

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Inclusive education and policy in Saudi Arabia

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**This paper investigates how Saudi Arabia supports inclusive education by closely examining its policy and legislative frameworks. By exploring what is meant by 'right's, 'integration' and 'inclusion' this article provides a critical perspective on Saudi educational policy and its lack of effectiveness in the school systems. Employing a modified version of Bacchi's 'What Problem is Represented?' (WPR) approach, this study looks behind the policy itself and concludes that while Saudi Arabia's policy and legislation is consistent with international policy and human rights legislation, there is much work to be done before inclusive education is achieved in Saudi Arabia.**

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, inclusion, special education, educational policy, Bacchi's (WPR), Saudi Arabia.

## INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia places a lot of emphasis and significance on education. Alnahdi (2014) argues that education is a changing process and that reforms are part of it. The Saudi Arabian education system has dramatically changed in recent years. Initially, education was reserved for children from wealthy families, but nowadays education is available to all people in the society. The Ministry of Education offers free education for every student, including those with disabilities. Initially, people with disability did not have access to specialised education in Saudi Arabia. The burden of their education was left to their parents (Alquraini, 2011).

Disability is a significant social and economic problem in that nation. Although there is a growing awareness of disability-related issues in Saudi Arabia, little emphasis has been given to researching this population. Aljadid (2013) maintains that the labour law of Saudi Arabia defines a person with a disability as any individual who has minimal ability to gain and continue doing regular work due

to physical or mental frailty. Various states are faced with moral and political challenges about the best way of including and supporting individuals with a disability. Persons with disabilities lack equal access in society as well as lacking access to education in developed states.

Saudi Arabia has established a standard national curriculum whereby all children are offered an opportunity to access education. Teacher education programs have also been developed to aid in the process of the implementation of government policy concerning inclusion. This program is aimed at educating children together, including those with disabilities, within the system of gender separation. Inclusion aims to educate all children within mainstream schooling, offering additional specialist services where required. Saudi Arabia has a history of offering special education in regular schools for visually impaired children, as well as those with hearing difficulties and those with less severe disabilities.

However, the country is currently expanding its system of special education institutes to make them more consistent with the inclusive policies and practices of other nations. The state also offers children with different special educational needs the educational help they require (Alanazi, 2012). It has increased specialisation programs

for children who require educational, social, emotional and behavioural assistance. In this way, the national government aims to address the gap left by the standardised national curriculum.

The first Al-Noor Institute for the Blind was opened in 1960 (Alenzi, 2012). Since its establishment, the country has continued to participate in the training of special education teachers. Saudi Arabia has also expanded the development of educational aids and equipment to assist students. The country has also implemented an inclusive policy based on the international model. The move towards inclusive education shows the shifting perceptions and attitudes towards disability. People with a disability are increasingly viewed as individuals who need equal rights and development, rather than being considered from a care perspective.

Saudi Arabia's education policy targets two groups of pupils for inclusion. The first consists of students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, poor vision and those with behavioural problems who attend regular schools. The other group, specifically targeted by newer education policy, includes those students currently educated in the special education institutions. The Saudi Ministry of Education policy emphasises that it is mandatory for all children, including those with disabilities, to receive free education. Although the international literature and policy highlight the importance of inclusion, a significant gap exists within the Saudi context where few studies have been undertaken (Alsalem, 2015).

### **SAUDI ARABIA AND INCLUSION**

As an international expectation, different governments implement inclusion in order that targets are achieved and nations can report favourably on their progress within an international context. Government targets may be quantification of those with a disability in schools, as well as the nature of the disabilities of those attending school. This occurs in Saudi Arabia where the national assessment study on the experience of inclusion is quantified and measured throughout the country. In the process, the government aims to measure the number of students with a disability in the mainstream classroom (Ghafour, Allan & Foulds, 1983). This helps policy makers to understand whether the mainstream program is working as expected, and further, if it is working as 'inclusion' is conceptualised above. There is general agreement that mainstream classes are beneficial compared to the special needs institutions (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). How well Saudi Arabia is going in terms of inclusive education is my interest, and mainstreaming assists with the implementation of inclusion (Owen, 2014). It is also evident that mainstreaming is a flexible structure for making sure that the needs of students with disabilities are met (Friend

& Bursuck, 2015). However, the effectiveness of inclusion is recognised through the attitudes and behaviours of the community surrounding the school and the entire society. Throughout the world, the nature of inclusion is also understood through the experiences of individuals involved in the process. The concept of inclusion grew out of (and away from) the field of special education, in combination with the civil rights movement of the United States. In the 19th century, pioneers of special education worked towards ensuring that young individuals and children who were excluded from education received attention (Lundqvist, Allodi & Siljehag, 2015). Later, governments assumed the responsibility of making sure that all children had access to education. To meet this responsibility in Saudi Arabia, the field of special education and special schools were developed and introduced for students with disabilities (Al-Jadid, 2013). The Saudi government opted to provide children with disability education that is segregated according to the individual challenges and difficulties related to impairments and conditions. Policy about students with disabilities was premised on the idea that they were incapable of benefiting from the ordinary methods of education. The older medical model of disability supported this approach. The model claimed that the learning barriers were within the child, which is the opposite of inclusion. The explanation and justification for this model were found in advances in psychometrics (Ministry of Education, 2001).

This separation of children with disabilities in the provision of education remains in Saudi Arabia. This method of segregation has never been challenged and has seen many children enrolled in special needs institutions (Minou, 2011). In countries like Saudi Arabia, children were routinely enrolled in schools such as the Al-Noor Institute for the Blind. The school aimed to offer blind children an opportunity to learn (Al-Omari, 2009) but this was a long way from inclusion. The field of special education continued to expand in Saudi Arabia and was perceived as a method of reaching the needs of children with disabilities while at the same time safeguarding the practical education of the other children.

The segregation of children with disabilities has recently begun to be questioned in Saudi Arabia. Some argue that children with a disability are being marginalised and that more should be offered within general education (Alanazi, 2012). Debate about inclusion is emerging in all sectors of education. Disability and parental advocacy groups have begun to form and they pressure the Saudi government to include children with a disability in mainstream education. They are focused on the adverse effects of segregating students into special schools (Aldabas, 2015). Internationally, at the end of the 20th century, inclusion became widely recognised as an appropriate philosophy and an important structure for reforming the education

sector. Saudi Arabia has come to this position more recently (Aldabas, 2015). While many countries have embraced inclusive education, Saudi Arabia is just beginning these discussions. And as the aim of inclusion is to change the mainstream in a manner that will increase its capacity for responding to every learner, the 'integration' discussed earlier is not sufficient to achieve inclusion.

## LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS

In this section the international legislative frameworks are introduced. Focused on both disability and discrimination, key international legislation identifies the conditions for inclusion and advocates for its adoption as policy for individual countries. International legislation is made up of treaties and international agreements among the different nation states (Beckman & Butte, 2009). It acts as a structure for the practice of stable and organised global relations.

### THE UNITED NATIONS: RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The rights of children are well stipulated in the United Nations Convention. Article one of the Convention defines a child as anyone under the age of eighteen years (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The convention is against the discrimination against children based on their ethnicity or religion, as well as on their abilities. The agreement requires governments to ensure that they fulfil the children's rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child upholds the human rights of every child, including children with disabilities and those with special needs. Human rights encourage the movement towards inclusion for children with disabilities (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

As discussed earlier, inclusion entails the recognition of every child as a full member of society. It also requires every person to respect the rights of every child. It involves removing every barrier that may prevent a person from enjoying their rights. It also requires the generation of suitable supportive and protective environments. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the inclusion of children with a disability entails changing the attitudes and practices of the people so that they can equally participate in the community activities as well as culture. An inclusive society does not condone discrimination of any kind.

UNESCO has estimated that up to 650,000,000 (six hundred and fifty million) individuals in the world live with some sort of impairment. However, the prevalence of disability in the population is different in every country. In some countries, there is a high degree of stigma linked to disability. In such cases, parents may be reluctant to report their child's disability to authorities. In most cases, the children do not even have their birth registered, which means that the health institution does not recognise them. Consequently, learning institutions do not recognise these

students. The United Nations has committed to ensuring that children with disabilities enjoy basic human rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) is the fundamental element in international law that focuses on the human rights of children. The convention also concentrates on inclusion. The enactment of the CRC is supervised and promoted at the international level.

The CRC ensures that every child is protected from discrimination and his/her best interests are met. The children's views are also respected under the United Nations Convention (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The CRC offers a framework containing the implications for law, policy and practice based on the children's disabilities. The law provides guidance on how children with disabilities should be given consideration within society. In 2000, the United Nations adopted a resolution to implement an ad hoc committee to look at the proposals of the rights of individuals with disabilities. The projects were meant to ensure that people with disabilities were recognised in every aspect of life. The implementation of the recommendations included supporting children with advocates for Human Rights and Persons with Disabilities (2002). The advocates were required to be present to offer the children the guidance they needed. Article (24) of the convention focuses on inclusive education and highlights the need for children with disabilities for inclusion in all activities and social organisations. According to the article, children with special needs should be offered the support they need to succeed in life. Some of the supportive services that are included in the article are sign language, Braille, and aids for low vision.

The main principles and overarching government obligations can be implemented to create a clear conceptual structure to pursue the EFA goals in a comprehensive approach. Governments should ensure that children with disabilities can enjoy their right to education. The law focuses on the quality of education, which means that the learning institutions should make sure that they have all the resources required by the students (The Right of Children with Disabilities to Education: A Rights - Based Approach to Inclusive Education in the CEECIS Region, 2011). There are various types of disabilities and each requires unique resources. Initially, the governments focused on including the children in mainstream education without emphasising the resources that were being utilised.

However, the international legislation ensures that the children are recognised, and they can easily participate in the education system (Promoting the rights of Children with disabilities, 2007). The laws also warn against discrimination of any kind by other children and students. Students are encouraged to accept the students with disabilities and ensure that they are comfortable within the classroom setting. Teachers are required to make sure that education is offered in an environment that is respectful of the children's rights. It is important for the teachers to understand that education is meant for all children. The government also needs to be committed to the inclusion process (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). According to the

United Nations, it is not enough to offer the children access to equal opportunities in education. It is imperative to ensure that the education is of high quality to enable children to reach their highest potential. The children should be offered positive learning opportunities. In Saudi Arabia, the inclusion program ensures that all teachers are given the appropriate training needed in the implementation process (Alanazi, 2012). Another stipulation of the law on disability is the protection of rights-based learning and evaluation. The education institutions are required to provide a child-friendly and healthy environment for the students. Children cannot reach their full potential in an atmosphere that does not support their growth. They therefore require a healthy environment that will enable them to achieve their goals (Promoting the rights of Children with disabilities, 2007). UNICEF developed the concept of child-friendly schools; the move was meant to make sure that all children attended school. The program is also aimed at ensuring that the schools protect the children's rights (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The concept is effective as it ensures that there is a thorough inclusion of the children with disabilities. It includes a multidimensional aspect of quality and aims at addressing the entire needs of the child as a learner. The child is required to actively participate in the classroom activities without any discrimination. Lack of coordinated actions in various government ministries has affected the implementation of the inclusion of children with a disability.

## METHODS

This study uses the approach called Bacchi's 'WPR' – What's the Problem Represented to be? – to analyse related documents, namely: The Disability Law of Saudi Arabia (2000); The General Education Policy of Saudi Arabia (1995); The Special Education Policy of Saudi Arabia (2016). Bacchi (2009; 2012), proposed six very useful questions that assist in the analysis of policy, called the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' approach (WPR). These questions support policy assessment by pushing the investigation behind the stated policy to focus instead on what lies behind their development. The WPR questions provide guidance for investigating policy documents. As Bacchi (2012) notes, "The 'WPR' approach is a resource, or tool, intended to facilitate critical interrogation of public policies." Below, each of her questions is listed together with some discussion:

- 1) What's the 'problem' (for example, of 'problem gamblers', 'drug use/abuse', 'gender inequality', 'domestic violence', 'global warming', 'sexual harassment', etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?
- 2) What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?

3) How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?

4) What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

5) What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

6) How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced? (Bacchi, 2012, p. 21).

The (WPR) method is a very useful tool for policy analysis and investigation of policy documents in any context. Together with Document Analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the WPR method will be used in the larger PhD thesis that will undertake a substantial investigation into inclusive education within the Saudi Arabian context from a range of perspectives, including policy. However, for the purposes of this small-scale study, we have adapted Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach. Our question is purposefully narrow to focus the investigation onto (a) three key Saudi policy documents that address disability and inclusive education, and (b) how these documents are cognisant of international education policy in the area of inclusive education. The argument for choosing Bacchi's WPR approach is that investigation of what underlies policy documents has significance for policy development. The WPR approach offers assistance in the examination of how the international context for inclusive education policy has been represented in Saudi Arabian documents. The WPR approach will help to determine how the issues are described in different categories and subject positions to diverse groups in the policy documents (Bacchi, 2009). The method will also allow the assessment of how disability and inclusive education is structured in the three Saudi policy documents.

Extensive and detailed employment of the WPR method would also assist in understanding how the particular policy environment has impacted on the idea of disability in that nation. This study will only utilise three questions of the "What's the problem represented to be?" approach. However, it is significant to introduce all six questions and how they will help in the research. Close investigation of the WPR approach has revealed how extensive its thorough employment would be. For this reason, we have chosen to adapt this method for this study and have instead focused this investigation on an adapted version that allows for the three policy documents to be problematised. The question here is "How do Saudi Arabian policy documents reflect international inclusive education policy?" This question requires international contextualisation of these policies. By contextualising the Saudi Arabian policy within the international literature and laws, the problematisation of the three policies is undertaken by an adapted version of the WPR approach

that questions the motives and premises behind the development of the policies.

#### I. ANALYSIS

We will discuss how the Saudi policy documents reflect international inclusive education policy. To do so, we have employed a modified version of Bacchi's (2012) (WPR) approach. Firstly, we begin with a discussion of the Saudi General Education Policy (1995). We will also offer a brief introduction to the Law of Disability in Saudi Arabia (2000) and Special Education Policy in Saudi Arabia (2016).

#### **General Education Policy of Saudi Arabia (1995)**

The General Educational Policies of Saudi Arabia were established in 1970 and include 236 articles that outline the overall goals and purposes of education in Saudi Arabia, based on the Islamic religion. The document addresses students of all educational levels in Saudi Arabia. The document is organised in such a way that schools, institutes, and universities in the education system in Saudi Arabia will be under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (General Education Policy in Saudi Arabia, 1995). Additionally, the articles of the document serve both boys and girls who study at different levels in Saudi Arabia. As it was established in 1970, requiring that it be updated is not unreasonable. The reason for analysing this document is because it is an important document when I am looking for educational policy, and also there are four articles (188, 189, 190 and 191) that relate specifically to students with disabilities.

#### **The Law of Disability in Saudi Arabia (2000)**

The law of disability in Saudi Arabia (2000) is targeted to safeguard people with disabilities living in Saudi Arabia. The government of Saudi Arabia enacted the law in 2000 through a cabinet resolution. It is part of Saudi Arabian law that focuses on the rights of individuals with disabilities (The Law of Disability in Saudi Arabia, 2000). The document contains sixteen articles that offer guidelines on the rights of people with a disability. The report serves people with a disability in various domains, such as education, social and occupational. It contains the services that the government offers to people with a disability so as to enjoy a healthy life. I have included this document because this study examines how inclusive education works in Saudi Arabia and what is specified in government policy is the logical starting point for this investigation. The interest here is the rights of individuals with disabilities and how they are addressed in Saudi policy.

#### **Special Education Policy of Saudi Arabia (2016)**

The special education policy of Saudi Arabia offers guide-

lines for special education schools and institutes for students with disabilities. It includes all disability terms together with their definitions (Special education policy of Saudi Arabia, 2016). Another important aspect of the document is that it includes tasks for the teachers, specialists and the workers in the administration, early intervention services as well as the educational plans and goals. The document serves students, teachers, professionals and administrators who work in the special education system.

#### **BACCHI (2012) (WPR) ANALYSIS**

##### **Naming the problem: Special Education for People with Disability**

The law of disability in Saudi Arabia (2000) defines a disabled person as: 'an individual with complete or partial failure in a stable manner in the physical abilities, sensory, mental or communicative, educational or psychological, in such that it minimises capacity to live a normal life'.

In earlier times, Saudi children with disabilities were dependent on their parents for education support and care, as the government did not provide specialised education. Blind adults became the first individuals to be recognised by the government, and in 1958, special education was established as a training program to educate blind adults in how to read Braille (Haimour, 2013). No other programs were included to cater for other persons with disabilities apart from visual impairments and blindness. In this case, it is clear that the term disabled individuals only applied to the visually impaired people. Today, the term has expanded to include physical and motor disability, speech and language disorders, hearing disability, learning difficulties, behavioural and emotional disorders, mental handicap, and autism among others (World Data on Education: Saudi Arabia, 2011). The significant point is not the term itself. Rather it is the ways in which the representation of the particular problem is produced. Hence, the first objective in this section is to analyse the ways in which the term "disability" functions as part of the problem representation in the structure of the question "What is the "problem" of disability as represented in a particular policy?

The law of disability in Saudi Arabia (2000) has adopted the term disability to include physical and motor impairment, speech and language disorders, hearing disability, learning difficulties, behavioural and emotional disturbances, mental handicap, autism among others. The recognition of people with a disability is adopted from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (The Law of Disability in Saudi Arabia, 2000). I find it notable that the law of disability in Saudi Arabia (2000)

defines disability as individuals suffering from complete or partial failure in a stable way in the physical capabilities, sensory, mental or communicative, education or psychological to the point that it minimises the person's capability of meeting the standard requirements. Understanding the problem, as disability is important as it helps to identify the manner in which the government handles the issue.

It is apparent that the government of Saudi Arabia recognises disabled people. The government guarantees the rights of disabled individuals in such that it ensures that they are taken care of and provided with rehabilitation services. Institutions and individuals are encouraged to participate in charitable works in the field of disability (Aldabas, 2015). They are also required to offer services to persons with a disability through the use of competent authorities in the particular areas. In this case, the government ensures that people with a disability are offered the right services. The government of Saudi Arabia also provides that people with a disability are offered counselling and preventive testing. The state also makes sure that individuals with disabilities are offered the proper education under the law of disability in Saudi Arabia (2000).

The law stipulates that people with a disability should be provided with a proper education at all levels, including pre-school, public education, technical education and higher education. It also requires the learning institutions to ensure that they provide proper facilities that would cater for children and individuals with disabilities (Alothman, 2014). The law requires regular assessment of the curriculum and services offered to persons with disabilities (Aldabas, 2015).

The government promises individuals disability training and rehabilitation services according to the type and degree of disability. The training must match with the requirements of the labour market. The law also requires the learning institutions to offer the students vocational and social rehabilitation centres, making sure that they use the appropriate training approaches.

After close examination of the documents, it is apparent that the problem is well stipulated in the law of disability in Saudi Arabia. Naming the problem as disability is important; the emphasis within Saudi Arabian policy-making has been the ideal of a proper education for individuals and students with disabilities. However, there remains a significant difference between acknowledging disability and inclusive education.

In 2009, Saudi Arabia endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Individuals with Disabilities and follows the United Nations Optional Protocols, as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a signatory (Friend & Bursuck, 2015). Saudi Arabia also made provision in

education for individuals that are intellectually gifted (Alothman, 2014).

### **Assumptions Underlying the Problem of Inclusive Education in the Saudi Arabia Special Education Policy**

The updated version of the special education policy in Saudi Arabia has well-stipulated guidelines on how to cater for students and individuals with disabilities. The 2016 version clearly outlines what mainstream teachers need to do, as well as requirements for specialist teachers. After examining that policy, it is apparent that it closely follows the guidelines associated with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Individuals with Disabilities (Brown & Parekh, 2010). The policy focuses on ensuring that students with disabilities gain a quality education. Our examination of the Saudi Arabian special education policy, has found agreement with Alothman's (2014) observations regarding the assumptions and presuppositions about this policy, including the background of representation of the issue. Informed by both Ball's (2015; 2012) policy text/policy discourse discussion and Bacchi's WPR approach, looking behind the policy to assess its assumptions and presuppositions provides some insight into the Saudi policy.

Our aim here is to use Question 2 – What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'? (Bacchi, 2009) to assist in the identification and the uncovering of the cultural behaviours that are linked to the problem of special education for children with a disability. The first step was to investigate the idea behind education and how the government of Saudi Arabia uses the current curriculum (Corbett, 2001). After that, we highlight the assumptions about the education of individuals with disabilities as stated in the special education policy of Saudi Arabia. Then we will examine how the government of Saudi Arabia tackles the issue of inclusive education within the policy sphere. Finally, we will highlight the aims and the findings of the discussion.

The Saudi Arabian government has put a lot of emphasis on education. The state ensures that individuals receive free education despite their physical abilities. The aim to educate all the people of Saudi Arabia has been established through the linkage of religious beliefs and international rights (Corbett, 2001). The government of Saudi Arabia works together with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) with the aim of ensuring that all individuals receive free and fair education. The General Education Policy in Saudi Arabia (1995) stipulates that students in Saudi Arabia should receive a proper education.

The Saudi Arabian government enacted the General Education Policy in 1970. The plan offers guidelines that

are required to protect students with disabilities at all educational levels. The changes in the general education sector are evident, and one can clearly differentiate the old curriculum and the new one. When Saudi Arabia was founded, the educational system was partial and not all individuals were able to attend school. There was the lack of enough schools, as well as teachers. The most common form of education was the teachings of the Islamic Law and basic literacy.

Most of the children were required to supplement their family finances, and they had to undertake jobs such as herding animals, as well as taking up domestic labour. Nevertheless, the education system changed with the development of oil fields in the country (Corbett, 2001). The government established more public schools, as well as special schools to cater for every individual throughout the country.

However, the current education policy is also encouraged by the international education policy. It shows that the government is concerned with making the international community happy. However, there is an issue due to the fact that the education system is centralised. The Saudi government manages all education processes while the Ministry of Education leads the administration of teaching (Alquraini, 2011). The Ministry of Education was initiated in 1954 to safeguard young boys and girls in the education sector. This shows that the government was focused on ensuring that there was gender balance in the education system. The Ministry is meant to ensure that all individuals receive proper training, including those with disabilities.

### **Education of individuals with disabilities**

It is evident that the aim to educate all persons in Saudi Arabia has been influenced by religious beliefs as well as international rights. The government of Saudi Arabia has continued to develop and change the education sector. For instance, the state recognises children with disabilities and also ensures that there are plans to offer them a proper education (Alquraini, 2011). The first recognition of children with disabilities occurred in 1956 through individual initiatives that were focused on ensuring that people with certain disabilities were able to receive an education so as to live a normal life and access job opportunities (Oyaid, 2009). First, they were offered a basic education that ensured that they could read. Although the government did not introduce the first specialised learning institutions, it supported the initiatives. The government was on the frontline facilitating government buildings and offering individuals materials that were used during the sessions. The government was later able to put up its first learning institution for persons with disabilities.

Looking at the Saudi Arabian education policies, it is appa-

rent that the government has been focused on changing the assumptions about teaching for persons with disabilities. As mentioned earlier, individuals with disabilities were offered primary education, and not all of them were included in the program (Alquraini, 2011). A common difficulty among people with disabilities is that their condition makes it more challenging for them to acquire education and ability to learn. In this case, the individuals with disabilities may require specialised support, such as physical tools, to improve their learning (Brown & Parekh, 2010).

However, times have changed since individuals with visual impairments were provided with specialised assistance. The General Education Policy (1995) now recognises the needs of people with many different types of disability. The article also states that the government will make sure that there is proper curricular and cultural variety of training that are suitable, whatever the disability. This shows that the government recognises the needs of children with a disability in the education system. The recognition of individuals with disabilities in the general education policy shows the changing perception of special needs education. How this extends to inclusive education remains to be seen. This shows that schools are required to ensure that the curriculum matches the needs of all children. The article 189 in the General Education Policy in Saudi Arabia (1995) offers guidelines to ensure that children with disabilities receive a quality education. The article states that the training will be designed in such a manner that it will cater for the disabled individual (The General Education Policy in Saudi Arabia, 1995). In this case, the government ensures that the teachers receive proper training so as to have adequate skills to cater for children with disabilities (Friend & Bursuck, 2015).

The General Education Policy (1995) also calls for the involvement of the teachers in the process of designing and providing special education for the students. Initially, the parents were left with the burden of educating and caring for their children (General Educational Policy of Saudi Arabia, 1995). However, after examining the General Education Policy (1995), it has become clear that the Saudi Arabian government has continued to gradually change its education system to cater for all children. Whether it is yet an 'inclusive' education system, however, remains to be seen.

Another important article in the General Education Policy (1995) is Article 190, which states that children with visual impairment can learn religious studies as well as Arabic language. The report supports the assumption that the education system in Saudi Arabia is based on the Islamic religion. In this case, the government tries to ensure that children at all levels receive the proper education. However, the article only recognises blind individuals. The education policy does not include other disabilities in its

stipulations that might be misleading for the learning institutions.

The General Education Policy (1995) also works towards establishing a deliberate plan for the advancement of all the education branches and ensuring that they achieve their objectives and develop a list of regulated guidelines (General Education Policy of Saudi Arabia, 1995). The policy matches the intentions of the International Education Policy. However, research from the various literature shows that not many teachers are aware of the education policy (Aldabas, 2015). It is apparent that many teachers are influenced by their school policies rather than by the General Education Policy in Saudi Arabia (1995). This can be linked to the fact that school policies are developed to match the school's requirements, workers' perceptions, and the students' capabilities. Therefore, the teachers get more attached to the systems as they seem favourable compared to the education policy implemented by the government.

This study raises the important issue of barriers to the enactment of inclusive education policy in schools. The learning institutions may lack financial support, guidance, as well as supervision (Oyaid, 2009), but that is outside the scope of the current study. Nevertheless, this investigation has indicated that although the Saudi government has attempted to implement policy for children with disabilities based on the international education policy, it has not yet succeeded in achieving inclusive education.

Other documents that are important in Saudi education are the Special Education Policy documents (2001 and 2016). The second document is the updated version of the first one. The two documents were established so as to cater for children living with disabilities and ensure that they receive an appropriate education. The policy provides that individuals with disabilities are well recognised (Special Education Policy in Saudi Arabia, 2016). The 2016 version of the special education policy highlights the precise tasks for teachers, specialists and the workers in the special education system. It also offers guidelines on how to develop early intervention and teaching plans (Henry et al., 2013). Although the guidelines are well stipulated in the policy, it is apparent that the government of Saudi Arabia has failed in its implementation process.

The purpose of this study was to analyse the Saudi Arabian inclusive education policy in relation to international policy. Through examination of Saudi education policy documents utilising aspects of Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, this study has focused on Saudi education policy documents. This study has found that the Saudi Arabian inclusive education plan has been guided by the international education policy and the international disability legislative framework. At the same time, questions have been raised about how well inclusive education has been enacted in the school system. It is evident that the aim to educate all individuals in Saudi Arabia has been influenced by

religious beliefs as well as international rights. The government of Saudi Arabia has continued to develop and change the education sector.

However, although it is well stipulated in Saudi policy documents that teachers should be actively involved in inclusive education processes, the inclusive education policy in Saudi Arabia does not give proper guidelines on how they should be involved. Many learning institutions have partially implemented the guidelines. Children with disabilities are remaining behind in the Saudi education system and it has not yet achieved inclusive education. It appears that the Saudi education system has some way to go in terms of policy implementation within schools. Schools have not yet been provided with appropriate guidance for them to enact the policy to fully support the learning of individuals with disabilities. The Saudi government has established inclusive education policy from an international perspective. However, its people continue to lag behind in development and this particularly applies to inclusive education. The policy states that all students with a disability should receive a proper education like their mainstream counterparts. Inclusion is a process that is utilised by schools to respond to the needs of every student. However, the lack of proper guidelines, implementation plans and resources appear to be hindering development in the inclusive process.

## CONCLUSION

This article adapted Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach to examine how Saudi Arabian educational policy supports inclusive education through close examination of policy and legislative frameworks. The related international policy was reviewed and the Saudi policy environment was found to be consistent in many ways with international policy. The central question of this article, 'How do Saudi Arabian policy documents reflect international inclusive education policy?', served to focus and limit the study to critically examine publicly available Saudi policy documents and how these documents fit with international policy documents.

The Special Education Policy of Saudi Arabia (2016) offers guidelines for the education of students with disabilities in special education schools and institutes. Historically, the government of Saudi Arabia did not offer special education services for children with disabilities who depended on their parents for education and care. Blind adults became the first individuals to be recognised by the government, and in 1958, special education was established as a training program to educate blind adults in how to read Braille. However, the law of disability in Saudi Arabia (2000) has adopted the term disability to include other disabilities.

The recognition of people with a disability is adopted from the United Nations Document of the Rights of People with a Disability. It is apparent in all of the policy and legal documentation examined in this study that the government of Saudi Arabia recognises disabled people. The government guarantees the rights of disabled individuals to be taken care of and receive rehabilitation services (Haimour, 2013). The state also makes sure that individuals with disabilities are offered a proper education under the law of disabilities in Saudi Arabia (2000). The law stipulates that people with a disability should be provided with special education at all levels. The updated version of Special Education Policy in Saudi Arabia (2016) stipulates clear guidelines on how to cater for students and individuals with disabilities. The 2016 version has clearly specified tasks that teachers need to follow. However, the aim appears to be 'integration' into regular or mainstream schools, rather than inclusive education.

In summary, Saudi Arabia has developed key disability legislation and education policy that is consistent with international literature, legislation and guidelines. However, it has failed to move as quickly as other countries towards inclusive education. Rather than keeping fidelity with the international community, Saudi education systems would benefit from clear guidelines and expectations that move beyond integration towards inclusion. Based on human rights, the nature of inclusion is more effectively understood through the experiences of individuals involved in the process and this has not yet occurred in Saudi Arabia. It is anticipated that this small-scale study will provide a solid base from which the new project and studies can be developed.

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