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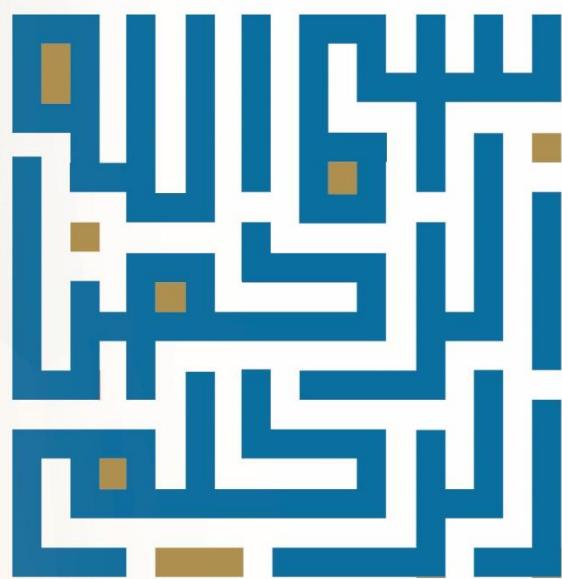
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البحوث المنشورة في المجلة
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Inclusive Education Divergences that Framing Across the Gulf Countries: Six Nation Critical Policy Analysis

**البيانات في التعليم الشامل التي يتم
تأطيرها عبر دول الخليج: تحليل نظري
للسياقات في ست دول**

[إعداد]

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Abstract

The potential for education to foster social justice and equity in a country hinges on a national curriculum that improves inclusion and cohesion. The Gulf region has divergent education systems with dissimilar ideas about defining and promoting inclusive education concerning students with disabilities. Across six nations (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain), divergences in inclusive education framing are attributed to political and ideological motivations, resulting in their policy frameworks being complex and multifaceted. This article employs critical policy analysis to explore the issues surrounding inclusive education policies in these countries, as well as the steps taken regarding their impact on meeting the needs of students with disabilities. It also presents ideas for effective inclusive education approaches that support students with disabilities. The results of this analysis show that the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have minimum criteria for inclusive education policies to support students with disabilities in various areas of personal development and knowledge growth, with notable variations due to differing political ideologies. Saudi Arabia has the most inclusive policy, while other countries face challenges due to unclear support systems, hindering effective educational experiences. Therefore, recommendations are provided for developing multifaceted, community-oriented educational programs, school-based disability awareness initiatives, and teacher preparation and participation practices. Additionally, there is a need for civil societies to recognize these dynamic initiatives and empower students with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusion; critical policy analysis, students with disabilities, education policy, Gulf countries

المستخلص

إن قدرة التعليم وإمكانياته على تعزيز العدالة الاجتماعية والمساواة تتوقف على منهج وطني يعمل على تحسين الاندماج والترابط. وفي هذا الإطار تتمتع منطقة الخليج بنظام تعليمي متباين مع أفكار مختلفة ومتعددة حول تعريف ووصف مفهوم التعليم الشامل الخاص بالطلاب ذوي الإعاقة. فعبر ست دول (المملكة العربية السعودية، والكويت، والإمارات العربية المتحدة، وعمان، وقطر، والبحرين)، تُعزى الاختلافات في تأطير التعليم الشامل إلى دوافع تنظيمية، مما أدى إلى أن تكون أطر ذات سياسات معقدة ومتعددة الأوجه. وعليه، استخدمت المقالة الحالة تحليل السياسات النقدي لاستكشاف القضايا المحيطة بسياسات التعليم الشامل في هذه الدول، بالإضافة إلى الخطوات المتخذة تجاه آثارها على تلبية احتياجات الطلاب ذوي الإعاقة. كما تقدم المقالة أفكاراً حول مناهج التعليم الشامل الفعالة التي تدعم الطلاب ذوي الإعاقة. ولقد أظهرت نتائج هذا التحليل أن لدى الدول ست في مجلس التعاون الخليجي معاييرًا دنياً لسياسات التعليم الشامل لدعم الطلاب ذوي الإعاقة في مجالات مختلفة من التنمية الشخصية ونمو المعرفة، مع تباين واضح يعود إلى اختلاف الأيديولوجيات السياسية. حيث تمتلك السعودية السياسة الأكثر شمولًا، بينما تواجه الدول الأخرى صعوبات بسبب نظم دعم غير واضحة، مما يعيق التجارب التعليمية الفعالة. ولذلك، تم تقديم توصيات من أجل تطوير برامج تعليمية متعددة الأوجه موجهة نحو المجتمع، وبرامج التوعية حول الإعاقة في المدارس، وإعداد المعلمين ومشاركتهم، بالإضافة إلى ذلك ضرورة اعتراف المجتمعات المدنية بهذه المبادرات الديناميكية وتمكين الطلاب ذوي الإعاقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدمج؛ التحليل النقدي لسياسات، الطلاب ذوي الإعاقة، سياسة التعليم، دول الخليج.

Introduction.

The question of whether education reinforces social justice and fosters equity generates considerable debate. A major consensus of this debate is that the education system can serve as a crucial pillar for fostering inclusion and social cohesion (Al Khalifa, 2022). Policymakers and academics are actively involved in discussions about integrating the right to good quality education for learners with disabilities into mainstream educational settings through inclusion advocacy (Al Khalifa, 2022). Understanding the concept of inclusive education is the basis of appreciating the extent to which quality and equitable education safeguard lifelong learning opportunities for all students as outlined by the United Nation's Sustainability Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Knight et al., 2023). Stanczak et al. (2023) posited that inclusive education is in the principle that all learners have an opportunity to succeed in school despite their differing learning needs. According to influential policy documents, for example, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, inclusive education is delivering satisfactory access to quality free primary and secondary education by maintaining equality with other communities and eliminating discrimination while avoiding exclusion based on disability (Kefallinou et al., 2020). Therefore, this concept is concerned with a resolve and willingness to increase enrolment, attendance, and completion to reduce education disparities to promote cohesion and diversity.

This paper critically analyses policy goals to process the complexity of executing a policy and committing to resource allocation concerning inclusive education across six nations in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar, and the Kingdom of Bahrain. Historically, a common pattern of educational reforms among the six GCC countries is that they have entirely developed their educational system by borrowing policies and practices that have been tested and implemented in the West (Romanowski et al., 2018). Hence, a significant similarity among these nations is their comparable populations and demographics, characterized by low proportions of national citizens compared to expatriates within their localities, founded on Islamic traditions, and exhibiting conservative cultures (Al-Hendawi et al., 2023). Furthermore, underpinning a right to education for all citizens in the GCC's states is Islamic values engrained in national laws and values that all citizens are entitled to education, including students with various learning needs (Al-Hendawi et al., 2023; El-Mubarak & Hassan, 2021). Overall, the six GCC countries are keen on implementing education policies matching Islamic principles and values.



The paper is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses the pressing need for inclusive education frameworks in the Gulf region, where diverse populations and varying educational policies create unique challenges. By critically analyzing the educational policies of six Gulf countries, the study aims to identify divergences in implementation and effectiveness, providing valuable insights that can inform policymakers and educators.

Second, the research highlights the importance of culturally responsive and context-specific approaches to inclusive education. Understanding how different nations frame and address inclusivity can lead to improved educational outcomes for marginalized groups, including students with disabilities, expatriates, and other minority populations. Finally, this study contributes to the broader discourse on global educational equity, emphasizing the necessity for collaboration and shared learning among Gulf countries. By fostering a deeper understanding of inclusive education practices, the research aims to promote a more equitable and effective educational landscape across the region, ultimately benefiting all learners.

As system justification theory hypothesizes that society members are motivated to justify social and political systems aspects to emphasize self-evident success indicators (Stanczak et al., 2023). This statement is taken from the standpoint of policy framing and recontextualization to suggest a critical analysis approach as vital to acknowledging policy implementation complexity. Therefore, this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How do the six Gulf countries articulate and promote inclusion in their education policies?
2. How are differing political and ideological motivations and priorities signposted and acknowledged in policy on inclusion and meeting the learning needs of students with disabilities in the six nations of the Gulf countries?

Theoretical Background and Literature Review.

A historical perspective of inclusive education provides valuable insights into the set of educational practices that stimulate the social participation of students. This perspective emphasizes the importance of a community-wide policy framework that reflects the commitment of all stakeholders. Central to this discussion is UNESCO's Salamanca Statement, adopted in 1994, which serves as a guiding policy initiative aimed at addressing the needs of students with disabilities and elevating their status within global education policies (Hernández-Torraso et al., 2022; Magnússon, 2019). The statement is oriented towards safeguarding inclusion

as “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all” (UNESCO, 1994, p. 4). The statement is a vital treaty to emerge in the special education field. Enacting an inclusive education to serve students requires special education to reflect adequate participation in the same spaces attended by other learners with a support system that reflects the identities of students with disabilities (Graham et al., 2023). Inclusive education practices are well-established based on the wider international recognition of a superior education system embedded in inclusive principles to cater to the lifelong learning of students with disabilities.

It is concerning that efforts toward inclusive education do not match expected outcomes about safeguarding social justice, equality, and the right to good education for all learners despite differing disabilities. Progress toward inclusive education aspirations varies across countries owing to technical legislative issues and the complexity in ideas, behaviors, and practices (Knight et al., 2023). These disparities are attributed to competing policies, insufficient funding, and limited resources that hinder the achievement of progressive set standards during the policy implementation process. Waitoller (2020) underlined that policies and practices rooted in neoliberal ideology have a profound effect on the global space, causing inequitable development to mark apparent differences among nations. The multifaceted nature of policies affects the range of available action options, as policies are often seen as a blend of political compromises that embody contradictions and ambiguous priorities, requiring interpretation at both the national and school levels. Consequently, national and international education legislation influences the extent to which certain processes are implemented, while others are more likely to be executed, other are not as the political commitment to achieving inclusive education practices appears insufficient (Magnússon, 2019). Based on these explanations, understanding the multidimensional nature of capacity and the challenges of inclusion is essential for directing both individual and collective efforts toward reforming an education system.

The normative practice of maintaining the status quo contributes to uneven progress in inclusive education globally. Evidence suggests that policymakers might adopt discourses that appear to reflect inclusionary principles, but lead to outcomes that perpetuate exclusionary practices (Knight et al., 2023; Tomlinson, 2017). A typical example of exclusion is a misconception that inclusion is a progression of special education but within a mainstream context. This description denotes a deficit-based assumption implying the existence of a problem that hinders the inclusion of students



with learning needs rather than emphasizing the environment (Cologon, 2019). Concerning this explanation, inclusion should be construed as a process rather than a program or an end product. The concept reflects a complex process, as its manifestation is influenced by underlying philosophies and rationally esteemed elements accepted by the general public and the existing hierarchies in most societies. Consequently, practical implementation of inclusion is evident after all members within a given community accept its proposed principles (Halder, 2023). Nevertheless, it should not be designated that inclusive education is not apparent throughout a global experience. Rather than dismissing the process, evidence suggests that the modern-day school system has misappropriated and subverted inclusive education to exhibit ableism culture, the ethic of competitive individualism, and an illusion regarding special educational needs (Slee & Tomlinson, 2018). There is a need for a clear understanding of the fundamentals of inclusion as a process and outcome.

Considering inclusive education as a process underpins how different countries accept it as a policy entrenched in a set of multidimensional processes. Knight et al. (2023) indicated that appreciating inclusion necessitates critical thinking regarding the extent to which education policy is associated with the practice and context in which it is established. This claim exemplifies the need for comprehending how policy is interlinked with both practices and context. The intended outcome of intensifying the implementation of educational policies by every country is that they should benefit from significant quality education, where such practices are inclusive in such a manner that they respond to learners' circumstances and needs (Madani, 2019). Therefore, nations should comprehend the dynamics of an inclusion policy promoting awareness of students' desires and needs. An international survey published by the Global Education Monitoring Report on Inclusive Education revealed worldwide laws emphasizing inclusion within 17% of countries to provide diverse learning needs for students with disabilities (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). Inclusive school systems should be established on changing practices whereas school-level actions must be built upon a more inclusive environment revolving around students' expectations (Nilholm, 2021). Therefore, the analysis of inclusive education necessitates policy clarification and assessing the degree of commitment to policy implementation.

Whereas the six GCC countries display ideals for a national education policy, disparities in extending this obligation exist. The evident divergences are attributed to substantial variances in educational systems across these nations. Qatar's education system is built around equipping citizens to achieve individual aspirations to meet global market desires and the needs of

Qatar's society (Amin & Cochrane, 2023). Saudi Arabia's educational policy is rooted in Vision 2030 to create a highly productive and skilled population to meet the 21st century needs based on a knowledge-based labor market (OECD, 2020). Omani's education policy reform is grounded on an educational curriculum designed to ensure the school environment and learning methods prepare Omani students for life change and the modern global economy (Nasser, 2019; The Education Council Sultanate of Oman, 2018). Bahrain, the UAE, and Kuwait reinforce an education policy for improving human capital through adequate training to become competitive personnel within the workforce (Al-Hendawi et al., 2023).

Table 1 displays education policy supporting learning needs for students with disabilities as identified by the most relevant laws and initiatives in the six nations of the Gulf countries.

Table 1. Relevant education policies supporting students with disabilities

Country	Date	Policy or Guiding Document	Citations
Saudi Arabia	1970	General Education Policy	(UNESCO, 2021a)
	2000	Article 8 of the 2000 Disability Code (the Creation of Supreme Council for Disabled Affairs)	(UNESCO, 2021a)
	2008	Saudi Arabia acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	(UNESCO, 2021a)
	2013	The National Strategy for the Development of General Education	(Ministry of Education Saudi Arabia, 2021)
	2016	The National Transformation Program 2020	(Ministry of Education Saudi Arabia, 2021)
	2016-2020	The Education 2016-20 Strategy	(Ministry of Education Saudi Arabia, 2021)
Kuwait	2020	Disability Code 2020	(UNESCO, 2020a)
	1963	Kuwait ratified the UN Convention Against Discrimination in Education	(UNESCO, 2021b)
	1987	Law No. 4 of 1987 on Public Education	(UNESCO, 2021b)
	1992	Article 7 of the Constitution outlines equal opportunity for all citizens	(UNESCO, 2021b)
	1996	Article 3(3) of Law No. 49 of 1996 on People with Disabilities	(UNESCO, 2021b)
	2010	Law No. 8 of 2010: Law for the Welfare of the Disabled in the State of Kuwait	(UNESCO, 2021b)
UAE	2016	New Kuwait 2035 (Kuwait National Development Plan)	(UNESCO, 2021b)
	2016	Ministerial Decree No. 16 of 2016	(UNESCO, 2021b)
	2017	Amendment of Law No. 8 of 2010	(UNESCO, 2021b)
	1972	The Constitution of the United Arabs	(UNESCO, 2021c)
UAE	1996	Article 17 of the 1996 UAE Constitution	(UNESCO, 2022c)

Country	Date	Policy or Guiding Document	Citations
	2006	Federal Law No. 29 of 2006: Rights of People with Special Needs Law	(UNESCO, 2021c)
	2008	The School For All	(UNESCO, 2021c)
	2008	The National Project for Including People with Special Needs	(UNESCO, 2021c)
	2010	General Framework for Education Policies (Article 4.1.1) in its General Rules for the Provision of Special Education Programs and Services	(United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2010; UNESCO, 2021c)
	2014	Dubai Law #2(2014)	(International Academic School, 2019)
	2015-2016	The UAE School Inspection Framework	(United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2015; UNESCO, 2021c)
	2016	Article 31 of Federal Law No. 3 of 2016 on Child Rights Wadeemas Law	(UNESCO, 2021c)
	2017	Dubai Inclusive Education Policy Framework	(Knowledge and Human Development Authority, 2017; UNESCO, 2021c)
	2017	National Policy for Empowering People of Determination	(UNESCO, 2021c)
	2017	Article 23(4) of the Provincial Government of Dubai's Decision No. 2 of 2017	(UNESCO, 2021c)
Qatar	2001	Article 2 of the 2001 Compulsory Education Law	(UNESCO, 2021d)
	2003	Article 25 of the 2003 Constitution	(UNESCO, 2021d)
	2008	Qatar ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	(UNESCO, 2021d)
	2008	Qatar National Vision 2030	(General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2008)
	2015	Qatar adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	(UNHCR, 2015)
	2018	The Qatar National Development Strategy 2018-2022	(Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018)
Oman	2008	Royal Decree No. 63 of 2008 (Law on the Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled)	(UNESCO, 2021e)
	2008	Royal Decree No. 121/2008 (Ratification of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)	(UNESCO, 2021e)
	2011	Article 13 of the 2011 Constitution	(UNESCO, 2021e)
	2014	Article 2(b) of the 2014 Child Law	(UNESCO, 2021e)
	2017	Ministerial Decision No. 27: Article 73 of Regulations for Private Schools	(UNESCO, 2022a)
	2019	Ministerial Decision No. 125 Article 26 of the Disabled Care and Rehabilitation Act	(UNESCO, 2022a)
	2023	Royal Decree 31/2023 (Promulgating the School Education Law)	(Decree, 2023)
Bahrain	1999	Bahrain joined the Arab Agreement for Employing and Rehabilitating Persons with Disabilities of 1993	(UNESCO, 2021f)
	2002	Article 7 of the 2002 Constitution	(UNESCO, 2021f)
	2005	Education Law 2005	(UNESCO, 2021f)

Country	Date	Policy or Guiding Document	Citations
	2011	Law 22/2011 (Bahrain ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)	(UNESCO, 2021f)
	2012	The 2012 National Strategy	(UNESCO, 2021f)
	2013	National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities	(UNESCO, 2021f)
	2017	2018-2022 Strategic Partnership Framework	(Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain & United Nations, 2017)

Method.

This paper employs critical policy analysis to map the inclusive education policies of GCC to evaluate the coherence between practice guidance and national policy, the intended goal, policy clarification, and commitment to policy implementation. Critical policy analysis is an approach that examines the formulation, implementation, and impact of policies through a lens of scrutiny and reflection. It goes beyond mere evaluation, aiming to uncover underlying assumptions, power dynamics, and social implications. Thus, the aim is to examine how inclusive education policies are realized. This approach assists in examining complex connections concerning education and movements trying to distort existing relations between these aspects (Apple, 2019). This methodological strategy is apparent in the field of education as an essential deviation from traditional methods of research depicting policymaking as a linear process (Diem et al., 2019). Critical policy analysis is an approach that explores how power relations are manifested throughout the process of policy construction and implementation (O'Conner & Rudolph, 2023). Assessing educational policy through a critical frame is valuable in different ways, including allowing the development of a holistic understanding of divergent complexities linked with education policy, ranging from problem finding, policy development framing, and policy implementation to policy evaluation (Young & Diem, 2018). A methodology to help recognize how an inclusive education process reflects an opportunity to offer social justice for students with learning disability is essential.

The research method utilized in this study assists in examining and evaluating how inclusion in the six GCC countries is constructed, particularly regarding the crucial education policy initiatives and associated framework. A preliminary assumption is made that educational reforms demonstrate impactful, dynamic progress toward inclusive education policy in these countries. Determining the extent to which this presumption is accurate necessitates exploring the consistency in the practice adoption and goal communicated and intended in the education policy and associated

laws, such as learning with disabilities programs and initiatives about inclusive policy, curriculum guidance, and teaching practices.

Critical policy analysis provides a thorough critique of perspectives and developments. It is an approach aimed at providing alternative wide-ranging strategies to scrutinize and assess an education policy to examine integral players involved in policy construction and implementation (Young & Diem, 2018). Analyzing policy documents in alignment with the principles of critical policy sociology helps to identify how inclusion is framed (Knight et al., 2023). The themes identified based on the research questions help capture the similarities and divergences across the education policy laws and initiatives evaluated in these six nations.

As this paper employs critical policy analysis, this involves several ethical considerations to ensure responsible research practices. First, the research takes into account the cultural sensitivity, as the research addresses diverse perspectives within the GCC countries. He respects the local values and norms related to disability and education, ensuring that the analysis does not unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes or biases. Moreover, this article maintains accuracy and integrity in its findings, avoiding misrepresentation of data to foster trust and enhance the credibility of the research. Lastly, ethical considerations extend to the implications of the analysis. Recommendations derived from the study aims to empower students with disabilities and promote equitable practices, rather than reinforcing existing inequities in the educational system.

Results.

How Do the Six Gulf Countries Articulate and Promote Inclusion in Their Education Policies?

It is important to understand how the six Gulf countries define inclusive education to determine how this concept is articulated in the relevant education policies that are implemented for students with disabilities. Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education acknowledges inclusive education and provides special need categories, including hearing, visual, mental, and learning disabilities, among others. Opportunities to develop personal abilities and respect individual dignity promote an inclusive education policy since it becomes effective for every individual to engage and actively contribute to national development (UNESCO, 2021a). That way, the General Education Policy of Saudi Arabia places significant emphasis on providing inclusive learning support systems through the delivery of strategies identifying students with disabilities and developing awareness as well as building policies to match the needs of mentally and physically disabled learners in general education (UNESCO, 2021a). Inclusive education encompasses questioning academic and social inequity,

accounting for governance, and comprehensive support to eliminate existing barriers to students' engagement in education (Köpfer & Óskarsdóttir, 2019). The extent to which Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education guarantees lifelong learning, equitable opportunities, quality education, and inclusive education is significant and cannot be overstated. The Education Strategy 2016-2020 has provisions catering to equitable inclusive education across all learning levels, especially increasing the capacity of offering and accessing education to students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2021a). More specifically, Saudi Arabia is committed to providing students with disabilities with comprehensive education by implementing inclusion-related policies.

The Ministries of Education in Oman and Kuwait endorse UNESCO's definition of inclusive education and students with learning disabilities. In 2021, the Education Council of Oman issued a document outlining educational policies proclaiming inclusive education as the full or partial integration of students in learning activities or regular school (UNESCO, 2021e). Similarly, the Oman Ministry of Education also outlines how students with learning difficulties engage purposefully for meaningful education in a learning environment. It expresses students with learning difficulties as "mainstream school children who are academically weak, and this includes students with dyslexia" (Knowledge Gate International Council, 2020, p. 4). The Oman Ministry of Education articulates inclusive education from two major categories, namely learning difficulties and special education needs. Schools are obliged to create provisions for all students with learning difficulties as stipulated in Article 73 of the Regulations for Private Schools.

In Oman's context, special educational needs are defined as an effective policy when the initiative identifies a student affected by one or the combination of the following difficulties and problems:

- Specific learning difficulties (for example dyslexia, dyscalculia)
- General learning difficulties (for example comprehension, attention, memory)
- Communication difficulties
- Physical difficulties
- Social or emotional difficulties
- Behavioral problems
- Underachievement
- Persistent illnesses or medical problems
- Several changes in schools, led to gaps in general education (Knowledge Gate International Council, 2020, p. 4).





An inclusive orientation is effective when it combats discriminatory attitudes, in turn, creating a welcoming community and safeguarding education for all through improved efficiency and cost-effective manner (Ainscow, 2020). This articulation of inclusive education is manifested in Oman's Ministry of Education's Royal Decree 31/2023 Promulgating the School Education Law in Article II regarding implementing necessary decisions and regulations without contradicting existing provisions (Decree, 2023).

The Ministry of Education of Kuwait does not provide an explicit definition of inclusive education and learners with disabilities. The country submitted a report to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and referenced inclusive education as the integration of students with disabilities in general education to mitigate psychological and social isolation (UNESCO, 2021b). Policy articulation is crucial in the presentation and understanding of social and cultural contexts of students with disabilities to facilitate understanding of the inclusionary practices for slow learners within mainstream schools (Almarzouq, 2022). Law No. 8 of 2010 affirms the rights and protections of all Kuwaiti citizens with disabilities to achieve Kuwait Vision 2035 and guarantees that no person is disadvantaged and that children with disabilities are supported (Al-Hendawi et al., 2023). Kuwait education laws interlink mainstreaming with inclusion. With the amendment of Law No. 8 of 2010 in 2017, the government's commitment to addressing the education services of students with disabilities is affirmed.

Qatar provides an explicit definition of inclusive education. Based on a 2009 policy statement outlined by the Education Authority at the Supreme Council of Education in Qatar, inclusive education is defined as:

A process of enabling all students to learn and participate effectively within mainstream schooling systems and in mainstream classrooms. Placing previously excluded students within a mainstream setting, however, does not of itself achieve inclusion. Whole school policies and practices need to result in the development of agreed strategies for ensuring that inclusion is achieved effectively, enabling all students to access the full range of curriculum opportunities and experiences (UNESCO, 2021d, para. 1).

This description leans more on the individual and how the student can benefit from wide-ranging learning opportunities afforded by the syllabus adopted. Qatar National Development Strategy 2018-2022 is also an exceptional representation of how a learning environment for students with disabilities is safeguarded through improved access to quality education (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018). The recognition of students with disabilities in Qatar's context is also revealed in terms of expressed additional educational support needs, for example, supporting learners with

behavioral problems and learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2021d). These accounts represent a promotion of inclusive education and seek policy interventions and frameworks that meet the proposed education outcomes of students with disabilities in Qatar.

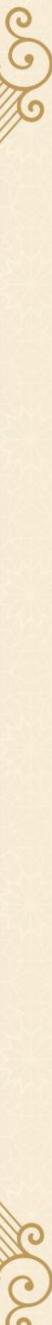
The UAE has initiated steps to implement the necessary guidelines on spreading equal education among all populations, but learners with disabilities are disadvantaged because there is no emphasis on inclusive school environment for people with disabilities. Article 7 of the UAE Constitution, as amended in 1996, stipulates education as a right. However, this declaration leans more towards education as a fundamental element for societal progress through illiteracy eradication since free education is offered within its primary stages and spread across all education levels (UNESCO, 2022). This statement does not clarify effectively non-discrimination for learners with disabilities. A vow made to support learners with disabilities, however, manifests evidently in some of the UAE's education policies. The Federal Law No. 29 of 2006 outlines the rights of learners with disabilities in a distinctive definition that a person with special needs is:

an individual suffering from a temporary or permanent, full or partial deficiency or infirmity in their physical, sensory, mental, communication, educational, or psychological abilities to an extent that limits their ability to perform the ordinary requirements of people without special needs (UNESCO, 2021c).

The above definition, though, does not clarify the environment as integral to inclusive education. In 2008, the UAE made significant progress by implementing The School for All as an education initiative to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities. The program was launched by the Ministry of Community Development presenting a general education system that considers the environmental aspect of inclusive learning. In 2008, a similar policy, namely, The National Project for Including People with Special Needs, was introduced to guarantee equal opportunities in all areas of life for people of determination (UNESCO, 2021c).

Similarly, Dubai Law # 2(2014) validates the utmost commitment by the UAE government to safeguard educational inclusion among students with disabilities. According to Dubai Inclusive Education Policy Framework: (2017)

A need that occurs when a student is identified with an impairment requires the school to make specific modifications or provide specific supports to prevent, remove, or reduce any potential disability from occurring and to ensure that the student can access education on an equitable basis and within a common learning environment with same-aged peers (Knowledge and Human Development Authority, 2017, p. 52).





By defining a disability as a need concerning a learning environment, Dubai's terminology emphasizes support for individuals in a conducive setting. It accounts for student equity and gifted education as crucial features, underlining inclusive education based on equal opportunities and sufficient support for learners with disabilities.

Bahrain's definition of inclusive education closely parallels that of the UAE. Bahrain expresses inclusive education from the viewpoint of gifted and culturally diverse students with different academic capabilities. National Report of Education in Bahrain states that the Ministry of Education defines inclusive education as the provision of learning opportunities, services, facilities, and supportive educational materials for all students with diverse potentials and facilitates their integration with other students (AlMahdi & Bukamal, 2019). Bahrain's consideration of meeting the special needs of vulnerable groups, for instance, people with disability, is exceptional since these individuals are considered productive in improving society's overall development.

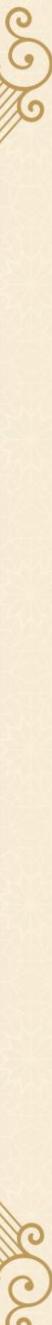
The UAE has adopted relevant education initiatives to respond effectively to the diverse needs of students with disabilities for inclusivity. This progression is evident based on how the nation has appreciated the essence of an education system matching a school environment within which all students can take advantage of programs and opportunities aligning with individual talents (Ismail et al., 2022). After launching the Dubai Inclusive Education Framework (2017), the UAE established a comprehensive education system within its education policies. This positive development is also apparent in the adoption of the National Policy for Empowering People of Determination to offer equal opportunity for students with disabilities and learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2021c). The UAE's constitution remains a fundamental framework and foundation for promoting the rights of people with disabilities in all education levels.

Each of the six nations of the Gulf countries analyzed articulate and promotes inclusion in their education policies, but differences in their political and ideological motivations and priorities provide a context for further debate. The disparities discussed are the emphasis on the six nations' position on teaching practices and experiences and curriculum, individual nations' aims and ambitions, and efficiency in delivering educational support systems for students with disabilities. This discussion allows us to understand how the six nations can effectively develop and sustain robust learning interventions that promote a more inclusive education, thereby supporting the learning needs and outcomes of students with disabilities.

How are Differing Political and Ideological Motivations and Priorities Signposted and Acknowledged in Policy on Inclusion and Meeting the Learning Needs of Students with Disabilities in the Six Nations of the Gulf Countries?

The education policies of the six nations of the Gulf countries characterize differing ideological priorities around inclusive education and students with disabilities. In the Saudi Arabian context, the Ministry of Education emphasizes multidisciplinary teams as the most effective arrangement to provide inclusive education for students with disabilities (Ministry of Education Saudi Arabia, 2021). The instructional approach in this setting requires that teachers meet at the least very least the minimum qualifications necessary to be considered specialist educators. In this regard, Article 4(3) of the 2020 Disability Code is clear on specific teacher preparation details, while Article 5(3) to 13(3) is keen on the teaching standards and qualifications to cater for gifted students, individuals with learning difficulties, and students depicting communicative disorders (UNESCO, 2021a). These policies depict a deliberate effort by the Saudi government to understand the challenges facing teachers, thus preparing them to navigate different diversity aspects. A modification in the education system to equip the teaching workforce with the necessary skills to support inclusive education is about the desire to promote quality training, social mobility, and common values (Florian & Camedda, 2020). Education policies and laws in Saudi Arabia reflect an agenda of strategic dealing with differences by removing barriers to teacher preparation and participation in implementing inclusive education regulations.

In Kuwait, crucial emphasis is placed on delivering individualized support. Here, teachers are expected to develop skills and competencies in enrichment curriculum from the perspectives of technical and professional growth. Nevertheless, this arrangement fails to create meaningful impacts on inclusive education according to a teacher's license project completed in 2020. The project was aimed at benchmarking teachers' competencies for technical and professional progression. Inclusive education programs for approaching the academic and personal outcomes of students with disabilities should combine the theoretical teaching proficiencies of instructors and field-based practical experience. National disability inclusion policies are effective when they are seen to explicitly outline that all students have access to the general national curriculum based on a separate syllabus; such an arrangement curtails students' growth potential (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). Individualized support is aligned with the desires of students with disabilities is an extraordinary characteristic that differentiates Kuwait from the other Gulf countries.





Differences between these nations are also evident in their adoption and progression of a distinct comprehensive national curriculum model across the education levels. Qatar has made positive developments in establishing education centers, such as an Education Training and Development Centre, to improve and expand the quality of professional opportunities among teachers. In 2015, the Government of Qatar funded and instituted the Roua Centre to provide learning services for students with special needs (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018). Oman implements a curriculum with enhanced quality of teaching to meet the standards of students with disabilities. The 2019 Ministerial Decision 125 outlines the criteria for education standards, whereas the 2014 Child Law asserts the criteria for providing social childcare. These standards enhance the children's abilities, strengthen their social ties with families, and encourage participation in age-appropriate recreational activities (UNESCO, 2022a). A quality academic curriculum should be flexible and relevant so that the adopted instruction delivery method aligns with teachers' preparation and learners' needs.

The Ministry of Education of Qatar has adopted a harmonized curriculum. The Emirati school model comprises a framework evaluation for equitable education (UNESCO, 2021c). It differs from Bahrain's approach which supports a monitoring system rooted in the nationally developed and approved quality education indicators as outlined in the 2012-2016 National Strategy for the Rights of Individuals with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2021f). Governments affording curriculum modifications exhibit their ability to acknowledge differences in priorities and motivations when supporting the learning of students with disabilities. Differing political motivations in the six nations of the Gulf countries indicate that a harmonized curriculum is executed distinctively.

Within the education policies, ambitions and aims of individual nations differ considerably depending on their acknowledgment of inclusive education and responding to the needs of students with disabilities. An education strategy should advance social and economic programs as a reflection of a reformed curriculum. The issue of concern with meeting the needs of students with disabilities is that such an initiative does not advance in isolation (Ainscow, 2020). In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education creates departments and parallel agencies to cooperate. For example, the Supreme Council for Disabled Affairs draws and revises policies and laws associated with students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2021a). This collaboration underlines the importance of governance in acknowledging and spearheading inclusion and supporting the needs of learners with disabilities. Governance dynamics encompass political governance consisting of political stability voice and accountability. Economic

governance comprises government efficiency and quality of regulation, while institutional governance entails controlled corruption and maintained rule of law (Asongu et al2023).

Qatar's governance of inclusive education for students with disabilities involves creating cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The partnership is meant to create strategies aimed at encouraging the professional integration of people with disabilities (UNESCO, 2021d). Accordingly, students with disabilities can attain success depending on how a country's ambitions of devising and endorsing mainstream curriculum are supported. Alternatively, in Kuwait, governance of inclusive education is a coordination of standards and mechanisms set by the National Supreme Council for the Affairs of the Disabled. The Supreme Council comprises ministers from Social Affairs and Labour, Health, Education, and Higher Education, and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the General Authority for Youth and Sports, which are civil society representatives in the disabilities field. A structured body to promote the educational system paves the way for future gains in the sector and its various other areas owing to collective actions taken.

All six nations of the Gulf countries exhibit differing promotions and acknowledgment of students with disabilities in their inclusive education policies. However, this statement does not negate the fact that these nations have taken towards more inclusive rhetoric about inclusive education laws. A further debate is developed in this article by discussing efficiency in delivering educational support systems and learning and analyzing an approach to defining inclusive education in the category of students with disabilities across the Gulf countries.

Discussion.

All six nations demonstrate a commitment to delivering effective educational support systems for students with disabilities across various stages of education. Kuwait approves the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) concept as an expression of inclusive classroom settings. All students, with and without disabilities, benefit from this framework as they learn and attain knowledge. UDL is an educational framework aimed at optimizing teaching and learning for all individuals by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. The concept is rooted in the idea that a one-size-fits-all approach to education fails to accommodate the diverse needs of learners. UDL emphasizes the following three principles (Chita-Tegmark et al., 2012; Mackey, 2019):

1. Multiple Means of Engagement: This principle focuses on the "why" of learning. It encourages educators to motivate and engage students by





offering choices and fostering a sense of belonging. By addressing individual interests and preferences, educators can increase learners' motivation and self-regulation.

2. Multiple Means of Representation: This principle addresses the "what" of learning. It suggests that information should be presented in various formats to accommodate different learning styles and preferences. This includes using visual, auditory, and tactile materials, as well as providing options for language and symbols to ensure all students can access and understand the content.

3. Multiple Means of Action and Expression: This principle pertains to the "how" of learning. It encourages flexibility in how students demonstrate their knowledge and skills. By allowing students to choose from various methods of expression, such as writing, speaking, or creating multimedia projects, educators can cater to different strengths and preferences.

The UDL's principles stress the requirement for providing options meant to meet all learners' needs by incorporating flexibility into the classroom via affective networks, recognition networks, and strategic networks. The affective networks cover the "why" of learning and recognition networks entail the "what" of learning, while the strategic networks symbolize the "how" of learning (Mackey, 2019, p. 88). The complexity of inclusive education pinpoints inconsistency surrounding the practice of teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive environment.

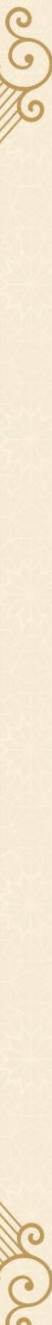
Similarly, Saudi Arabia demonstrates efficiency in the use of UDL principles. The country has committed to enacting a flexible policy, increasing resources in technology, and affording teachers additional planning time (Alquraini & Rao, 2020). A flexible learning environment is designed to assist learners in gaining knowledge and cultivating learning skills (Almumen, 2020). Sustaining teacher confidence in implementing the UDL's guidelines is a minimum requirement for supporting students with disabilities. In the UAE, Dubai Inclusive Education Policy Framework Standard 9.2 proclaims that efficiency of delivery is required to impact student outcomes due to a student's disability (Knowledge and Human Development Authority, 2017). The articulations in policy documentation and political motivations are unclear since the efforts to change existing laws are neither timely nor comprehensive. Alqahtani et al. (2021) reported that inclusive education policy adoption in Saudi Arabia was necessitated by an overarching philosophy aimed at meeting the individual needs and academic outcomes of students with disabilities. Gulf countries use UDL models to improve learning opportunities and educational contexts of students with disabilities to fulfill their mandate of educational law.

The acknowledgment and promotion of inclusion policy is dynamic across the Gulf countries. Oman's and Kuwait's endorsement of the UNICEF definition should not be interpreted that they adopt policies that are not suitable for their contexts. Rather, this approach to adopting international definitions reflects a commitment towards establishing a solid and robust framework for inclusive education (Alharbi, 2022; Ehaab, 2020). While referring to inclusive education support and learning services, Oman's educational system characterizes the over-identification of students with learning disabilities. Teachers' reliance on learning disabilities as a justification for student challenges is a significant issue stemming from insufficient teaching quality and a lack of effective motivational strategies (Emam et al., 2021). This disparity arises from a lack of clear understanding policy implementation practices designed to address this complex issue. The requirement of Goal 8 of the Ministry of Education Strategy 2016-2020 regarding inclusion in Saudi Arabia is:

To guarantee a good and fair education that is inclusive of all and that promotes life-long learning opportunities for all". Under that goal the key strategic initiatives listed include: "enhancing education for students with special needs" and developing "a comprehensive educational system that offers opportunities for quality education for students with special needs (Ehaab, 2020, p. 93).

This clarification demonstrates a commitment to inclusion efforts for all students, including those with learning difficulties. Saudi Vision 2030 underscores the significance of enhancing equity and inclusion in general education within public schools for students with disabilities (Alharbi, 2020). Therefore, the description of inclusive education as well as special education needs, including special needs categories, as well as the approval of an internationally formulated definition of inclusive education promotes the enactment of national disability strategies and guidelines. Overall, Saudi Arabia's education system appears the most inclusive among the Gulf countries due to its comprehensive policies that aim to improve the learning environment of students with disabilities, significantly increasing access and support services. The Ministry of Education's commitment to enhancing equity and inclusion is reflected in initiatives like the National Transformation Program, which aims to expand educational opportunities for all students, especially those with special needs, across various educational stages.

In Oman, the Royal Decree 31/2023 affirmed sufficient compliance with the UN CRDP. Promulgating the School Education Law is more of an internal effort since the Sultanate of Oman articulates students with disabilities issues from the government's point of view (Decree, 2023).





Accordingly, it is functional when the voice of inclusion is communicated from within the government publications and statements. The law establishes a comprehensive framework that prioritizes special education and mandates the country's Ministry of Education to enhance educational opportunities for all students. The emphasis on the importance of equity and inclusion ensures that Oman creates a supportive environment for students with diverse needs.

In Bahrain and Qatar, education policies on inclusion are voiced effectively in policy documents and articulated through a commitment to resource distribution. Investing in human capital through the provision of education and training is expressed in Bahrain Economic Vision 2030 emphasizes meeting the learning needs of children and youth with disabilities (Al-Hendawi et al., 2023). The outcomes of such a clear articulation are increasing confidence for students and teachers in connecting with citizens at a community level. Whether this promotion is practical in Bahrain remains to be seen. In analyzing focus group and survey results, Al Khalifa (2022) noted that many parents did not feel actively involved in the schooling of their children's education as they were only called when provided with negative updates regarding their children, thus citing their involvement as sidestepped. Increased unawareness about the implementation of education policies on inclusion highlights a major limitation to accepting individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities (Al Khalifa, 2022; Rashid & Wong, 2023). Responsibilities of executing an educational system addressing the learning context for students with disabilities should fall squarely on collective and collaborative community-school efforts.

Similarly, Qatar's Second National Development Strategy 2018-2022 policy document is a publication that is keen on strengthening and promoting human development through quality education. One of its programs linked with the education field is its acknowledgment of the need to enhance educational services for children with disabilities (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018). Furthermore, Qatar's endeavor to ensure that all citizens' right to education is sustained by making application laws in general education cannot be construed to reflect the reality related to exceptional inclusive policies in the country. However, this explanation may not convincingly demonstrate that the country actively fosters and enhances the learning environment for students with disabilities. In 2019, the Qatar Foundation for Social Work initiated the "Doha Declaration" to inspire the acceptance of the rights of at least 1.5 billion people with disabilities globally, advocating for the acceptance of education inclusion-related policies (Al-Hendawiet et al., 2023).

Overall, there is confusion and mixed communication about inclusive education practices across the six Gulf nations. This ambiguity often stems from varying interpretations of inclusive education policies, leading to inconsistent implementation and support for students with disabilities. The lack of clarity in policy articulation creates barriers for educators, parents, and stakeholders, hindering their ability to effectively collaborate and support the needs of all learners. Furthermore, the differences in political ideologies among the nations contribute to contrasting approaches to inclusive education. While some countries, like Saudi Arabia, have made significant strides in developing comprehensive policies, others struggle with unclear guidelines and insufficient resources. This disparity not only affects the quality of education provided to students with disabilities but also perpetuates social inequities within the educational system.

The findings indicate a pressing need for enhanced communication and collaboration among stakeholders to foster a shared understanding of inclusive education practices. Establishing clear, unified guidelines and frameworks can help bridge the gaps in policy implementation. It is essential for policymakers to engage educators, parents, and disability advocates in the development of inclusive practices that are contextually relevant and culturally sensitive.

Conclusion.

Within their respective inclusive education policy framing and documentation, all six nations express the minimum criteria expected of supporting students with disabilities within different areas of personal development and knowledge growth. The articulation and promotion approaches differ between them attributing to variations of political ideologies. Saudi Arabia appears to have the most inclusive education policy among Gulf countries; however, a significant limitation in the policies of other nations is the unclear integration and fulfillment of expectations through comprehensive interconnected support systems. This lack of clarity hinders the creation of suitable and meaningful educational experiences for learners with disabilities across individual nations... The instructional models and curricula are signposted, but their execution lags owing to inadequate teacher preparation and bypassing or disregarding parent involvement. This can cause poor educational outcomes for students with disabilities and a regrettable waste of valuable teaching resources, preparation efforts, and learning opportunities.

Policy formulation is crucial to examine the problems of social injustice and inadequacy of fostered education equity. Prioritizing legislative practices is a practical endeavor that involves the multifaceted, community-oriented



development of education programs, school-based disability awareness initiatives, and teacher preparation and participation practices. These efforts are recognized, whether collectively among Gulf countries or within individual nations, with the goal of empowering students with disabilities.

Recommendations.

This study recommends the following actions to enhance inclusive education policies and practices across the six Gulf nations:

1. Enhance Policy Integration: Gulf nations should work towards clearer integration of inclusive education policies by developing comprehensive support systems that connect various stakeholders, including educators, parents, and community organizations. This can facilitate a more cohesive approach to meeting the needs of students with disabilities.
2. Strengthen Teacher Training: Invest in professional development programs for teachers focused on inclusive practices, instructional strategies, and support for students with disabilities. Training should emphasize the importance of differentiated instruction and the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.
3. Promote Parental Involvement: Encourage active participation of parents in the educational process by establishing clear communication channels and support mechanisms. Schools should provide resources and training for parents to help them engage effectively in their children's education.
4. Implement School-Based Disability Awareness Initiatives: Develop and promote awareness programs within schools to foster understanding and acceptance of disabilities among students and staff. These initiatives can help create an inclusive school culture that values diversity.
5. Encourage Collaborative Policy Development: Foster collaboration among the six Gulf nations to share best practices and experiences in inclusive education. Joint initiatives can lead to more effective policies that address common challenges and promote equity.
6. Monitor and Evaluate Policies: Establish mechanisms for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education policies to assess their effectiveness and impact. This can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that policies are meeting the needs of students with disabilities.
7. Address Social Justice Issues: Prioritize legislative practices that address social injustice and inequities within the education system. Policies should aim to empower marginalized groups, ensuring that all students have access to quality education and support.

By implementing these recommendations, Gulf nations can enhance their inclusive education frameworks, leading to improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities and fostering a more equitable learning environment.

Limitations.

This article acknowledges several limitations that may affect the findings and conclusions drawn from the critical policy analysis of inclusive education policies in the GCC countries. First, the analysis may not fully account for local contexts and cultural differences within each country, which can significantly influence the implementation and effectiveness of these policies. Additionally, the availability and reliability of data on inclusive education practices may limit the understanding of their real impact on students with disabilities. The focus on policy frameworks may also overlook the complexities of actual policy implementation, including challenges related to resource allocation and stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, while the study emphasizes policy analysis, it may not adequately capture the practical experiences of teachers, parents, and students, which are crucial for assessing the effectiveness of inclusive education.

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