

Critical Report: A Systematic Review on the Status of Special Education for Refugee Children with Learning Difficulties in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

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Abstract

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a recently established kingdom that relies on financial aid from European and Gulf countries. Half of its population is youth (around 42.2% of six million) under the age of 14, and 31% are between 15 and 29 years old. Jordan confronts numerous challenges stemming from its deficient economy, limited resources, and socio-cultural barriers, which significantly affect its special education system. Furthermore, Jordan's geographical location in the midst of neighboring conflicts has significantly impacted its demographics, as it has welcomed a significant number of refugees, including Palestinians in 1948, Iraqis between 1990 and 2008, and Syrians in 2011. This has limited research on special education for refugees, focusing on the unique needs and challenges these children face. This paper presents a systematic review of the current state of special education for refugee children, highlighting the urgent need for more thorough research to address these gaps and facilitate improvements in educational practices for refugees and other at-risk students. Studies on food security, foreign policy, and health services are prevalent, but the specific topic of special education remains under-represented, underscoring the need for further research on how to better support refugee children with learning difficulties in their education, emphasising the need for more research on how refugee children with difficulties can be better supported in their education.

Keywords

Refugees, Special Education Children, Learning Difficulties, Jordan

1. Introduction

Special education in Jordan faces numerous challenges, including a shortage of trained personnel, limited resources, and funding constraints (Alshoura & Ahmad, 2014). While the country has progressed toward inclusive education, it still struggles to meet the needs of students with disabilities, especially refugee children (Muhaidat et al., 2020). Schools in Jordan, particularly those serving refugee children with disabilities, encounter issues like bullying incidents, insufficient teacher qualifications, financial limitations, and a lack of capacity, as they fall short of meeting minimum inclusive education standards (Muhaidat et al., 2020, Al-Zyoud, 2011). Historically, Jordan has limited educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities, but recent advancements aim to create a more comprehensive system (Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014). Despite a shared belief that education for students with special needs is a fundamental right, factors such as disability severity, teacher preparedness, and classroom overcrowding influence perceptions of inclusion in UNRWA-operated schools (Rodriguez, 2019a, 2019b) and, public schools (Al-Zyoud, 2011). Improvement in Jordan's special education services requires legislative reform, better accessibility, and enhanced teacher training.

Following the 1948 exodus, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) schools were established for Palestinian refugees in Jordan and other host countries, recognizing the role of education in maintaining community identity and improving job prospects (Dickerson, 1974). The United Nations' Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA, 2008; Al-Zyoud, 2011) reported that in 1950, there were approximately half a million Palestinian refugees in Jordan. By 2008, this number had increased to over two million, residing in ten official camps. The majority of Palestinian refugees acquired Jordanian citizenship following the union between Jordan and the West Bank in 1950. Despite political and financial challenges, UNRWA has consistently provided education and health services, resulting in higher-than-average academic achievements and improved health outcomes among Palestinian refugees (Alduraiddi et al., 2021; Abdul-Hamid et al., 2015). UNRWA schools in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jordan outperform public schools by an estimated one year of learning, thanks to factors that foster resilient school performance (Abdul-Hamid et al., 2015). However, the implementation of inclusive education for students with special educational needs (SENs) in UNRWA schools in Jordan remains problematic, with stakeholders citing more challenges than benefits (Rodriguez, 2019a). To fully enroll all students in their programs, UNRWA must address stakeholder concerns as it adopts new inclusive educational policies.

The Syrian refugee families arrived in Jordan in 2011, presenting significant challenges for children with learning difficulties (LDs) who require special education (Al-Hourani, 2019). Jordan's education system lacks inclusive standards, qualified teachers, adequate programs, funding, and capacity (Muhaidat et al., 2020). Social tensions, child labor, early marriage, and restrictive policies further hinder access to education (Majthoub, 2021). Despite receiving services across sectors, Syrian refugee children with disabilities face persistent challenges due to

insufficient resources and training (Salemi et al., 2018; Alshoura & Ahmad, 2014). Policy reforms and increased donor funding are critical to improving access for this group (Majthoub, 2021).

While Jordan's special education system has evolved to address challenges faced by Palestinian, Syrian, and Iraqi refugees, there remains limited research on the educational experiences of Iraqi refugees.

1.1. The Demographic-Political Context of Refugees in Jordan

Palestinian Refugees (1948-1967)

Following the Nakba (the Catastrophe), the occupation of significant portions of historical Palestine by Zionist Jews, and the subsequent Palestinian exodus in 1948, the newly independent Kingdom of Jordan accommodated approximately 450,000 Palestinian refugees. This resulted in a doubling of Jordan's population and heightened demands on its finite resources. King Abdulla I convened the Jericho Conference in December 1948, which culminated in the unification of the West Bank of the Jordan River—what remained of Palestine after the war—with the East Bank. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan subsequently designated the enlarged territory. As a result, Jordan granted citizenship to Palestinians living on both banks of the river.

Notwithstanding their citizenship rights, refugee status remains politically significant for Palestinians, highlighting the demand for a just resolution that encompasses return and compensation. Consequently, while the designation “refugee” initially signified destitution post-war, particularly as most eligible individuals resided in refugee camps or nearby regions, it subsequently evolved into an identity reflecting a connection to one's homeland and a demand for the exercise of rights. The refugee status signifies the importance of the international community's obligations in burden sharing. UNRWA distributed ration cards to Palestinian refugees to access aid and UN services, including basic and vocational education, healthcare, and hardship relief. These cards have provided assistance and services to long-term refugees while also symbolizing “a temporary, unique status and a tangible representation of the UN commitment to facilitate their return to Palestine” (Plascov, 1981). The British government, upon which Jordan relied economically, initially assisted Jordan by financing local development projects and facilitating employment opportunities for the Palestinian intelligentsia in oil-producing Gulf countries during the 1950s (El-Abed, 2014). The United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom, and West Germany, along with other nations, provided financial assistance to Jordan in addressing the substantial demands of state infrastructure development and managing demographic growth. The Jordanian government designated 18 funds to support refugees and provide various services, including land tenure, secondary education, sewage, water, and electricity—especially within camps.

The Iraqi Refugees (1991-2008)

Iraqis constitute the second significant wave of exiled individuals who sought refuge in Jordan from 1991 to 2008 as a direct consequence of conflicts including

the 1991 Gulf War, UN sanctions, and the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Initially, approximately 500,000 middle-class Iraqis arrived in Jordan in the 1990s looking for better living conditions. While many later emigrated to Western countries, about 200,000 remained in Jordan, some overstaying visas and living as illegal migrants, while others integrated into society through work in education and the private sectors. Additionally, the US invasion in 2003 caused a sharp increase in Iraqi migration, with their numbers rising to an estimated 450,000 - 750,000 by 2006 (El-Abed, 2014).

This population surge placed significant economic pressure on Jordan, driving up inflation and costs for fuel, food, and housing. Recognizing the severity of the crisis, Jordan requested international support, which resulted in significant foreign aid inflows, including \$750 million in 2005 (Abdul-Hamid et al., 2015). Despite these efforts, the scenario emphasized the persistent difficulty of managing large displaced populations, as well as the impact on host country resources and demography (El-Abed, 2014). Furthermore, consumer goods acquisitions rose sharply with an increase in property investments; international real estate transactions escalated from JD 44.7 million in mid-2004 to JD 82.8 million by mid-2005.

The purpose of the “inflated statistics” was to ensure Jordan’s development plan accommodated the needs of both Iraqi refugees and native Jordanians. Unlike the UNRWA’s mid-twentieth-century approach to utilizing funds to deliver services to Palestinian refugees living in camps and semi-camps, the nearly \$400 million allocated to Jordan between 2007 and 2009 for displaced Iraqis has primarily facilitated assistance for Iraqis while significantly enhancing Jordanian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and water and sewer systems (El-Abed, 2014).

The Syrian Refugees 2011

The Syrian refugee crisis, starting in 2011, has profoundly affected education systems in surrounding nations, especially in Jordan (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). International organizations have provided significant assistance to improve educational access for Syrian refugee children in Jordan. Even with these initiatives, obstacles remain, such as overcrowded classrooms, scarce resources, and issues related to quality (Bataineh, 2019). UNICEF, in collaboration with the Jordanian government, initiated the Emergency Education Response Program, successfully enrolling 130,000 Syrian children in formal education; however, at least 97,000 remain unenrolled (Culbertson et al., 2016). UNICEF has introduced alternative education programs, providing 35,000 Syrian children with adaptable learning options (Culbertson et al., 2016).

The Syrian refugee flood has had a big effect on Jordan, which is now home to more than 1.2 million people, putting a lot of stress on its resources (Alshoubaki & Harris, 2018). Over half of the Syrian refugees in Jordan are under 15 years old, making up a big part of the population. Even though work permits are available, less than 20% are actually working, with most of them doing unofficial work (Krafft et al., 2019). Jordan is having trouble with its economy, society, and safety because of the large number of refugees (Alougili, 2019; Salameh et al., 2018).

Jordanians’ perceptions of refugees are influenced by several elements, such as

unemployment, resource pressure, income levels, and nationalistic sentiments (Ali & Ganideh, 2020). The crisis has altered the demographic composition of Jordan, with some regions benefiting economically from the talents and investments introduced by Syrians (Jaber, 2016). However, the persistent crisis has resulted in difficulties for both refugee and host populations (Thynat, 2018). Syrian children in Jordan are more often enrolled in school than their counterparts in Lebanon (Sieverding & Calderón-Mejía, 2020).

1.2. Understanding Learning Difficulties and Disabilities: A Global Perspective

Learning difficulties and disabilities are related but distinct terms with meanings that vary by region.

In the UK, “learning difficulties” encompass a wide range of cognitive impairments, replacing outdated terms like “mental handicap” (Ritney 2003). These challenges, linked to central nervous system dysfunction, affect skills such as speaking, reading, and mathematics (Hammill et al., 1987b). Individuals with an IQ below 70 are categorized as having learning difficulties, divided into moderate (IQ 50 - 70) and severe (IQ < 50), often requiring long-term support in education and daily life (Ritney 2003).

In Australia, “learning difficulties” describe students struggling with classroom expectations, while “learning disabilities” refer to a smaller group needing specialized intervention (Elkins, 2002).

The US recognizes “learning disabilities” as a legal category for students requiring special services, stemming from central nervous system dysfunction, though they may coexist with other conditions (Hammill et al., 1987b; Jones & Wallace, 2008). Despite differences in terminology, addressing the challenges of inclusive education for students with learning disabilities remains a global priority (Karr et al., 2020). Understanding these distinctions is vital to meeting their educational needs effectively.

Learning difficulties may hinder the abilities of children in reading, writing, speaking, listening, reasoning, and math. These challenges often influence their academic journey, social relationships, and emotional well-being (Neeraja & Anuradha, 2014). Students with these challenges frequently find that tailored education programs and personal support may actually assist them in developing and addressing their individual needs (Wardhani, 2023). Moreover, students with learning disabilities frequently encounter challenges in adjusting and may experience emotional difficulties stemming from their academic struggles (Neeraja & Anuradha, 2014). Recognizing and addressing these challenges early is essential for effective management (Politi & Braimiotti, 2023). Providing effective special education for students with learning disabilities means using clear and structured teaching methods, keeping track of their progress, and working in small groups (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Grasping how the brain works and how we learn is crucial for creating effective strategies (Sousa, 2001). Learning a foreign language can be especially tough for students who face learning difficulties; it often calls for personalized strategies (Ganschow & Sparks, 2001). Special education for learning

difficulties requires a deep understanding of each person's unique needs and the use of proven teaching methods.

Children with learning difficulties, especially refugee children in Jordan, face tremendous obstacles. According to studies, more than half of Jordan's children with learning challenges have behavioral disorders, with private school students doing better than public school students (Abu-Hamour, 2014; Abu-Hamour, 2016). Syrian refugee children with learning difficulties exhibit diverse degrees of emotional security and social competence, with gender and parental status impacting these variables (Almakanin et al., 2021). Jordanian schools that host Syrian refugees lack proper inclusive education practices for students with disabilities, owing to limitations in school capacity, resources, program availability, and teacher credentials (Muhaidat et al., 2020). Refugee children worldwide suffer a number of risk factors for learning difficulties, including family misconceptions, instructor stereotyping, prejudice, and trauma.

Intellectual disabilities (ID) are typically diagnosed by doctors before the age of 18, a condition that affects cognitive abilities and adaptive behaviour (Fidler et al., 2019; Hepsiba & Raju, 2017). The population has a prevalence rate of 1% - 3% and refers to it as "mental retardation" (Purugganan, 2018; Fidler et al., 2019). Standard assessments measure intelligence and adaptive behavior to determine intellectual disability (ID). An individual typically receives a diagnosis of ID when their IQ falls below 70, and they exhibit deficits in their ability to perform daily living tasks. Research by (Shree & Shukla, 2016) and (Hepsiba & Raju, 2017) supports this criterion. Intellectual disability (ID) can vary in severity, ranging from mild to profound. It affects an individual's cognitive abilities, including their capacity to process information, solve problems, and adjust to their surroundings (Fidler et al., 2019; Shree & Shukla, 2016). Individuals with intellectual disabilities have a slower learning pace and encounter difficulties when dealing with abstract concepts (Shree & Shukla, 2016). Timely recognition is essential, as stated by the American Academy of Paediatrics, which advises conducting developmental surveillance and screening at designated stages (Purugganan, 2018).

1.3. What Challenges Does Special Education Refugee Children with Learning Difficulties Face at Schools?

Special education strategies for children with learning and intellectual disabilities in refugee environments encounter distinct obstacles. The implementation of inclusive education, widely regarded as the most effective approach, may not always be possible in resource-constrained settings like refugee camps (Crea et al., 2022). Children who have intellectual disabilities frequently display behavioral issues that can make their education more challenging (Bakare, Ubochi, Ebigbo, & Orovwigho, 2010). These characteristics may encompass traits such as aggression, impulsivity, or timidity, as well as neurotic disorders and learning challenges. Although mainstreaming can have advantages, special education settings may provide protective elements and more effectively address specific requirements (Crea et al., 2022). Research has indicated that employing video feedback interventions with staff teams can be

effective in altering attitudes and interactions concerning children who exhibit challenging behaviors (James et al., 2021). These children require comprehensive support, including medical, psychological, and pedagogical assistance, as emphasized by Furthermore, it is imperative to tackle systemic obstacles and enhance the accessibility of special education services for refugee families (Adams & Santos, 2021). It is crucial to create mental health programs within schools and implement effective screening measures to identify and intervene early (Bakare, Ubochi, Ebigho, & Orowigho, 2010).

2. Literature Review

2.1. An Overview of Special Education in Jordan

Teaching students with physical disabilities in Jordan started in the late 19th century. Children who were visually or hearing impaired began to learn in churches; at that time, the term “mental retardation” only applied to those who were deaf, blind, or cognitively impaired, not to behavioral conditions (Melhem & Isa, 2013).

Until 1964, when the Episcopal Church in the Middle East founded the Holy Land Institute for the Students with the Deaf, families and parents were solely responsible for securing special educational accommodations and services for all disabled children in Jordan (Hadidi, 1998). Additionally, the Swedish Organization for Individual Relief and the Episcopal Church’s founded institute for deaf children received positive reactions from the Jordanian community in the same year. According to (Hadidi, 1998), the primary objective of the Western organisation was to support the government and society, while also assuming responsibility for the children through establishing residential centres.

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) established the Special Education Directorate in the late 1970s to support the special educational needs of children by providing them with regulations and educational services (Amr, 2011). Consequently, Jordan enacted its first government legislation focused on special education in 1979, which led to the formation of the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) (Alshoura & Ahmad, 2014; Abu-Hamour & Al-Hmouz, 2014).

The MSD sought to deliver crucial care, education, and rehabilitation services for children with special needs; facilitate vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities in the open market; and extend tax exemptions and duty-free services for individuals with disabilities and the organizations that support them.

In the same year (Melhem & Isa, 2013), Jordan conducted its first National Survey of Persons with Physical Disabilities. Despite this, the survey revealed that over 18,829 people were physically recognized (Melhem & Isa, 2013).

When the Jordanian Parliament passed the Law for the Welfare of “Handicapped” Persons in 1993, the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) lost control of educational programs and disability diagnosis to the Ministry of Education (MoE), marking an important milestone in the country’s SEN service delivery (Hadidi, 1998). This law resulted in the establishment of the Supreme Council for People with Disabilities in 1993. Its responsibilities encompassed the development of policies to support individuals with disabilities, the creation of a comprehensive

national plan to raise awareness and aid in prevention to reduce the prevalence of disability, and the proposal of changes to laws related to people with disabilities (Al-Zyoud, 2011). These changes facilitated the coordination of special education policies and services across government agencies and non-governmental organizations. However, in 1993, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan constitution, the World Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Declaration of Disabled Persons shaped the vision of the National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons, or WDP.

By 1996, the number had risen to 55.0000, signifying an unexpected increase in the number of individuals with physical and hearing disabilities in approximately 60% of the classes. Socio-cultural factors hindered families from providing accurate data about their children, casting doubt on the survey's accuracy (Hadidi, 1998), particularly in light of the population's normal growth and the high number of injuries in the Gulf War and the West Bank (Hadidi, 1998).

In 2008, Jordan officially signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, thereby integrating into its national legislation numerous rights that had been previously articulated in the Law on Disabled People Rights (No. 31/2007) The Jordanian Law and the Guarantee of the Disabled Persons' Rights. Article 24 of the Convention highlights the rights of children with disabilities to receive equal and free education while also stressing the importance of fostering their potential, dignity, talents, and creativity. This dedication fosters the integration of individuals with disabilities into society and encourages their complete engagement as equal participants within their communities (Al-Anizat & Hammash, 2020).

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan implemented numerous principles and strategies through the establishment of the following institutions:

1) Ministry of Education's (ME) role

Under the MOE umbrella, the Directorate of Special Education and the Division of Programs implemented some strategies to differentiate high-achieving students and students with learning difficulties using the available resources in the country.

a) Gifted Students

A special program for gifted students was launched, which promoted a higher class to talented children according to their academic level; this privilege is only allowed once to a child. The Noor-Al-Hussein Foundation played a big role in establishing special schools for gifted students who apply for acceleration and intervention programs.

b) Special education for students with disabilities

The Directorate of Special Education (DSE), the Division of Remedial Education (DRE), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), under the guidance of the Ministry of Education (MOE), initiated special services through 400 resource rooms, introduced 18 programs for students with disabilities, and successfully integrated children with mild to moderate disabilities and 18 students with hearing impairments into public schools.

The MOE has supported the Jordanian education system in its efforts to adopt

the American education policy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), specifically to provide special education to SEN students (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Presents the percentages of recipients of educational services in 2004/2005 according to MOE, 2004.

The percentages of students who received educational services in 2004/2005, as reported by (Al Shoura & Ahmad, 2014).				
Type of authority	MOE	Private Institutions	UN School (UNRWA)	Other Governmental Institutions
Percentage	70.5%	19.2%	8.9%	1.4%

2) United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) role:

Over 500.000 students attend The United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA schools in Jordan in around 700 campuses each year through five regions including Jordan (Abdul-Hamid et al., 2015).

Despite all the challenges, UNRWA plays a major role in neighbouring countries, particularly Jordan, which is considered the largest location for Palestinian refugees. The failure can be attributed to the geographical location of the West Bank, Syria, and Iraq. The primary responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency was to establish special education programs for Palestinian refugees and Special Education Needs (SEN) children throughout the region, with the aim of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning through the following steps:

- UNRWA worked with Universalia, a consultant agency based in Canada, to review the education system.
- UNRWA for Palestine Refugees constructed approximately 3% of the schools in Jordan and provided education to non-disabled children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) of Palestinian refugees living in camps. Palestine Refugees built about 3% of the schools in Jordan and provided non-disabled children with SEN of Palestinian refugees' education in camps.
 - Special centres offered special education programs to students with disabilities.
 - Fifteen therapeutic classes for second and third-grade students with LD.
 - UNRWA launched ten special classes for hearing-impaired students.
 - UNRWA set up a two-year preparation training for teachers in four training centres, which was the first of its kind in all of the Arab regions, and a distance learning program, established in the 1960s.
- UNRWA leaders envision a system that truly supports equity for Palestine refugee students. They believe the current education system for these students should strive for higher quality, greater effectiveness, better efficiency, and stronger equity. Special education and inclusive practices are seen as essential to achieving this vision (Rodriguez, 2019a; Sultana, 2007).
- The final inclusion education policy IE was lately developed in February 2012 and insisted on: individuals, equity for free education for SEN children, the best quality of learning, differentiation of education and outcomes, positive social reflection, early identification and assessment of children to get them the preservice, focus on psychosocial and health sides, inclusion at schools reflects positively to the community (Rodriguez, 2019b).

3) Other Organizations

Queen Alia Fund: This organisation is involved in teacher preparation, offering professional training courses and workshops to enhance educators' skills.

4) Private Institutions: These institutions provide financial support to the special education sector.

Ministry of Higher Education (MHE):

a) In the 1980s and 1990s, Jordanian researchers, under the MHE, adapted the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale to better align with the specific needs of the Jordanian population.

b) A new program through the University of Jordan was launched which is considered a big step forward by offering a diploma of two years in Special Education and later expanded a master's program in this field. The first graduate in the mentioned field was in 1996 (**Table 2, Table 3**).

Table 2. Jordanian-adapted learning disabilities assessments (Al-Zyoud, 2011).

Tests for General Learning Disabilities							
Test	Stanford Binet	WISC-R.	Goodenough)	McCarthy	Peabody	AMMR, ABS	Cain-Levine
Original version	1972	1974	1926, 1963	1972	1959, 1965	1969, 1975, 1981	1963
Jordanian Version	1981	1981, 1988	1978	1986	1986	1981, 1983, 1993	1983
Ages targeted	2 - 18	6.5 - 16.5	4 - 10	2.5 - 8.5	3 - 10	3 - 12	6 - 14

Table 3. Jordanian-modified specific learning disabilities assessments (Al-Zyoud, 2011).

Tests for Specific Learning Disabilities		
Test	ITPA	Pupil Rating
Original version	1961, 1968	1969
Jordanian Version	1990	1988
Ages targeted	9 - 11	6 - 11

All of the above establishments focused on supporting disabled people throughout their lives and guaranteed the best educational environment, the right to be included in the general life with others, facilitate their transportation safely, and rehabilitation, providing services either to them directly or to their families, and guaranteed their participation in decision making.

More practical steps were put into action to provide different services for children with LDs distributed through many establishments as shown in below **Figure 1**.

Finally, a new law, No. 20 (2017), was enacted in June 2017 and is referred to as the Special Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This particular law was enacted to provide Jordanian individuals with disabilities with a legislative environment that is devoid of obstacles and barriers. It is founded on the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities. It is crucial because it is the first law in the region to address discrimination against individuals with disabilities. It mandates that all public and governmental institutions incorporate the inherent challenges of disability into their strategies, plans, and programs. They must guarantee that all services and facilities are accessible to individuals with disabilities (**Benson, 2020**).

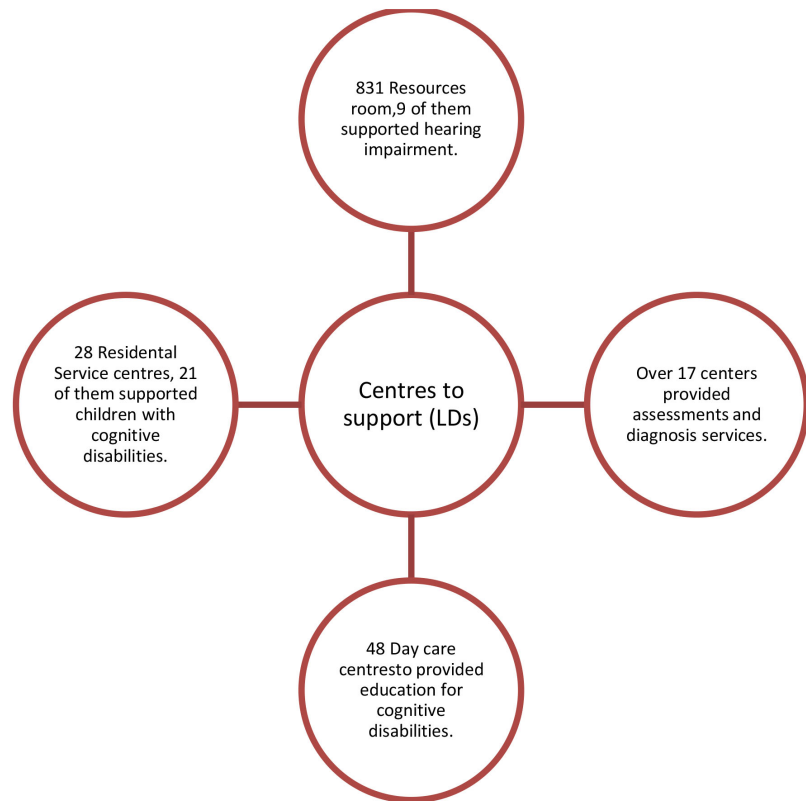


Figure 1. Including learning disability service providers for children.

2.2. Strategies for Screening and Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities in Jordanian Schools

The identification of children experiencing general and specific learning difficulties (LDs) has historically been a significant concern for psychologists, educators, and special educational needs (SEN) teachers. A significant challenge resides in the intricate nature of development and the dependability of screening tests for referrals (Steele, 2004). In countries such as Jordan, the presence of social stigma has always been an issue for parents and the extent to which educators attentively recognise early indicators of learning disabilities. Identification poses a significant challenge for new educators, given that developmental differences during the pre-school years can be nuanced and exhibit variability in both pace and progression. Studies underscore the advantages of conducting screenings for learning disabilities in the early years of education, particularly during kindergarten and primary school (e.g., Majnemer, 1998; Al-Natour et al., 2008).

In the 1990s, Jordan began its journey toward inclusion by integrating students with learning difficulties into mainstream classrooms that followed the national curriculum, adapting the approach based on the students' needs. A significant challenge at the time was the lack of professional psychologists to provide accurate diagnoses and conduct objective assessments of intellectual and adaptive functioning, as is common in many other countries.

To address this gap, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced “resource

rooms” in public schools—specialized spaces designed to support students with learning disabilities. Subject or class teachers referred students to these rooms when they demonstrated low achievement in core subjects. The method involved pulling students out of their regular classrooms for one-on-one instruction in the resource rooms for one to three sessions daily. Unfortunately, this approach lacked consistency and adequate supervision.

Resource-room teachers, who typically held two-year diplomas or bachelor’s degrees in learning disabilities or special education, were the only providers of specialized instruction. However, their lack of training as educational psychologists compelled them to identify students with learning disabilities, further complicating the system.

Jordan has made efforts to support refugee children with special education needs, but challenges persist. The country has provided public education to around 130,000 Syrian refugee children, while non-government organizations (NGOs) offer alternative education for an additional 35,000 (Culbertson et al., 2016). However, inclusive education for refugee children with disabilities remains insufficient, with gaps in legislation, accessibility, and appropriate accommodations (Muhaidat et al., 2020). Barriers such as child labor, early marriage, limited school capacity, and a shortage of qualified staff further complicate the situation (Khater, 2023). Special education programs also struggle with limited funding, resources, and training (Alshoura & Ahmad, 2014). To improve the situation, experts recommend developing medium-term strategies, expanding access to public education, improving double-shift schools, and addressing gender-specific challenges (Culbertson et al., 2016). Despite these difficulties, there is potential to overcome these obstacles and enhance the quality of education for refugee children with special needs in Jordan (Khater, 2023).

3. Research Method

This research paper was conducted using a systematic review approach, aiming to bring together all the existing studies on a specific topic to provide a detailed summary of the current evidence on the current special education status of refugee students with learning disabilities

Systematic reviews in the humanities and social sciences use thorough methods to bring together existing research, aiming for clarity and replicability (Barisau et al., 2024). These reviews follow steps like defining a research question, creating a search plan, gathering data, and evaluating quality. There are two main types: Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs), which answer specific questions, and Scoping Reviews (SRs), which explore the scope of research in an area (Barisau et al., 2024). Though these reviews are often time-intensive and non-linear, they provide valuable insights into complex topics (Barisau et al., 2024). Challenges, such as handling varied data types and fixing errors in bibliographic sources, can complicate SLRs in these fields (Vega et al., 2018). Still, systematic reviews are seen as a more rigorous alternative to traditional, less structured literature reviews in these disciplines (Vega et al., 2018).

4. Discussion and Findings

Starting with social aspects, understanding fate is important in influencing perspectives on disability in Jordan. Some parents perceive having a disabled child as a manifestation of divine will, which aligns with the prevalent religious and cultural beliefs in the country. People often attribute disabilities to divine punishment, the evil eye, or fate, thereby accepting them as part of God's plan. The perspectives presented are based on a lack of understanding of disabilities and the support systems in place, blending religious beliefs with local cultural views. Consequently, families, particularly in rural regions, may respond unfavourably to a child's disability, occasionally concealing them—a practice that persists despite advancements made over the past twenty years.

Following on, studies revealed that Jordan has substantial obstacles to delivering an inclusive education for refugee children who have an intellectual disability. Jordanian schools have deficiencies in meeting the minimal requirements for inclusive education as they grapple with inadequate resources, budgetary limitations, program availability, and teacher credentials (Muhaidat et al., 2020). Teachers usually endorse the inclusion of children with minor intellectual impairments. However, they argue that existing school settings are not practical for implementing this owing to limited resources, facilities that are not accessible, insufficient training, and a lack of support from parents (Al-Hassan et al., 2022). According to (Al Khatib, 2007), regular education instructors in Jordan possess a moderate level of understanding about learning difficulties. Researchers found that female teachers tend to possess more knowledge on this subject than their male counterparts. Children who are Syrian refugees and have learning impairments face additional challenges with emotional stability and social competence, both of which are crucial for the learning process. Gender and parental status influence these characteristics, underscoring the need for targeted training programs to support these vulnerable students (Almakanin et al., 2021).

On the other hand, Palestinian refugee students in Jordan face significant obstacles in accessing special education. Palestinian refugees from Syria encounter numerous difficulties linked to their status as refugees. Moreover, the lack of proper facilities and resources for children with special needs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Jordan, and Lebanon makes the challenges faced by these students even more pronounced. UNRWA schools, which serve a large number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, may face challenges in offering adequate support to the roughly 90,000 students who could benefit from special assistance (Sultana, 2007). Additionally, the unique circumstances surrounding Palestinian refugees, who have been displaced from Palestine since 1946, contribute to the intricacies of their educational needs. Even with the efforts made by organizations to create educational settings focused on children in Jordan, challenges still persist. There are around 5.8 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and other places, which really emphasizes how big this issue is.

In conclusion, the difficulties encountered by Palestinian refugee students (whose the majority have become Jordanian citizens) with special education needs

in Jordan are intricate and call for thorough solutions to support their academic achievements and overall well-being. Some of the major challenges include the absence of proper qualifications and training for teachers working with special education needs (SEN), limited funding, and inadequate infrastructure. Negative attitudes from teachers and parents, along with incidents of bullying in schools, make the situation even worse. Many people are not aware enough of the special education services and indicators available in our society, and this issue is made worse by overcrowded classrooms in both UNRWA and public schools.

Similarly, the Syrian and Iraqi refugee students in Jordan face the same conditions. These include academic underachievement, behavioural difficulties, emotional traumas, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of adequate teacher training (Alkhaldeh, 2018). For refugee children with disabilities, schools struggle to receive inclusive education, hampered by limited capacity, financial constraints, and underqualified teachers (Muhaidat et al., 2020). Economic pressures also play a critical role, with families often facing low wages, labour exploitation, and high living costs, leading them to prioritise work over education (Al-Sarayrah & Al Masalhah, 2019). University students encounter additional obstacles, such as financial difficulties, legal issues due to a lack of documentation, and psychological challenges (Abdu Razak et al., 2019). The war's lasting psychological impact and difficult social circumstances further intensify these issues (Alkhaldeh, 2018). Proposed solutions to these challenges include strengthening communication between schools and parents, providing more comprehensive teacher training, addressing the psychological well-being of students (Alkhaldeh, 2018), and offering financial support to families in need. Despite the severity of the obstacles, these initiatives present opportunities for improving the educational experience for refugee children in Jordan.

5. Recommendations

Several significant recommendations have been proposed in order to improve the support that is provided to refugee children, particularly those who have disabilities and students who receive education in Jordanian schools.

- 1) The kingdom of Jordan needs to take more steps forward in raising public awareness of individual needs, special education, learning disabilities, and/or difficulties, understanding what these needs and conditions are, and engaging all members of society to participate in the responsibility by conducting targeted awareness campaigns to educate communities on the importance of inclusion and reduce the stigma associated with disabilities, involving schools, media, and community leaders.

- 2) The Jordanian Ministry of Education must implement a clear policy and strategies to support and protect students with special educational needs and inclusion from negative attitudes towards them.

- 3) Allocating additional funding for special and inclusive education; enhancing the budget for resources, equipment, teacher training, specialists, technology, and assessments; and constructing more educational facilities by advocating for

increased financial support from the government, international donors, and NGOs to improve infrastructure, provide specialised resources, and expand special education services.

4) Establishing international educational partnerships to enhance special education in schools in Jordan; conducting regular inspections for compliance. All academic institutions undergo regular inspections to verify the application of the aforementioned policies.

5) Implementing a periodic survey for continuous improvement to gather feedback from teachers, parents, students, and stakeholders, building a database to help identify the current situation and fill in the gaps.

6) Developing specialised training programs for all teachers for early identification to promote an inclusive classroom environment to cater to students with diverse needs.

7) Establishing comprehensive screening and diagnostic services using developed standardised national processes and train educators, social workers, and other professionals to detect impairments early. To guarantee a timely and effective response, including screening with normal health and education procedures, developing accessible diagnostic centres in refugee communities.

8) Establishing a comprehensive national database with an efficient system for collecting and monitoring data on refugee children with special needs and special educational needs. This system should capture details about their specific requirements, the services provided, and their progress, to inform effective policy development and decision-making.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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