

Background of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) Policy in Some Countries: A Review (**)

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(**) *The author extend his appreciation to the College of Education Research Centre, Deanship of Scientific Research, King Saud University for funding this research work.*

Abstract

This paper seeks to provide a cogent outline of the current policies that six separate countries have on Individual Education Plans (IEPs), identifying the key features in each system. The chosen countries are Australia (Queen Island), Canada (British Columbia), New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Saudi Arabia. The aim of the paper was to have greater insights of the globalisation of IEPs at public schools in these above countries. It looked into a set of factors closely associated with each other; such as, to enable the exploration of how IEP policy is implemented at public schools in the same countries. The findings from the literature review showed a number of gaps in the current frameworks. Therefore, this has led the researcher to work further on these frameworks for the purpose of this paper.

Keywords: IEPs in Australia, IEPs in Canada, IEPs in New Zealand, IEPs in United Kingdom, IEPs in United States of America, and IEPs in Saudi Arabia.

Background of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) on Disability in Some Countries

This paper aims to provide a cogent outline of the current policies and core features of the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) of six separate countries: Australia (Queensland), Canada (British Columbia), New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Saudi Arabia. This paper seeks to offer insights into the globalisation of IEPs at public schools in these countries. The next section sheds light on these issues.

1. Overview of IEPs in Australia (Queensland)

The development of IEPs for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the school districts of Queensland, Australia, attempts to intelligently unite students, parents and professionals in the design of programmes focused on the performance of the student for the following six months. This process seeks to foster good communication for the sharing of responsibility for the key aspects of IEP design, including planning, gaining agreement on goals, and sharing accountability for outcomes. The resultant individual plan for each student is intended to guide educators in meeting the particular needs that arise from their disability, through modification to the general educational programme. This means that the student with SEN participates in the mainstream programme wherever possible, which is then supplemented by targeted, adapted elements as needed (Queensland Department of Education, 2003a).

The design of an effective IEP involves the following steps: collection of the relevant information; IEP meetings; design of the actual programme and its components; implementation of the IEP; and the evaluation stage. This process is cyclical, meaning that the final evaluation informs the information gathering of the next IEP cycle (ibid).

1.1 Information Gathering

Prior to the commencement of the information gathering stage, it is first necessary to gather an IEP team for each child. This team is generally composed of individuals who regularly work with the student: the parents; one of their class teachers; an expert disability support teacher; and the student themselves, if possible. The position of team coordinator is typically fulfilled at primary level by the class teacher, while at secondary level the coordinator is typically either the head of special needs or an experienced special needs teacher (Queensland Department of Education, 2003b).

The IEP planning is informed by a range of data, potentially including the student's competence in various learning areas; their preferred learning style; the particular interests, goals or aptitudes of the student; and any specialist equipment, training or resources that might be required. This information can be gathered formally and informally, drawing from sources within the school, the home of the child, and from the wider community at large. It is particularly important for the family and school to discuss and agree on the current educational priorities of the student (ibid).

1.2 IEP Meeting

The IEP Meeting is the most important part of the on-going consultation process. This meeting gathers educational

staff and family members, including the child, to hold an informed discussion that enables a joint decision upon the particular learning priorities to be made.

1.3 Implementation of IEPs

Implementing an IEP requires the team to agree on a plan, which is then implemented to meet the needs of students. All of the team members should be trained in the most suitable and current monitoring processes and teaching strategies. The collected data should be minimised, though sufficient to enable the programme to be consistently monitored and effectively updated. Data should be collected and compared at the start and finish of each six month period, the team is able to clearly monitor and assess the progress of each child and make informed decisions about how to develop the course in the next iteration (Queensland Department of Education, 2003e).

2. Overview of IEPs in Canada (British Columbia)

British Columbia (BC) indicated that Schools are obliged to provide educational programmes for all students in their districts, as stipulated by the School Act 1996. This Act was amended to require that students with special needs be integrated into classes alongside other children, wherever possible (Ministerial Order M150/89 amended in 2004).

The goals of students should be agreed upon by parents and members of staff, with due consideration of their particular strengths and their SEN. Except in a small number of exceptions, an IEP should be designed for any pupil that has been found to have special educational needs. The Special Education Policy Framework explains that IEPs are formal written plans which are devised by a team of students, parents, educators and other service providers. These plans should include plans to meet the student learning and other service needs in both the short and long term. These plans therefore inform and guide administrators in ensuring the implementation of the required structure. IEPs can therefore be useful tools in helping students with SEN transition effectively between different settings, as well as demonstrating the degree to which students are meeting their goals (Ministry of Education British Columbia, 1995).

For the development of an effective IEP, the Ministry of Education in BC recommends that there should be on going consultation between parents, teachers, students, support personnel and community agencies. This means that the family should be active and integral component in the process. Schools should also ensure that members of staff are provided with the required resources to fulfil the IEP, in addition to setting out clear procedures for planning and consultation between team members. The goal is to ensure the rapid and clear dissemination of information, thereby facilitating the planning process, as well as making sure that the needs of each student are met and that any difficulties are overcome. Support should also be available from the wider district, with recognition being given to the increased needs for planning and preparation, as well as ensuring that staff are not only sufficiently qualified, but that they have ample opportunity to continue training and developing to meet the increased demands entailed in the delivery of these courses (ibid).

2.1 Planning of IEPs

The fundamental planning process should be the same for all students. This cooperative process involves the student, their parents and the educators working together to define and meet a specific and informed set of goals, as well as the ways of attaining them. This collaboration should then result in the creation of an IEP that sets out clear objectives and describes the various commitments that these goals require of the educational system (ibid).

2.2 Implementation of IEPs

This stage details the practical implementation of the plans and strategies decided upon in the IEP. The plans should be clearly understood by all parties, including the student, and the required resources made available. A range of possible support is available for IEP, including but not limited to the following: modification to the content of the curriculum; the use of adaptive technologies, or modification of the local environment for increased accessibility; the provision of support services, such as counselling, teaching assistants, or physiotherapy; alternative approach to teaching or assessment; the provision of instructional intervention, such as remedial work; or ensuring access to specialist training where appropriate, for example Braille or sign language (Ministry of Education British Columbia, 1995).

3. Overview of IEPs in New Zealand

The New Zealand Government special education policy was introduced in the 1996 Budget, which attempted to increase the available resources for students with SEN. This was later revised in the Special Education 2000 framework, which provides that all students have a right to learn, in accordance with the Education Act 1989, the National Education Guidelines and the Special Education Policy Guidelines (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003).

The Special Education Policy Guidelines state that the same rights and responsibilities should be accorded

to learners with SEN as they are to other individuals of the same age. Therefore, special education should aim to meet the particular developmental needs of the learner, based upon the effective use of resources and informed by parental choice. Indeed, these guidelines highlight the importance of the partnership between educators and parents in the process of enabling learning and overcoming educational barriers. Finally, the language and culture of the student is vital in understanding their specific learning needs and context, meaning that this consideration should be factored into the design of IEP programmes (ibid)

The IEP process in New Zealand is founded upon the Curriculum Framework that informs all educational activities. According to this, IEPs are a way of recognising and ensuring that the particular learning goals are met for children with SEN. Under this framework, special educational needs can include a wide range of behavioural, physical, or learning difficulties. This means that the plan must include a specific set of learning objectives, informed by the current learning and development focus of each individual pupil. This enables the IEP to foster collaboration between a student, their parents, the school and any other agencies, for the purpose of ensuring these objectives are met. IEPs are therefore designed for students with SEN in order to provide extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, as well as to ensure the availability of the particular equipment required to enable their learning in either mainstream or specialised classroom environments. Effectively, then, IEPs are used when standard classroom strategies are insufficient to address the challenges that have been identified (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003).

3.1 IEP Team

The design of an IEP requires the collaboration of a group of interested parties. These people should be closely involved with the student. The team will always include the student, their parents and the classroom teacher. However, this group can be supplemented by a range of other parties, including family support, such as a relative; other school staff, such as special needs teachers; a teacher aide; therapists, like physiotherapists or speech-language therapists; and even specialist service providers, including rehabilitation experts or Ministry special education staff. One member of the team will then be appointed as a key worker, with responsibility to coordinate services between the various parties and agencies, across all settings. The key worker should attempt to ensure that the programme is implemented effectively, as well as ensuring continuity between each IEP meeting (ibid).

3.2 Implementation of IEPs

Once the IEP meeting has been concluded, the parties responsible for the implementation of the programme should specify the various components that will be required. This could include specific teaching strategies, the required adaptations that need to be made to materials, the need for additional support staff, and tailored monitoring and assessment tools. These decisions should then be recorded in the IEP. The key worker should then coordinate the extent to which the programme is effective and guide the team in determining whether any further assessments or modifications are required before the next IEP meeting (ibid).

4. Overview of IEPs in the UK

Support for IEPs was given explicit provision in the UK in 2002, through the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SENCP) which was implemented under the authority of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The earlier codes that were based on the 1996 Education Act were incorporated into the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which were then updated into the SENCP. This Code seeks to offer practical guidance to all parties fulfilling their prescribed role in ensuring the recognition, evaluation, and support for children with SEN. The parties affected by these statutory duties include early education settings, schools, and even Local Education Authorities (LEAs) (Department for Education and Skills, 2001).

The 1996 Education Act considers that any child with a learning difficulty that requires special educational provisions should be identified as having SEN. This means that any of the following criteria can indicate that a pupil has a learning difficulty:

- (a) Significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
- (b) A disability that complicates their use of the general educational facilities provided for pupils of the same age in all schools within their LEA.

For children under two, special educational provision means any type of specific educational programme (Section 312, Education Act 1996). However, for older children, it describes educational provision that is either in addition to, or differs from, the normal curriculum offered by schools within that LEA. (Department for Education and Skills, 2001).

The goal of SENCP is to outline a standard, uniform approach to identifying, evaluating, and delivering the educational provision for all students with the SEN. This typically occurs through 'differentiation' of the curriculum, under the auspice of 'School Action'. This implies that teachers need to modify their approach in accordance with the range of particular learning needs of their individual pupils. When this differentiated approach is shown to be unsuccessful, the school should make different or additional provision. School Action can include

additional assessment, altered teaching methods or materials, or the provision of extra support. School Action provides that IEPs should be employed by teachers in order to track the changes that are made to the provision given to students. They should also record other important information, such as the agreed criteria for success, the particular achievements of the student in light of those criteria, the strategies used by the teacher, and the specific short-term targets that they are working towards. Should the provision offered to students with SEN under School Action be deemed to be inadequate, it is possible to upgrade the approach to School Action Plus. In this stage, advice or support is delivered to the school from the support services of the LEA, or from social service professionals, such as occupational therapists. All of these approaches base decisions about the most appropriate action in a given situation upon an evaluation of whether the student is making 'adequate' progress using the approach at that time. Essentially, this draws upon the professional judgement of the teachers and support staff involved (ibid). The SEN Toolkit provided by DfES outlines IEPs as:

- Planning, teaching and review tools that underpin a process of planning intervention for a student with SEN;
- Teaching and learning plans which set out what, how, and how often specific knowledge and skills should be taught through additional or different activities than those provided to all pupils through the differentiated curriculum;
- Structured planning records of the differentiated steps and teaching methods required to achieve identified targets;
- Accessible and understandable to all concerned, and should be agreed with the involvement of the parent and pupil whenever possible.

The guidelines recommend that a limited number (typically 3-4) of key targets be set for each student, set in recognition of their particular learning needs, which should then be the focus for the corresponding IEPs. The targets should typically focus on the most important areas of communication, literacy, mathematics, and key behavioural and physical skills. To this end, IEPs should typically include the following information: appropriate educational approaches; the provisions for implementation; specific review date(s); short-term targets; expected outcomes; and criteria for success. While there should be a small number of carefully chosen targets, designed to meet specific needs or priorities, the full curriculum should still be available to the student. Long term aims can also be added to contextualise and shape the learning process, as well as to assist in setting clear outcomes. The success criteria of the IEP should typically be based on achieving the targets that were set, after which new targets can be chosen. Optionally, when an IEP may no longer be required, specific exit criteria can be set. Wherever possible, teachers should use SMART objectives (i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) (Department for Education and Skills, 2001)

4.1 IEP Process

It is important to situate and understand IEPs within the overall context of the courses for all staff and students. Therefore, the delivery timeframes that have been incorporated into IEPs should not only be integral to classroom and curriculum planning, they should also be realistic. The daily or weekly plans of the teachers should take into account the specific needs of pupils, to ensure that sufficient time is available to support students in working towards the learning targets and activities in their specific IEPs.

The individual targets and strategies that each IEPs provides for each student should be made clear to all participating staff, who should ensure that regular feedback is delivered to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at their school. Wherever it is viable to do so, IEPs should be executed in a normal classroom setting, so that SENCO will enable all relevant parties to be able to liaise and cooperate in fulfilment of their roles. Depending on the size of the school and complexity of the required SEN provision, the SENCO may need to manage this process for all IEPs. In these cases, it may not be possible for the SENCO to have sole responsibility for the design and delivery of all IEPs in their school. Despite this complexity, there should be continuity in the delivery of IEPs, which may often require the SENCO and the school management team to establish protocols for the preparation of new staff to effectively integrate with IEP provision, such as in situations when students move between classes or even schools.

Depending on local needs, it can be possible to bring in external consultants, to provide speciality support or assessment, or even to directly teach certain pupils. In such circumstances, schools should still attempt to implement this support within the normal classroom setting.

Appropriate planning and target setting systems should be established at schools, as managing IEPs is facilitated by their integration into the overall school system for planning, recording, reporting and assessment. In this sense, the way in which IEPs are monitored to ensure their ongoing effectiveness should simply be a component of the wider monitoring that takes place within each school, as an aspect of its local targeting and overall planning process (Department for Education and Skills, 2001).

5. Overview of IEPs in the US

All those children receiving public school education who have also been identified as having SEN are required to have an IEP. The statutory basis for this provision is laid down in the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1975. This Act provides that an IEP must be provided for each child with a disability, so long as they are eligible for special education and related services. This IEP should identify, among other things, the particular services that each child required. In 1981, additional regulations were issued for the requirements of the IEP. The EHA was amended in 1990, by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and then again in 1997 through the IDEA amendments. The more recent of these amendments were enacted under federal law, thereby ensuring that all children with disabilities were accorded their right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The IDEA Amendments guide school systems throughout the US in education of students with SEN as well as in related support services. Formal IDEA Regulations were published in March 1999 (National Information Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 1999).

5.1 Managing IEPs

In this context, the IEP is at the heart of educational provision for students with SEN. Therefore, every IEP has to be designed to meet the specific needs of a single pupil. Each of these programmes then informs the way in which all special education support and services are delivered for that particular child. This educational provision occurs as part of the general IDEA provision for special education, which is managed through the following stages:

1. Identification of potential educational support needs.
2. Formal evaluation of child.
3. Parents and qualified professionals co-operate to interpret the evaluation results and determine whether or not the student meets the IDEA definitions for having a disability. However, parents may challenge this decision with regards to eligibility.
4. An IEP meeting is held at the school, at which all involved parties must be present. At this meeting, the IEP is written, with the involvement of the parents and child where appropriate. Again the parents can appeal where they disagree with the outcomes.
5. Services are provided. This means that the IEP must be conducted in accordance with the written plan.
6. The achievement goals identified in the IEP are used as the baseline for the measurement of student progress, the outcomes of which reported to the parents.
7. Review of IEP, which occurs at least once every year.

(US Department of Education, 2000)

5.2 The IEP Team

The legislation stipulates the involvement of certain individuals in the design of each IEP. These persons must co-operate to design the programme. Although it should be noted that one member may fulfil multiple roles, the IEP team should comprise the following: the student; the parents of that student; a regular education teacher; a special education teacher; a representative of the particular school system; representative of transition services; an individual who can interpret the evaluation process; and any other individual who possesses special knowledge or expertise about the student or subjects in question (see Figure 1) (Hulett, 2009). The purpose of IEP team meetings are to carry out evaluations for special education, determine the child's needs, recommend appropriate placement and teaching strategies, set targets and review the plan annually (Yell, 2006)

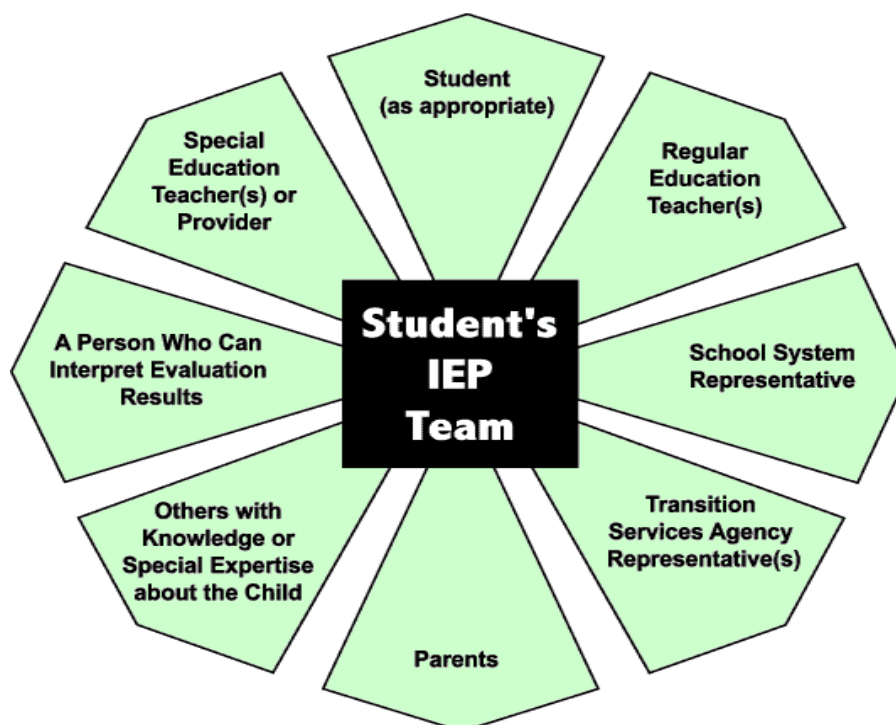


Figure 1. IEP Team Members

5.3 Implementing the IEP

Before commencing the delivery of special education provision for a particular child, it is first necessary for the school to obtain written permission from the parent(s) of the child. This consent must be given after the parents have been given a final written copy of the IEP designed for their child. Additionally, consideration should be given to the application of the following issues:

- All persons participating in the implementation of programmes should be made aware of all of their specific duties and responsibilities, as clearly presented in the IEP.
- Given the number of professionals involved, and the potential to share expertise and experience, teamwork should be prioritised. This can be encouraged through planning and activities relating to the modification of the curriculum.
- Clear communication should be maintained between the school and parents. An example of this could be the opportunity for parents to build upon the work from school.
- A leader should be appointed within the IEP team. This can assist in monitoring the receipt and delivery of services, helping to ensure that the programme is properly implemented.
- Regular progress reports should be prepared in order to monitor the progress of the child towards the achievement of their goals, as required by US law (US Department of Education, 2000).

6. Overview of IEPs in Saudi Arabia

Under Shariah law, the Government must guarantee the rights of its citizens in case of emergency, disease, disability and old age by supporting the social security system and encouraging institutions and individuals to participate in charity work (Ministry of Education, 2008). This clear guidance is based on the principle of equality among all citizens and is in accordance with Islamic law. According to Al-Jadid (2013:453), the position of Islam towards persons with disabilities is “against discrimination whether based on any racial, gender, colour, or ability”. It is clear that persons with disabilities are human beings and have needs and rights to enjoy and have responsibilities to be active members of the community.

In 1987, the Legislation of Disability issued the first special education policy document stipulating in its 26th Article that it is the obligation of the Government to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. It was based on a number of social and educational public agencies. In an attempt to clearly outline the criteria regarding eligibility for special education services, this legislation also includes several provisions that tackle the definition of disabilities and explains programmes for prevention, intervention, measurement and diagnosis of these needs. For example, Article 1 includes three items relevant to the definition of specific terms relating to categories of disability, prevention, rehabilitation programmes, special education programmes and IEPs. Lastly, this legislation

further stipulates that these agencies have to introduce rehabilitation programmes, educational evaluation and training programmes that support independent living (Prince Salman Centre for Disability Research, 2004). At the same time, there was a major shift in Special Education Needs legislation in Saudi Arabia. This resulted in changes in the manner in which these students received their education. Saudi Arabia also sought to protect the rights of disabled persons and to ensure that they were not discriminated against in any aspect of their lives (Ministry of Health Care, n.d.). In 2000, Saudi Arabia attempted to develop special educational needs legislation, such as the Provision Code for Persons with Disabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (PCPKSA) and the Regulations of Special Education Institutes and Programmes (RSEIP). The next section considers the PCPKSA and RSEIP in Saudi Arabia.

6.1 Provision Code for Persons with Disabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (PCPKSA)

The Provision Code for Persons with Disabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (PCPKSA, 2001) was issued according to the Royal Decree No.(M/37) dated 23/9/2000, approving the decision of the Council of Ministers No.(224) dated 15/9/2001 that authorized the code (Eastern Province Association for the Disabled, 2001). This document was also commissioned by the 15 members of the Supreme Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (SCAPD) in 2000. The Council was associated with the Prime Minister and comprised a group of 14 officials as follows: Chairman, to be appointed by a Royal Order, members from Secretary General for the Supreme Council (SGSC), Minister of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA), Minister of Health (MoH), Minister of Higher Education (MoHE), Minister of Education (MoE), Minister of Finance and National Economy (MoFNE), Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs (MoMRA) and General President of Girls' Education (GPoGE). It can also be concluded that these changes in education were related to a broader change in the legal and political position of disabled people in Saudi Arabia. The document was updated and revised in 2004 by a committee of six members: two persons with disabilities, two businessmen interested in the affairs of persons with disabilities and two specialists in the field of disability. All members of the two committees were appointed by the Prime Minister for this purpose (ibid).

Analysis revealed that the revision of the document coincided with the decision to introduce and support the rights to which persons with disabilities are entitled in every area of their life, including free appropriate public education that takes place in the same year. To ensure proper implementation of the code, Article 8 stipulated that steps should be undertaken to establish a supreme council that is responsible for matters relating to persons with disabilities. This document presented the vision of the Saudi Government in relation to disability and its types, rights of persons with disabilities and roles and welfare services to persons with disabilities. It also provides support services and seeks to integrate the disabled into the community to be active members. It incorporated and reinterpreted elements of the EPKSA policy document, as well as the authorization in organization of the affairs of persons with disabilities. In addition, it laid down the full responsibility for formulating policies as well as overseeing activities in the field of disability (The Eastern Province Association for the Disabled, 2001).

6.2 Regulations of Special Education Institutes and Programmes (RSEIP) Document

In order to fulfil its aims of meeting the needs of Saudi students with SEN, the National Committee for Special Education (NCSE), as the representative of the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE), undertook the preparation of mandatory regulations for both special and mainstreaming schools. This culminated in taking decision No. 1674/27 dated 05/04/2002 AH, which gave approval for the implementation process in special and mainstreaming schools to start in the school year 2002. In this sense, the DGSE issued a manual called the 'Regulations of Special Education Programmes and Institutes (MoE, 2002). This manual provided information about categories of both male and female disabled people. It also outlined the various procedures that could be implemented to inform decision-makers in the best ways to determine the eligibility of individuals for special education services (Al-Mousa, 2005). The beginning of regulations emerged to fulfil the aims and objectives of the Saudi education policy with regards to the needs of special education. It stipulates that mainstream education and equally the education of persons with disabilities should constitute an integral part of the educational system. The strategy also stemmed from the awareness of the MoE of the size of the problem, more specifically, students with SEN in regular primary schools needed special education services. It also stemmed from the belief that the resultant outcome of providing those services to the target categories would not be limited to those categories, but would also lead to pervasive qualitative changes to the education process of children with SEN in the Saudi context. Therefore, eventually it will leave a positive impact (ibid). A central goal of the current Saudi special education policy is to ensure that an integral part of the educational system is the provision of appropriate instruction for talented persons with special educational needs. The Directorate General of Special Education (2000) in Saudi Arabia developed an educational strategy for the provision of services to meet the needs of all students with SEN. This strategy has ten themes:

1. Activating the role of regular schools in the field of education for students with SEN
2. Expanding the role of special education institutes

3. Developing human resources within special education institutes and mainstream schools
4. Developing curricula, study plans and textbooks within special education institutes and schools
5. Introducing modern technology to serve special categories
6. Developing the organisational structure of the Directorate General of Special Education
7. Reviewing and developing existing regulations and preparing new regulations for future special education programmes
8. Reviving the role of special education in educational departments in Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in Saudi Arabia
9. Motivating the role of scientific special education research
10. Co-operating and co-ordinating with the appropriate Saudi Arabian authorities, as well as those outside the Kingdom

In the light of these topics, and more specifically topic (7) which seeks to study and develop the existing regulations and prepare new ones for future programmes in keeping with the fundamental changes that have taken place within the Special Education field in Saudi Arabia (Hussein and Salem, 2000: 5-6). These regulations comprise eleven parts:

Part I: Definition of terms

Part II: Special education aims

Part III: Principles underpinning the special education policy in Saudi public schools

Part IV: Special categories: concepts, procedures and requirements

Part V: Transitional and rehabilitation services

Part VI: Technical and administrative management of the institutes and programmes

Part VII: Technical, administrative and financial links with the relevant bodies

Part VIII: Producers of assessment and diagnosis

Part IX: Individualised Educational Plan (IEP)

Part X: Educational evaluation

Part XI: General provisions (MoE, 2002: 2-3).

Consequently, the RSEIP is in favour of providing special education services of good quality, on the one hand, and allowing the development and preparation of new regulations for future special education programmes in Saudi Arabia on the other (MoE, 2002). Figure 2 below shows the organization of the content of the document. The importance of the regulations lies in the organisation of the educational process, in the upgrading of the level of services provided and in the determination of the responsibilities and tasks assigned to the employees. In addition, regulations are essential since they can help in creating flexibility in the workplace and in reviving teamwork and team spirit among the multidisciplinary team.



Figure 2. RSEIP Document Framework

This paper will provide an overview of all parts in the regulations for the purposes and programmes of

special education.

Part One: A Definition of the Term Special Education

As stated in the regulations (MoE, 2002), SEN refers to a set of programmes, plans and strategies designed specifically to meet children with SEN. It includes special teaching methods, tools, equipment and aids as well as special educational services.

Part Two: Special Education Aims

Special Education aims to provide the relevant upbringing and instruction for those students who have particular needs in terms of the different special education categories. It also aims to train them to acquire the skills appropriate to their abilities and potential in line with plans and programmes for improving their performance and preparing them for public life and integration into the wider society.

Part Three: Principles Underpinning Special Education Policy in Saudi Public Schools

Education policy in Saudi Arabia has included a number of principles associated with the field of special education. In addition, the unprecedented development and expansion of special education has necessitated the addition of a number of other principles that have evolved recently to form a combination of the fundamental premises on which Special Education is currently based. One of those premises is providing care (medical model) for intellectually disabled students and seeking to remove all core causes of this problem. This refers to society adapting to meet their needs (social model) as well as setting up short and long term special programmes according to their needs (Article 55, MoE, 2002).

Part Four: Special Categories: Concepts, Procedures and Requirements

'Special categories' here refer to visual disability, hearing disability, intellectual disability, learning difficulties, talents and giftedness, autism, behavioural and emotional disorders, multiple disabilities, physical and health disabilities and communication disorders. Each of these categories includes an appropriate educational and teaching placement in order to provide special education services. In addition, it includes educational stages and plans, spatial, equipment and human requirements needed for each category and the admission requirements for each category of students with SEN.

Part Five: Transitional and Rehabilitation Services:

Transitional services aim to prepare pupils with special educational needs to move from one stage or environment into another. These transitional services are identified for each student through IEPs with the people responsible for the plans determining the nature, the method of delivery, duration and the extent to which students can benefit from them, according to Article (14,15) (MoE, 2002). With regard to the Medical Model, the different types of rehabilitation generally aim to enable individuals with disabilities to live as independently as possible through the appropriate use of a set of medical, social, educational, psychological and professional procedures (Article :17, *ibid*).

Part Six: Administrative and Technical Organisation of Institutes and Programmes

All members of the special education programme in mainstream schools should carry out the assigned tasks and responsibilities and co-operate effectively to ensure the goals of the educational process, as declared in the Education Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (EPKSA), (Article 22, RSEIP, 2002: 44)

It includes the tasks of the administrative body, such as the tasks of the principal, the school agent and the programme supervisor, as well as the tasks of the technical body. This includes the residing educational supervisor, special education teachers, paraprofessionals and support service providers such as speech pathologists, communication disorders specialists, physical therapists, health supervisors, occupational therapists, counsellors, psychologists and parents.

Part Seven: Technical, Administrative and Financial Links with the Relevant Bodies

This includes relations between institutes and programmes and the Directorate General of Special Education. In addition, it includes the links between these institutes and programmes and the LEAs as well as their relationships with the family in terms of their respective duties and responsibilities towards each other.

Part Eight: Producers of Assessment and Diagnosis.

This is intended to set formal procedures through which information can be collected from every student with SEN by means of formal and informal techniques. The data can then be analysed and interpreted to identify the nature of the disability to be dealt with. This part consists of a number of objectives for the assessment and diagnosis process, the foundations upon which the process of assessment and diagnosis are based, the team in charge of measurement and diagnosis and, finally, the steps taken during the assessment and diagnosis process.

Part Nine: Educational Evaluation

This refers to the procedure through which the level of student performance can be determined in the field of information, skills and targeted behaviours that students may have learnt and in which they may have received training. This part explains the goals behind the evaluation process, the rules and the bases of evaluation, the general tools and methods of evaluation, the special evaluation tools and methods for each category separately, for example, the evaluation tools and methods for children with intellectual disabilities.

Part Ten: General Provisions

This part consists of ten Articles, of which Article 94, Article 98 and Article 101 have specific relevance to the current research. In relation to Article 94, education in the academic special education stages takes place according to the curricula, textbooks and units. These are approved for each stage by the relevant authorities in the Ministry of Education, in keeping with the set of educational plans and IEPs. Certain necessary amendments can be made depending on the capabilities and needs of each student. As for Article 98, the special education institutes and programmes in regular schools undertake to employ techniques and computer programmes for educational purposes, organising activities and tasks, documenting data and evaluating results. Finally, according to Article 101, the administration of the institute or programme undertakes to form a multidisciplinary team under the supervision of the LEA for each region in line with specific regulations and standards set out by the Directorate General of Special Education.

Part Eleven: Individualised Educational Plans (IEP).

The following section discusses articles related to the IEP for students with SEN, as stipulated by the Regulations for the Special Education Institutions and Programmes document.

6.3 The IEP in the Saudi Educational System

The Ministry of Education issued Decree No. 1674/27 (2002) which gave approval to the application of RSEIP (MoE, 2002). It was approved under the regulatory controls to assist professionals in applying this system to accommodate the individual needs of students with special needs (ibid). The RSEIP requires schools to provide the necessary resources to implement IEPs for every child with SEN. In this capacity, IEPs fulfil a crucial role in the provision of educational services for each child.

Similarly, there are provisions in the RSEIP policy that emphasise the provision of educational care appropriate for students with disabilities. For instance, Articles 84 and 85 of those rules emphasise the effective use of an individual educational plan and its implementation. The current research explains these Articles. According to Article 84, the individualised educational plan is an acknowledgment and recognition of the privacy of children with special needs, in general, and of intellectually disabled (I/D) children in particular. Under Article 84, the IEP seeks to achieve the following objectives: ensuring the right of the student to educational and support services that aim to meet his/her needs by following the procedures set forth in the plan, assuring the right of the parents to receive appropriate care for their child, determining the quality and quantity of educational services and support required for the needs of each student individually, identifying the necessary actions to provide educational and support services for each student individually, achieving communication between the parties concerned to serve the student and the parents and to allow for a discussion of the appropriate decisions to enable better understanding of IEP procedures and particularly to ensure that the needs of children with SEN are met (MoE, 2002). It can be seen that the IEP plays an important role in ensuring that children with disabilities get good learning and support. It also demonstrates that the rights of disabled children are enshrined within policy and culture.

Article 85 takes this further and aims to set up an individualised education plan for every student with special needs regardless of the type, location and time of the requested service. This includes requiring means and methods for the success of the IEP and preparing an individualised education plan based on the results of diagnosis and measurement as central elements. The operations of the IEP should also depend on the accurate written description of the educational programme. In addition, the plan should be based on the work of the IEP team members. Equally vital and usually overlooked in special education research is the parents' position as a central element of the application of IEPs. Thus, parents must participate in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the individualised education plan at each stage (MoE, 2002). It is clearly shown above that the Articles seek to regulate the educational process, raise the level of services provided and determine the responsibilities and duties assigned to school staff. This Article, which means the composition of the IEP team, may create flexibility at work and focus on key IEP elements.

In summary, these Articles are concerned with the principle of providing equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities, as is the case with other members of society who benefit from a free and appropriate education. However, in reality, the IEP policy is not properly practised or implemented in Saudi Arabia (Al-Wabli, 2000). Al-Wabli also argued that previous Articles, which work to serve people with special needs, were not actually transferred from theory to practice. In other words, the individual education plan in Saudi Arabia has not yet been applied appropriately for students with intellectual disabilities. This affects the process of providing these students with appropriate educational services. Thus, this research aims to explore IEP team members' perspectives of the IEP process with a view to determining the ways in which the IEPs can best be implemented for children with SEN. Figure 3 illustrates these individual requirements are described in greater details below.

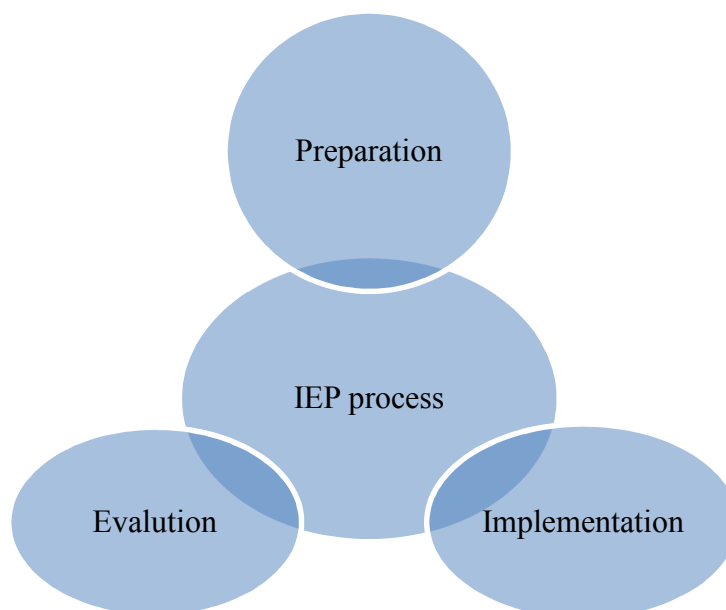


Figure 3: Requirements of IEP

6.3.1 Requirements for the Preparation, Implementation and Evaluation of the Individualised Education Plan

6.3.1.1 Preparation of the IEP

On the one hand, the preparation of the individualised education plan for children with special educational needs can be achieved by formulating an individualised education plan team. The members of this team include special education teachers, the head-teacher, parents, regular education teachers and other specialists, who can be deemed useful in the preparation of the plan. On the other hand, the preparation and writing of the individualised education plan for each student is carried out by IEP team members based on the recommendations of the diagnosis and measurement team. This team includes special education teachers, parents and psychologists (Article 81, RSEIP, and 2002:77). Moreover, this individualised education plan should be prepared within two weeks from the end of the diagnostic procedures. To this end, IEPs should typically include the following information: short and long term targets, appropriate teaching strategies, the provisions to be implemented, specific review date(s), expected outcomes and criteria for success (MoE, 2002).

6.3.1.2 Implementation of the IEP

The implementation of the individualised education plan may be done as follows: Firstly, the starting date of the implementation of the individualised education plan should not exceed a period of one week after its preparation. Secondly, the implementation of the individualised education plan should be carried out by IEP team members who are qualified to provide the service set forth in the plan. Thirdly, there should be co-ordination between the IEP team members assigned with the task of implementing the plan (MoE, 2002).

6.3.1.3 Evaluating the IEP

The individualised education plan is assessed to determine its effectiveness in meeting the student's needs and goals, at least once during each academic year, while the assessment of the student's performance aims to achieve the short-term objectives on an ongoing basis (MoE, 2002). Based on the discussion above, effective and successful education of the student requires an individualised education plan for each student. This is because the plan represents a general referential framework for the educational programme of students and is also considered the basic rule referred to when resolving problems or disputes between parents and the IEP team. It is also viewed as a tool to encourage communication between the multidisciplinary team on the one hand and the parents of the student on the other.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a common overview of the IEPs process for SEN students in six different countries. It is therefore hoped that the recommendations provided in this paper might facilitate the implementation of IEPs for students with SEN. These recommendations are offered for Saudi educational policymakers to formally set guidelines which will assure the application of the IEP in Saudi Arabia that will best serve the future of students with SEN. Equally importantly, the recommendations below may offer a way for the quality of special education services provided to students with SEN to be improved, as well as contributing to best practice for implementing IEPs. Therefore, this paper clearly suggests considerable results which may be useful to policy decision-makers and curriculum developers, and Ministry of Education (MoE), Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE)

and focus on development of IEP within IEP team members, by providing: more dynamic roles for different participants in the IEP process; an improving collaboration between IEP team; and Increasing coordination between the MoE, DGSE and Mainstream Schools in relation to the IEP. These may be helpful to IEP team members; Saudi educational policymakers and public schools to establish the key features, which ensure the development of the IEP and improving the level of educational services provided for student with SEN.

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