teachers for special needs education in school. Due to the experience with the establishment of this Bachelor's degree program, the obtained knowledge of staff members and the knowledgement of the situation in Iraq, the University of Duhok plays a key role in the development of the presented multiplier system approach program.

What Does an Inclusive Education System Need? – Teacher Training for an Inclusive School System

Based on the competence-oriented teacher profession approach, competence is understood as the result of the interaction of declarative and procedural knowledge, professional values, beliefs, subjective theories and normative preferences as well as goals, metacognitive skills, motivational orientations and professional self-regulation (Baumert & Kunter, 2006, p. 481). Professional action knowledge (general pedagogical knowledge, specialist knowledge, didactic knowledge, organizational and advisory knowledge) linked with a critical-reflexive attitude, enables teachers to plan and carry out effective high-quality lessons. It allows teachers to cope with heterogeneous learning groups and supports the professional and social participation of all students.

Based on this perspective, the First World Report on Disability (World Health Organization & The World Bank, 2011) and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2011) identified and claimed three principles for teachers in order to be able to meet the needs of learners' diversities in an inclusive education system: *knowledge* (the knowledge of effective measures and concepts), *skills* (implementing and adopting new measures) and *attitudes* (reflection of social values and norms). All three dimensions are relevant and interact (Gable, Tonelson, Park, Sheth, & Wilson, 2012).

To realize these principles teachers have to fulfill challenging tasks in their everyday work. They have to collaborate with families and caregivers, they have to select appropriate learning materials in order to deliver personalised support and actively involve students in their own learning processes (Germundsson, 2015, p.124). However, there is agreement that regular teachers alone cannot be given the high responsibility for the success of an inclusive school. Inclusive schools require support on several levels: administrative support (e.g. educational policies, stake-holders), access to learning and diagnostic material (e.g. assessment), perspectives and help of other specialists (e.g. special needs educators, psychologists, pedagogical staff etc.). In fact, the complementary view of other professions as well as the ability and willingness of all those involved to cooperate has been identified and claimed as one of the most important factors of success (Steinbeck, 2016). Regular teachers do not experience themselves as "lone fighters". Therefore, in order to develop an inclusive school, it is important to provide a framework in teacher training centres in which general teachers and professionals from the field of special education develop their skills and knowledge while interacting and practicing collaboration. Thus, collaboration of special needs educators and regular teachers is not only taken into account in this project on the theoretical level of knowledge transfer on (micro level), but is also an essential practical part of the project (meta level) on a level of a means-end-relation.

Based on a review of empirical studies, Hillenbrand, Melzer and Sung (2014) identify eleven areas of responsibility and teacher tasks for special education teachers in inclusive education systems. These consist in:

- administrative operations/ paperwork
- assessment and diagnostics
- instruction and co-teaching
- cooperation with external partners (e.g. parents, therapists)
- instructing other teachers and non-professionals
- writing individual education plans
- individualized support for learners
- consulting different groups
- teaching specialized strategies (e.g. mnemonics, metacognitive, cognitive-behavioral strategies)
- professional development for school staff
- individual professionalization

The competencies to reach an effective inclusive school system should be based on the international standards of an evidence-based support for all learners (World Health Organization & The World Bank, 2011).

Intercultural Factors Influencing the Success of an Intercultural Project

The intercultural exchange between the German and Iraqi academics (e.g. scientists, lecturers, research assistants) is an essential factor for the cooperation and the successful implementation of teacher training for an inclusive school system. To create this exchange successfully and productively it is useful to include elements of intercultural pedagogy. Schmidtke (2012, p. 70) describes it as essential to renounce all ethnic connotations of the unfamiliar and to get to know the social environment, the living situation and the customs of the participating persons. Hence, different intercultural competences are necessary to interact with the cooperators appropriate to the context and the situation. It is beneficial to respect cultural and religious dimensions and to overcome constructed differences by reflecting the cooperator´s behavior and statements from different perspectives (Yousefi, 2014). In such intercultural cooperation the process to learn from the cooperators is more important than the own knowledge (Schmidtke, 2012, p. 70). Only if the academics connect what they learn from the other cooperator with their own knowledge, they are able to define common goals that are realistic and appropriate to improve on establishing an inclusive education system. In an intercultural cooperation like this project, using a multiplier system approach, it is important to listen to each other with empathy and to make the effort trying to thoroughly understand the subjective perception of each cooperator, to consider the sociocultural background, the history, the development and the values of the environment and the society of the individual cooperators (Ortmann & Thies, 2018, p. 60).

As it is usual in international and intercultural cooperation, language skills of the cooperators can be barriers for participation. For the participation in this project, the knowledge of English language is a fundamental requirement for all participants, because all activities (e.g. workshops, conferences) are realized in English. It is necessary to translate frequently the topics covered, because of varying English skills of the participants. That proves the demand of more time but it also ensures that the participants are able to reflect their comprehension in their own language and their own context. This is an essential factor for the success of an international and intercultural cooperation.

AIMS OF THE CURRENT PROJECT

The overall aim of the project is to provide Iraqi society with qualified (university) teachers for an inclusive education system. The project intends to promote knowledge on *special educational needs* and provide knowledge for *inclusive teaching* regarding educational processes in preschool, primary and secondary education, inclusive education systems and their basic conditions.

At the first stage, activities address the improvement of professional, (special education) pedagogical and didactic competencies of the Iraqi and Kurdish academic at Higher Education Institutions. Thus, the project aims (1) to expand knowledge components in the areas of special needs and inclusive education, to enable the acquisition of skills in dealing with inclusion and to reflect on the necessary attitudes as conditions for success. This is linked to the goal of building up Iraqi university education in the area of teacher training for special needs education and thereby modernizing the general regular teacher training curriculum.

Thus, at the second stage, the project also aims (2) at changing structures and curricula at universities. The topic of inclusion is supposed to be implemented as a cross-cutting issue. The trained multipliers will continue to develop their teaching and hold further in-service training courses on the subject of inclusion for other university lecturers and teachers at schools. The professionalization of the training staff makes a sustainable contribution to improving the level of training of graduates of teacher training at the cooperating Iraqi universities. Furthermore, the project aims (3) to raise awareness for intercultural dialogue about the diversity of educational realities in the mirror of normative educational goals among German and Iraqi partners and (future) teachers. The importance of this subject area for teacher training is undisputedly high in all regions: In 2015, for example, 117.08 applications for asylum were made in Germany in the age group from zero to 16 year old children (National Education Report, 2017); no opposite trend is to be expected. For the German school system, this development means a continuously growing cultural diversity in German classrooms. A comparable challenge exists for the Iraqi school system and society: People from different ethnic groups and religions are living together in the country and during the last six years about 5.8 million people have been internally displaced. In August 2019, still 1.5 million IDP´s remained displaced and 229.000 Syrian refugees were registered in Iraq, the main part of them in Kurdistan Region (UNHCR, 2020). Therefore, the ability for intercultural communication and the willingness to adopt perspectives is becoming an increasingly relevant competence for teachers for successfully coping with their everyday work. In the course of a broad concept of inclusion, which not only implies the inclusion of people with disabilities, but all facets of diversity, there is also a technical-thematic and interdisciplinary benefit of this project with a high reach.

In order to achieve these objectives, the approach of a multiplier program was selected. In this way it is contemplated, that multipliers who were trained and gained knowledge, skills and who create awareness for importance of inclusive education can pass on their knowledge to local teachers and society in Iraq.

A further aim of the project is (4) to promote young researchers and especially women. In all measures within the project, special attention will be paid to gender balance in order to contribute to raising awareness, strengthening women in the university working environment.

Several aims of the project can be identified in the Agenda 2030. The attainment of several goals of the Agenda 2030 shall be supported by the project: The project activities shall ensure an inclusive and equitable quality education (Goal 4) and shall support gender equality and empowerment of women (Goal 5). Inequality can be reduced by the promotion of social inclusion of persons with disability and by making sure that they can seize education opportunities (Goal 10) and by encouraging and promoting effective international public partnerships, sharing experiences and developing resourcing strategies, a sustainable development will be strengthened (Goal 17) (UN, 2015).

MEASURES OF THE PROJECT

In order to achieve the project goals, various activities have been planned and carried out. The following table (Table 1) contains a chronological representation of the activities. It demonstrates the complex relationship between the various aspects.

TABLE 1
OVERVIEW OF PLANNED AND CARRIED OUT MEASURES (2019 - 2020)

Measures	University of Oldenburg	University of Vechta
Year 2019		
Spring kick-off-meeting in Turkey (Istanbul)	Meeting for planning and discussion about measures, goals and concept of the advanced training offer with the responsibles from the five universities	
August Summer conference with multiplicators 11 days	15 participants (5 days) Area: Special Needs Education (SNE)	15 participants (5 days) Area: Inclusive Education
	30 participants (6 days) Exchange and collaboration (complete group working in Vechta)	
Autumn advanced training 14 days	4 participants Stay for advanced training and visits to different schools (inclusive and SNE) and institutions in the field of SNE	Preparation of a digital platform to strengthen the cooperation and empower all participants to develop the content
Winter meeting in Turkey (Istanbul)	Conference with the responsibles • Feedback of the results from the summer conference (Assessment of the participants) • Planning future measures • Introduction to evaluation of aspects of school development	
Year 2020		
Spring meeting in Egypt (Kairo) 5 days	Hospitation in an inclusive school Workshop for diagnostics and support for children (postponed due to pandemic Covid-19)	
Spring 2 e-conferences	Realization of two e-conferences including students and teachers from all universities (postponed due to pandemic Covid-19)	
spring and autumn advanced training 14 days	Study visits to OldenburgTotally 8 persons, each time two persons for 14 days Stay for advanced training and visits to different schools and institutions in the field of SNE (all postponed to autumn due to pandemic Covid-19)	Preparation and development of the digital platform: Cooperation with a software developer who modifies the barrier free platform LAYA (Learn as you are) for the needs of the project
Winter final conference	Reflection of the project and the measures future planning for the network, the using of the platform and the multiplier system	

A central aspect and starting point of the project is the collaboration between the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg and the University of Vechta in Germany. Both universities have certain expertise in the areas of special education (Oldenburg) and teaching with a focus on inclusive education (Vechta). For this reason, they set individual priorities (training in the area of special educational needs and training of inclusive teachers), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, incorporated connecting elements in the sub-projects. However, it is only by merging the two sub-projects that the training of multipliers is made possible. For this purpose, individualized, tailored and joint training sections are carried out. This enables an early interaction of future collaboration partners at the respective home universities.

Establishing an Administrative Network

In order to strengthen the collaboration and to ensure the sustainable success of the project through supporting administrative processes, regular meetings and conferences are held with German academics, decision-makers and responsible persons from all participating Iraqi universities. The Iraqi participants of the multiplier program develop strategies and make sure that the content of the multiplier training systematically finds its way into their home universities. Thus, from the start it was a central aspect to involve decision-makers in the entire process and to actively involve them in the development of implementation options, in order to guarantee the success of the project.

Measures for Qualification

Trainings, lectures and workshops are carried out to qualify future multipliers in the field of teacher education and special educational needs. Since the curricula in the field of teacher education diverge internationally, in particular due to the different levels of qualification (degrees) of students, the theoretical foundation of the curriculum is based on the German educational science standards for teacher education (KMK, 2004). The curriculum is adjusted to the local and curricular conditions in consultation with the local actors taking identified needs into account. In order to achieve the goals, lecturers, teachers and special education actors from the University of Vechta (Inclusive Teacher Education, Germany), the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg (Special Education, Germany), Garmian University, Zakho University, Kufa University, Mossul University and Dohuk University (Iraq and autonomous region of Kurdistan) collaborate.

In addition to imparting theoretical knowledge (micro-level) and presenting implementation options (meta-level) such as curriculum development or the general structure of degree programs of teacher training, the concept includes visits of inclusive institutions (e.g. school, kindergarden). In this way, multipliers have the possibility to experience a variety of inclusive learning settings, different organizational types of inclusive schools and exemplary the German support system for pupils with disabilities. All the practical experiences are reflected upon together with the German academics and during lectures in university the Iraqi scientists and German students and lecturers are practicing a beneficial exchange.

The main structure and implementation of the multiplier system as well as level content specific knowledge that will be conveyed to multipliers will be explained in detail in the following section.

Inclusive Digital Learning Platform

As a flanking measure to the multiplier training, it is planned to develop and give access to digital learning rooms and online learning materials. In the long run it is the aim to empower participants of the Iraqi universities to expand and develop their knowledge in the field of inclusive education and to make a lasting contribution to the training level of graduates of teacher training courses at the cooperating Iraqi universities by professionalizing the training staff. The aim is grant low-threshold, free and sustainable access to relevant aspects and constant further development of all actors in order to achieve a lived and profitable cooperation. The implementation of the digital learning platform is the next action going to be addressed in 2020.

Implementation of the Multiplier System in the Current Project

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the implementation of the cascade model ensures that the multipliers are trained intensively in two different subjects, emphasizing core areas of an inclusive school system (Special Education and Inclusive Education), combining the key idea of the multiplier system approach: being learners (aim: content to be learned) and teachers (aim: conveying content to others) at the same time (*Level 1*).

FIGURE 1
**STRUCTURE OF THE MULTIPLIER SYSTEM OF THE PROJECT**
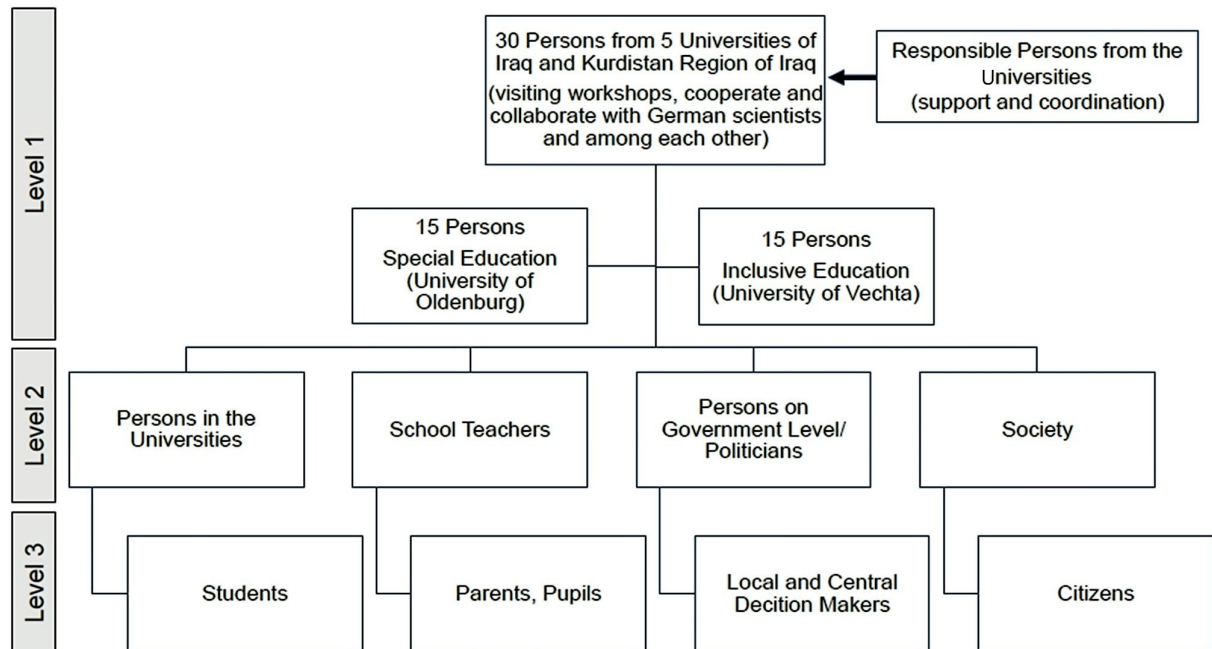
Activities, carried out on *level 1* are concerned with content that can be conveyed to the various target groups, such as school teachers, person in the universities (lecturers, research assistants, doctoral candidates) on *level 2*. The main goal is to enhance their knowledge so they can place the topic prominently in the preservice training. At this stage of the cascade model the teacher trainers also collaborate with responsible persons (e.g. Deans) in order to make sure that developed ideas can be implemented. The support of those responsible for the study programs is of great importance for the sustainable success of curricular or structural changes in higher education.

One main part of the multiplier program is a two-week training (see *figure 1*). This two-week training program is mainly concerned with imparting theoretical knowledge, combined with practical elements and the key idea of practice collaboration by interacting as tandem partners.

As visualized in Fig. 2 in a first step (*week 1*) 15 participants (professionals in the field of teacher training) are trained at the University of Vechta in different topics focusing inclusive teacher education, while other 15 participants (e.g. psychologists and professionals in the field of teacher training and special needs education) are trained at the University of Oldenburg with focusing on special needs education.

FIGURE 2
**TRAINING PROGRAM IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, WITH ACTORS AND THEIR
RELATIONSHIP DUE TO THE CORE CONCEPT OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM**
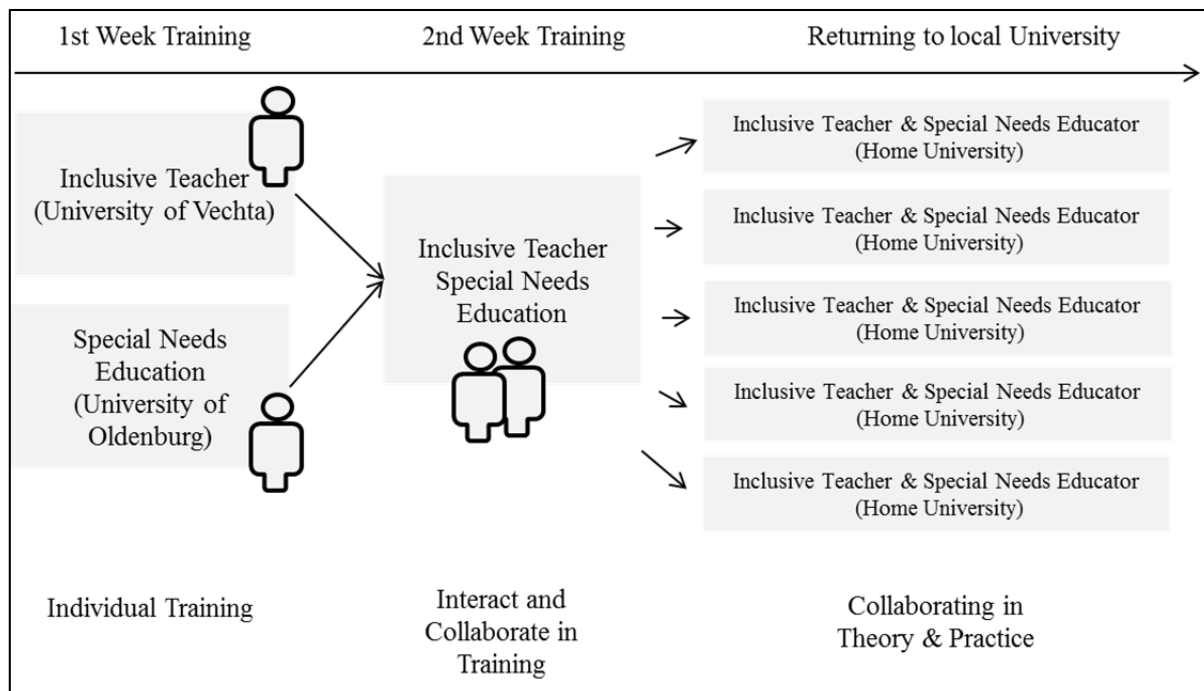
In the second step (*week 2*) multipliers from the field of inclusive teacher education (regular teachers) and special needs education are trained together to exchange and reflect on the experiences and their learning progress of week one. They will work on joined topics as well as develop first ideas for implementation of gained knowledge and on how to collaborate in theory and practice.

The first content on the micro level of teaching school children will be participants acquiring and deepening their knowledge of designing teaching-learning arrangements (e.g. cooperative forms of learning), teaching techniques (e.g. direct instruction) as well as participation and cooperation opportunities of social actors at school. Furthermore, knowledge of school development tools is imparted (dimension "knowledge"). In addition to imparting empirical and theoretical knowledge, practice-oriented training measures are carried out to test and reflect on newly acquired knowledge. The methodical-didactic design of the training measures also contributes to the improvement of didactical education skills of participating lecturers at university by introducing a "methodological meta level". These considerations take place explicitly and are integrated into the program (dimension "skills"). As far as possible, national and international research based knowledge is used in the respective subject areas.

The second content, delivered on *level 1*, is knowledge about conveying and implementing one's own advanced training (meta-level). Here it is explicitly discussed which methods and procedures are particularly suitable for the different contents and target groups. The trainers make concrete transfer suggestions; in specially guided and accompanied work phases, the multipliers develop their own advanced training units, which can then be implemented and developed further on site. The training is geared towards the success conditions of effective teacher training (see e.g. Timperley, Wilson & Barrar, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Lipowsky, 2011). The participants of the project offer information as well as learning materials to their colleagues in the universities (*level 2*). They collaborate with politicians and university counsellors in order to ensure gained knowledge being passed on.

Level 2 activities aim to ensure that gained knowledge from multipliers on *level 1* is used and passed on in order to improve the system and influence actors (pupils, parents etc.) on *level 3*.

The project managers from the universities have the experience of similar multiplier programs in teacher education for inclusion (e.g. in Lower Saxony: Hillenbrand, Vierbuchen & Voges, 2014; in North Rhine-Westphalia: Hennemann et al., 2017). The innovation of this program is that the multipliers who are trained in Vechta and the multipliers who are trained in Oldenburg come together towards the end of the training (see below), plan the implementation of further training together and exchange ideas which involve both important perspectives of special education and inclusive education. This enables them to cooperate effectively in tandem and to offer a broad spectrum of support and assistance in Iraq together.

First Results: Outcome on Level 1

In all of the events that had already been carried out in 2019, strategies and specific steps in relation to the development and implementation of curricula and new teaching methods were explicitly shown and developed together with the responsible persons of the five universities and representatives of the entire group in specific meetings. The Iraqi scientists gained insights into the inclusive everyday working life through excursions to inclusive educational institutions. These experiences and the reflection upon them provided further conclusions about dealing with materials, premises and organizational conditions. Encounters with actors from practice, teaching and research also offered opportunities for reflection on how to deal with inclusion in everyday school life (dimension "attitudes").

30 Multipliers, 6 from each of the named Universities in Kurdistan and Iraq, have been trained at a summer conference in August 2019 in Germany on the subject of "inclusive teaching" and on "special educational needs". In order to find out whether the contents and methodical presentation of the workshops of the Summer Conference have met the expectations and needs of the Iraqi partners, the participants of the two subgroups of the University of Oldenburg (n = 15) and University of Vechta (n= 15) were asked to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained questions on the following three main areas: (1) Impact of the topic on their own work, (2) the lecture in general, (3) workshops. The participants had the opportunity to submit their assessments on a 6-point Likert scale, ranked from *1 = very good* to *6 = not helpful* at all. Findings demonstrate that the participants were in general highly satisfied with the selected contents. Table 2 shows the mean average of feedback on topics and activities carried out: that were rated:

TABLE 2
**MEAN AVERAGE OF FEEDBACK ON TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT AT
MULTIPLIER LECTURES AND WORKSHOPS MEASURED BY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Topic and activities (first week Vechta)	*M*
Effective Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms	1.23
Classroom Management – Introduction and the GoodBehaviorGame	1.29
Differentiation and Individualization	1.23
Inclusive Teaching Strategies I: Direct Instruction	1.00
Inclusive Teaching Strategies II: Cooperative learning Methods	1.00
Topic and activities (first week Oldenburg)	
Introduction to Special Needs Diagnostics: Assessment and Fostering of Cognitive Skills	1.14
Introduction to Traumapedagogy: Teaching Traumatized Children - Establishing Safe Learning Environments	1.20
Introduction to Special Needs	1.26
Students with Intellectual Disabilities – A Brief Insight into their Special Educational Needs and Ideas on Teaching on a fundamental level	1.27
Assessment and Fostering of Motor Skills	1.27
Topic and activities (second week together in Vechta)	Vechta/ Oldenburg
Visiting various schools and institutions	1.14/ 1.00
Teaching and Learning in Higher Education – Constructive Alignment	1.27/ 1.43
Individual Development Plan	1.33/ 1.21
Multi-professional Teams	1.40/ 1.29
Multi-Level Instruction (RTI Teacher Task)	1.40/ 1.13

Ranking and answer options: 1 = very good, 2 = good, 3 = satisfying, 4 = not satisfying, 5 = not good, 6 = not helpful at all

Participants were also asked whether the training course met their expectations in general. They were asked to score the content of the conference, the methods used, the working atmosphere, the quality of the discussions between the participants, the structure and format of the sessions and the organization of the conference (location, facilities, support from organizers). The general valuation of the conference was rated by the participants from Vechta with a mean average of $M = 1.46$ (absolutely) and of $M = 1.29$ (absolutely) by the participants from Oldenburg, which shows high satisfaction.

In order to find out whether the collaborative part in week two fulfilled the participants expectations, they were asked whether the workshops and activities during the first week (Individual Training; Vechta: $M = 1.4$, Oldenburg: $M = 1.2$) and during the second week seemed helpful to them (Vechta: $M = 1.5$, Oldenburg: $M = 1.6$), and they were asked about the quality of exchange between collaborative partners (Vechta: $M = 1.6$, Oldenburg: $M = 1.7$). They largely agreed on the benefit of the cooperation with the other group (Vechta: $M = 1.4$, Oldenburg: $M = 1.8$) and for their future collaboration (Vechta: $M = 1.3$, Oldenburg: $M = 1.2$).

A point of criticism of some of the participants was the need for translations during the conference in consequence of the varying English language levels of the participants.

To identify the needs and interests of the participants for future measures they were asked for topics and areas that they would like to follow up and that should be covered in future conferences. The participants' answers show that they have an especially high interest and the need for more input in areas and topics such as *assessment and modern diagnostic items* or *specific target groups* (like children with traumatization or children with autism) and a deepening of the topics already addressed as well as *individual development plan* and *multi-level instructions*. These topics will be considered in the future.

All the results show high satisfaction with the contents and the structure of the conference in general. The visits to schools and other institutions having given an inside view to practical work were rated as one of the most beneficial items of the program. The request for more practical inside views will be covered for part of the group through the advanced training visits to Oldenburg. Afterwards, the participants of that group shall convey their obtained experiences and knowledge in their home universities with their colleagues and responsible university members.

CONCLUSION

Using a multiplier system in order to improve inclusive teacher education in Iraq, is an ambitious concept with high potential, effectiveness and impact, which, however, requires very intensive monitoring and close exchange. After the end of the first project year, a first positive interim result can be drawn. Regular exchanges and meetings made the establishment of a solid, well-functioning administrative network between the participating universities possible. Additionally, relationships were developed and strengthened between Iraqi universities and the universities in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

As demonstrated the implementation of the teacher training on level one has been widely accepted and is considered to be effective for their local work. Furthermore, the implementation of the training program on level one led to numerous activities (level 2) at the home universities of the participants right after returning. Participants showed high engagement and were well supported by the responsible persons. They conducted lectures and workshops for students, local teachers and local staff under supervision of the university presidents (e.g. Garmian University, Zhako University, Kufa University), they established units for special needs and inclusive education (e.g. Kufa University), they provided information about inclusion through local radio stations and interviews with press media (e.g. Duhok University) and they wrote and published articles. At the same time, every university was asked to work on local specific concepts, which fit the requirement and structure of their university, to make sure that, for example, by implementing new courses into their regular teacher training curriculum, structures at higher education institutions will visibly change.

One key challenge remains: Systematically linking the individual activities and accessing their reach and effectiveness on level 2 and level 3 of the cascade model. One possible solution could be the development and implementation of an inclusive digital learning platform. This way a learning offer across all universities providing local actors with basic knowledge giving them access to learning material on the topic of diversity and inclusion will be provided. At the same time, it will be made sure that they have the option of developing their own learning units, matching the local needs and requirements and, thus, ensuring the transfer of knowledge to a larger group of learners. Therefore, this digital solution will be the further developed in the second year of the project in order to achieve the goals.

The first steps seem to have been successful and inspiring. Now the long term task is to deepen the first engagement and stay effective on this area of increasing the participation of children and young people with disabilities in the education system.

ENDNOTES

1. There are different figures on the number of civilians killed in Iraq. Some sources suggest that this figure is around 30,000 people. "Kriegsbilanz: 2000 US-Soldaten und 30,000 Starred from Iraq", Der Spiegel

2. There has been 16,333 asylum aptications from Iraq to Germany with 4,249 acceptances from 2000 to 2018. https://www.laenderdaten.info/Asien/Irak/fluechtlinge.php.
3. After six years of compulsory primary education in Iraq, there is three years of intermediate and three years of secondary school education (Vernez et al., 2014).

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