

Advocacy for Democracy in the Education System as a Part of the Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030

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Saudi education is planning to infuse democratic values to the nation's educational system. This literature review evaluates the implementation of democratic education in Saudi Arabia's special education. The need to adopt and implement a democratic education is part of Saudi Vision 2030. Different reforms in the country's education system, such as changes in teacher education and preparedness and the design of the educational curriculum are essential to realizing the vision. As a result, the literature concludes that KSA can incorporate democratic values into education through the content of curricula, the choice of teaching methods and teacher preparation programs, and student-centered approaches.

Keywords: democracy, special education, education system, teacher education, curriculum, student centered approach

INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program (NTP) that flows from the vision creates a clear road-map to guide education transformation in the country. The success of the vision relies on a wide range of reforms in the education system. The Vision 2030 aims at ensuring that KSA no longer relies on oil alone as the country transforms from a rentier state to a nation with diverse resources and income. To attain this goal, Saudi Arabia needs to address the issues of democracy and freedom of expression that present significant challenges to the implementation of various reforms under the NTP. In the modern world, the subject of democracy is not only limited to the governance and political arena, but it is also a matter of concern in other sectors like education. Initially, the term democracy implied the rule of majority and equity. However, the contemporary meaning of the word has changed to mean providing freedom of expression and will in different sectors like education and business.

Democratic values comprise an opportunity for meaningful participation, personal initiative, and equity and justice for everyone. Therefore, democratic education refers to the integrated learning process with the fundamental values of the society mentioned above. In this regard, democracy in special education should focus on ensuring equity between the special and general education system in Saudi Arabia as well as providing an opportunity for learners and teachers' participation and personal initiative

(Zeichner, 2017). This study presents a literature review on the implementation of democracy in other countries like the United States. It uses the information to predict the outcome of the fusion of democratic values to the Saudi Arabian special education system. As a result, this literature review focuses on the element of educational democracy in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the fundamental democratic values in special education, and the role of curricula development, and teachers' training and preparedness to the implementation of a democratic educational system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are controversies among Saudi citizens regarding the introduction of democratic values in the country. One group of citizens agrees that these values need to be integrated into educational reforms, while the other advocate for the continuation of traditional approaches in the education system. This condition has presented a significant challenge in the education sector, particularly to the special education system which has been described as a rigid system that denies students the freedom to choose what is best and preferable to them (Alkahazin, 2015). The traditional system limits learners from participating in programs and forums that influence policy formation. In contrast, a democratic education system will increase the flexibility of student choices hence encouraged increased participation career knowledge and skills, as well in empowering them to influence policy decisions.

The integration of democratic values in the special education sector first begins with teachers training and preparedness to spearhead the change. The KSA teachers in the special education sector need to be adequately trained and prepared on both content and various teaching methods to ensure that they create a democratic learning environment for their students. Furthermore, teachers play a critical role in the development and design of special education curricula. Thus, the training needs to prepare them to effectively fuse the fundamental democratic values mentioned earlier into the curricula. The integration of democratic and educational values restructures the special education system by creating a collaborative and safe learning environment, which produces deliberative learners. This literature focuses on effective strategies for implementing democratic values in education. It comprises previous scholarly works, as well as official records regarding democratic education system, teacher education, and efforts to realize Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

The Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 and Democracy in Special Education System

The issue of democracy in special education is part of the goals and objectives of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Three pillars drive the vision. The first one refers to Saudi Arabia's "status as the heart of the Arab and Islamic world," the second one concerns the country's "determination to become a global investment powerhouse." The third one is the goal of "transforming [Saudi Arabia's] unique strategic location into a global hub connecting three continents" (Khashan, 2017). This vision and its pillars are essential to the Kingdom. Still, for them to be successful, the educational system must be given priority, since it is the foundation of achieving all the objectives outlined in Vision 2030.

The aims and objectives of Vision 2030 are to ensure that the education system offers equal opportunities to all learners irrespective of their physical or mental status. If all the democratic education system recommendations concerning education are implemented, then the entire society will be transformed to embrace and practice democratic values (Khashan, 2017). The democratic education system in the *vision 2030* is vital in meeting the different educational goals, including creating a conducive learning environment and improvement in the curriculum and teaching methods for learners in both special and ordinary education system.

The provision of equal educational opportunity for both individuals with disabilities and typical individuals has been the focus of Saudi Arabia education system for years. "Education for all" has been a critical guiding principle for the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Significant emphasis is on the current special education services for the students with disabilities who have unique interests that need to be addressed by the education system. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia has established policies and guidelines to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, as well as enhance the special education quality. Furthermore,

its ensures improvement of professional practices in the sector (Al-Mousa, 2010; Alquraini, 2010). The awareness programs and training of the primary implementers (teachers) will help effective integration of democracy in special education in Saudi Arabia. Transformation of the special education system by incorporating democratic values will ensure the realization of the Vision 2030 through equality and producing individuals with diverse skills and knowledge to transform the economy and social organization of Saudi Arabia.

Definition of Democratic Values in Relation to Special Education

As mentioned earlier, the modern understanding of the term democracy is not only limited to the political and government affairs but also concerns other sectors such as the social and economic elements. In general, it refers to the freedom of expression and will in all aspects of life. Therefore, democratic values comprise an opportunity for meaningful participation, personal initiative, and equity and justice for everyone (Beneke, & Cheatham, 2016). In this regard, it is essential to point out the way these values regard to special education. According to Renkema, Mulder, & Barnard (2019), democratic values in special education refers to the use of various techniques to ensure the interests of students and teachers are accomplished and addressed equally.

Democracy in special education provided learners with an opportunity to explore their potential and realize their personal goals. Democracy in education system promotes the consideration of justice, love, fairness, and cooperation (Stone et al., 2016). Therefore, with a democratic education system, students can identify their talents and engage in creative activities that will help them develop their talents. For example, students may cultivate a vibrant interest in music, art, swimming, research studies, or computer programming, which are not commonly covered in traditional academic subjects (Danforth, 2016). Democratic in special education ensures students and teachers develop creative and rational means of problem-solving through critical thinking and freedom of will. The teaching-learning methods in a democratic education system are students-based. Therefore, the unique needs of children with disabilities can be addressed.

Democratic education system involves a sincere appreciation of cultural diversity, individual differences, and ensuring equality in the provision of educational and development opportunities. As a result, infusion of democratic values ensures integration of the needs of individuals with disabilities in the educational policies and practices. In addition, through the freedom of expression, democracy in special education encourages the spirit of cooperation and healthy human relationships, whereby things are done not individually but using inclusion and teamwork (Renkema, Mulder & Barnard, 2019). Learners under the special education program are allowed to participate in various initiatives that involve unity and collective decision making (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016, p. 237). As a result, they can understand one another's weaknesses and strengths, put together ideas, and combine efforts towards a common goal. Thus, learners with special needs are engaged in proposing and designing practices and initiatives that address their needs not only in the education affairs but also in the society as well.

The Contemporary Special Education System in Saudi Arabia and the Need for Reform

For the last two decades, Saudi Arabia's education system has undergone a rapid transformation. Most of the changes made are attributed to the goals and objectives of Vision 2030. Research has indicated that the existing education system is one of the main barriers to the achievement of the Kingdom's economic vision. The current education system is rigid and does not address the special interests for the students with disabilities. Therefore, there is a need to change the current policy to one that encourages the freedom of expression, choice, and promotes equality (Kovacs, 2014). Due to this demand, several reforms have been implemented in the country.

One of the most practical initiatives introduced in the nation was the 'school development model' that was introduced in 2011. The primary focus of the model was to have every school combine a self-evaluation with planning. The guiding principle for these objectives includes; excellence for all, commitment from everyone, accountability for all, professionalism from everyone, and transparency and clarity by everyone (Kovacs, 2014). This initiative required to have the right people who are committed

and work collaboratively to promote educational outcome for all. Democracy, therefore, is a critical element in this initiative which requires contribution from individuals with diverse interests and views, as well as ensuring equality in the education sector. Practitioners and learners from the special education sector have benefited from this program since it advocated for equality and encouraged contribution from various actors. Despite these developments, there is still more to be done to promote democracy in Saudi Arabia's special education sector.

Advancing Democracy in Special Education through Teacher's Training and Preparedness

Teachers as Educators

The integration of democracy in special education system should be spearheaded by teachers who plan the learning process and influence learners through teaching and interaction with them. Democracy in education has the objective of instilling desirable values into students through their teachers (Fortunato, 2017). To integrate the democratic values teachers need to know these values and how to incorporate them in their teaching methods, especially when dealing with learners with special needs.

Some of the most critical issues that should be addressed through training include the content areas, communication, and instructional methods. Learners with special needs have unique demands that needs to be addressed differently. As noted earlier, one of the weaknesses of the Saudi Arabia education system is that it is rigid (). Therefore, the method and content delivered may be suitable to some learners with special needs but not to others. For that reasons, teachers should be trained to realize this diversity and adopt the most appropriate teaching method and content for individual learners.

Teachers Should Demonstrate Democratic Values in Their Actions and Practice

Teachers are role models for their students. A democratic teacher education program should include democratic values. These values include justice, equality, determination, and cooperation. To set a good example for the students to emulate, all teachers should ensure that they show respect to everyone they interact with (Banks, 2014). Special education learners learn through various means. However, most of them learn through imitation (Amukugo, 2017). Therefore, promoting understanding of democratic values among special education teachers and training them on ways to practice them is a critical measure of implementing democracy in special education system in Saudi Arabia.

Teachers Should Model the Learning Environment to Incorporate Democratic Values

Teachers have the mandate to model the learning environment to promote democracy among learners. According to Stone et al. (2016), a teacher should ensure that all students are treated equitably without bias on any grounds. Equity should be exercised in terms of learning conditions, examinations, and the provision of resources. Every teacher should, therefore, manipulate the classroom environment and "make use of his/her position as a teacher to enrich and ensure the building of students' personalities in an all-round manner" (Fortunato, 2017, p. 180). In addition, teacher should be prepared to exhibit positive and liberal attitudes to the democratic values. Special education teachers need to be adequately prepared to foster cooperation among students. Just like for other typical learners, special education teachers should provide ample freedom, love, and justice in the classroom.

Teachers Are Planners

As essential stakeholders in the education sectors, teachers, including those in the special education program, need to be involved in planning of the education matters. Therefore, the special education teacher should not only be trained on instructional methods and content but also on planning and recognizing the essential needs for learners (Minton, G., & Sullivan, 2013). In most cases, the needs for learners with special needs can only be understood and interpreted by experts in the sector. Therefore, preparing teachers identifying these demands and incorporating them in education planning is vital to ensuring democracy in Saudi Arabia's special education sector.

Integrating Democratic Values in Curricula Content in Saudi Arabia

Infusing democratic values in the curricula content is an effective method for implementing democracy in the special education system in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi curriculum is developed by education experts in the Ministry of Education so that the compulsory curriculum is designed annually to suit the development in various fields of education (Kovacs, 2014). Furthermore, concerning special education curricula, the curricula are derived from general education curricula but more smoothly taking into account the needs of students, in addition to the existence of individual plans to support the student in additional skills to support the educational process.

The curricula content also needs to be more inclusive to address the needs of special learners. To support the integration of democratic values in Saudi education, the curriculum should support both general education students and special needs students (Einarsdottir et al., 2015). The curriculum content given to students should reflect what they can relate to in their society. It should reflect their day-to-day lives within the compulsory content while incorporating the socially acceptable norms and values to which students can relate. In addition, Einarsdottir et al. (2015) emphasize that teaching methods should reflect fairness, sensitivity to individual student differences, and respect for students. Curriculum planners should involve teachers when selecting curriculum content since it is teachers who implement curricula in the classroom.

The application of democracy in the development of curriculum content develops a strong foundation of equity in an educational system. According to Castro-Villarreal and Nichols (2016), democracy is added to the curriculum content to ensure teachers instil democratic value through teaching and assessment. For example, to support the integration of democratic values in the special education curriculum, special needs students should be taken care of, and provided with favourable learning aids and resources such as wheelchairs, braille devices, and hearing aids to ensure that “they also receive the same quality education as others without feeling left out due to their disabilities” (Stone et al., 2016, p.13). In this regard, they get equal learning opportunity as ordinary learners.

CONCLUSION

As noted earlier, one of the critical objectives of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 is to ensure reforms in the education system by integrating democratic values in the system. Various scholars expressed the need for improvement in the Saudi education system, which is a significant hindrance to achieving vision 2030 in the country. This review proposes ways in which democratic values can be incorporated into the education system to improve the special education programs and inclusion for students with disabilities. The evidence suggests that educators and policymakers should consider incorporating democratic values in curriculum content, foster teacher preparation. However, more research is needed on this matter to establish the process of integrating these values with regard to labor, finances, and time. This would help in establishing the roots to achieve the 2030 vision smoothly. Therefore, educators should take this study seriously to ensure they achieve the vision of incorporating democracy and improving special education programs in Saudi Arabia.

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