

Research Article

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Lebanese Law 220/2000 and Educational Inclusion: A Critical Analysis

Ali Hussein El Ahmad 

Abstract

Background/purpose – The right to inclusive education (IE) for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Lebanon has been affirmed in Law 220/2000, which was passed by the Lebanese parliament in May 2000. However, no mechanisms or execution decrees have been developed to enforce its implementation (Combaz, 2018; Damaj, 2014; Humanity & Inclusion, 2022; Loutfy, 2019), resulting in marginalization and exclusion of students with SEND from mainstream public and private schools in Lebanon (Chamsine, 2013; Frangieh & Ramel, 2019; Khochen-Bagshaw, 2023; Koplewicz et al., 2018). Theoretical, conceptual, and analytical studies on IE in Lebanon are still very limited, with no studies have been conducted and published to date on Law 220/2000 regarding educational inclusion. This paper aims to critically analyze Law 220/2000 regarding inclusion in education for students with SEND in Lebanon.

Materials/methods – This study employed critical analysis without empirical data collection and analysis.

Results – The study revealed poor implementation of the Law articles on educational inclusion of students with SEND in Lebanese schools, with demonstrably better implementation outcomes in private schools compared to public schools, after more than two decades of its enactment.

Conclusion – Despite weaknesses due to its limited implementation and impact on students with SEND and their inclusion, Law 220/2000 remains a significant step towards promoting educational inclusion in Lebanon.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

A significant change in the approach to educating students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from segregated education through to an integrated model to inclusive education (IE) has occurred over the past 40 years (Ainscow et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2010). However, Terzi (2014) contended that disagreement exists about the definition of exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion in the literature on students with SEND. El Ahmad (2022) argued that the right to IE is underlined in three international human rights instruments: the *Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations [UN], 2015), *Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD]* (UN, 2006), and the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1994). Graham (2020) emphasized that *General Comment No. 4 [GC4] of Article 24 of the CRPD* (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2016) is the most authoritative and comprehensive document which explains the human right to IE and its implementation. It not only defines inclusion, but also critically provides definitions for the other two approaches to the education of students with SEND, namely segregation and integration (Graham, 2020). The UNCRPD (2016) refers to segregation as providing education for students with SEND, in isolation from their peers without SEND, in separate learning environments used or designed for responding to various or particular impairments. The UNCRPD (2016) defines integration as accommodating and providing education for students with SEND in general classrooms, with their obligation to adapt to the existing standardized requirements of these learning settings. However, inclusion in education is defined as a comprehensive process that encompasses modifications to the education system to remove barriers hindering accessibility, sense of belonging, participation, and learning of all students, taking their abilities, preferences, and needs into consideration, within a friendly and supportive school environment (UNCRPD, 2016).

With increasing diversity among students in today's classrooms, promoting inclusion and strengthening equity within the mainstream education system have become a professional and moral responsibility for education administrators. An inclusive and equitable mainstream education system is a place where all students, including those with SEND, are offered fair opportunities to access and participate in education in order that they may achieve their full potential. The ultimate purpose of inclusive schooling is developing an inclusive society, which accepts and respects the diversity of all its members and is committed to their comprehensive development and self-realization.

1.2. Historical Overview of Education of Students with SEND in Lebanon

Under mandate from the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) has been responsible for all disability issues for students with SEND (McBride et al., 1999). McBride et al. (1999) criticized this mandate because MoSA's primary function is care rather than education. They added that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with some support from MoSA have provided and expanded educational and support services for students with SEND in segregated learning settings. They also highlighted that students with SEND at that time were facing many barriers to education leading to their exclusion from educational programs. These barriers were exclusionary practices and policies within MEHE; lack of leadership and vision within MEHE; lack of collaboration and coordination among the public sector, private sector, and NGOs; inaccessible facilities; inflexible curricula and resources; discriminatory practices at some private schools; poor teacher training; and a lack of public awareness on the situation of students in Lebanon with SEND (McBride et al., 1999).

Lebanon is among the leading countries in the Middle East region whose schools, particularly those in the private sector (Khochen-Bagshaw, 2023), started to implement the agenda of providing education for students with SEND in general learning settings. Khochen-Bagshaw (2023) contended that education provision for students with SEND in general education classrooms in Lebanon became popular and acceptable during the second half of the 20th century; adding that the initiative was implemented largely in private and special schools who were in receipt of financial support from NGOs. According to Bou Sreih and Mjaes Azar (2020), the credit for the initial integration experiences of many students in Lebanon with SEND into mainstream learning settings goes to their parents. These experiences of integration were largely unplanned, and took place in several private schools with limited autonomy in the 1990s (Bou Sreih & Mjaes Azar, 2020). These initiatives were implemented as part of a school integration approach, although no clear policy existed governing the education of SEND students in either general or special education schools (Bou Sreih & Mjaes Azar, 2020). The school integration approach aimed to accommodate some students with SEND and empower them to cope with and adjust to the school system by offering them educational and rehabilitation support services (Bou Sreih & Mjaes Azar, 2020).

1.3. Statement of the Problem

In May 2000, the Lebanese parliament passed Law 220/2000, which was titled as the “Law on the Rights of People with Disabilities.” According to this law, students with SEND have the right to receive education within a mainstream learning environment, whether in the public or private sector (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). However, no mechanisms or execution decrees have been developed to organize, facilitate, or enforce its implementation (Combaz, 2018; Damaj, 2014; Humanity & Inclusion, 2022; Loutfy, 2019).

In addition, Khochen-Bagshaw (2023) highlighted that Lebanon signed the *CRPD* (UN, 2006), which reaffirmed the right to IE for students with SEND in mainstream learning settings. Nonetheless, the decision to set the level of inclusion that Lebanese schools provide to students with SEND still lies exclusively with each school’s management (Khochen-Bagshaw, 2023). Therefore, the acceptance of students with SEND into mainstream public and private schools in Lebanon is granted at the discretion and selectivity of school principals and teachers (Khochen & Radford, 2012; Koplewicz et al., 2018); a mechanism that has resulted in an unsystematic, discriminatory, and subjective approach to the admission of students with SEND (El Ahmad, 2023). As such, many students with SEND are excluded from mainstream Lebanese public and private schools (Chamsine, 2013; Frangieh & Ramel, 2019; Khochen-Bagshaw, 2023; Koplewicz et al., 2018), which forces their parents to enroll them in special education schools (Damaj, 2016) at significant financial burden, or keep them at home (Alborna & Gaad, 2014).

1.4. Rationale for the Study

Primary research on inclusion in education in Lebanon has significantly increased since 2011, with 46 studies having been published from 2011 onwards compared to just 13 studies published prior to that time, according to a scoping review conducted by El Ahmad (2023). A significant gap in the academic literature on educational inclusion in Lebanon was identified by Kiwan (2019). Theoretical, conceptual, and analytical studies on IE in Lebanon are still very limited, with no studies having been conducted and published regarding Law 220/2000 and educational inclusion in Lebanon. Therefore, a need exists to conduct a critical analytical study on Lebanese Law 220/2000 regarding educational inclusion in order to inform stakeholders about its implementation, strengths, and weaknesses, and to suggest future directions for improvement of the Law and its implementation. This could then result in an improved and updated version of Law 220/2000, leading to wider advocacy of the right to IE for students with SEND, and therefore improved social and learning outcomes for those students.

1.5. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this paper was to critically analyze Lebanese Law 220/2000 regarding educational inclusion of students with SEND in Lebanon. Specifically, the study set out to: (1) explain the articles of Law 220/2000 on educational inclusion; (2) examine the implementation of the Law regarding educational inclusion; (3) identify strengths and weaknesses of the Law; and, (4) suggest future directions for improving the Law and its implementation.

1.6. Organization of the Paper

This paper is organized in seven sections. Following the Introduction, the second section provides an overview of Law 220/2000 and its articles on the inclusion of students with SEND. The third section examines the extent and progress made in implementing the Law since it was enacted in 2000, including the challenges encountered and the successes achieved. The fourth section critically evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the Law. The fifth section presents future directions for improving the Law and its implementation, while the sixth identifies the study's limitations and directions for future research. Finally, the seventh section draws conclusions related to the study.

2. Overview of Law 220/2000 and Its Articles on Educational Inclusion

Damaj (2014) stated that Lebanese Law 220/2000 mirrors the primary approach of the United Nations' *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (UN, 1993) and the *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* (UN, 1982). As such, Lebanese Law 220/2000 is considered a highly advanced disability law in the Middle East region and has since been employed as a model in other countries that were working to develop their own laws on disability (Damaj, 2008). Damaj (2008) argued that this Law has attracted praise for its pioneering approach that clearly and strongly deals with issues of discrimination towards persons with disabilities (PwDs). The Law consists of 102 articles divided into 10 parts, addressing issues for PwDs on health and rehabilitation services, accessibility, transportation, housing, education, employment, social benefits, and tax payment, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Contents of Law 220/2000 (Lebanese Law 220, 2000)

Part Number	Part Title	Number of Articles	Articles Range
1	Terms, Definitions, Classification, and the Personal Disability Card (PDC)	5	1-5
2	The National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA)	21	6-26
3	PwDs' Rights to Health and Rehabilitation Services	6	27-32
4	PwDs' Right to an Enabling Environment	11	33-43
5	PwDs' Right to Commuting, Parking, and a Driving License	11	44-54
6	PwDs' Right to Housing	4	55-58
7	PwDs' Right to Education and Sports	9	59-67
8	PwDs' Right to Work, Employment, and Social Benefits	15	68-82
9	Miscellaneous Tax Provisions for PwDs	12	83-94
10	Miscellaneous and Closing Provisions	8	95-102

In order for PwDs to enjoy the rights, privileges, and benefits afforded by the articles of the Law, they first have to acquire a Personal Disability Card (PDC) (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). The PDC is an official document that can then be used to prove a person's disability to the necessary authorities in order to receive services (Lebanese Law 220, 2000).

Part seven on the right to education and sports for PwDs is comprised of nine articles (Articles 59-67). Both Articles 59 and 60 clearly recognize the right to IE for PwDs in general education classrooms in both public and private Lebanese schools. Article 59 sets out the scope of the right to education for PwDs, including both children and adults, by guaranteeing them equal access opportunities to all educational institutions of any kind, within both mainstream and special education, if that may be required (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). Article 60 reaffirms the right of PwDs to join an educational institution of their choice whether in the public or private sector, regardless of their disability type or level (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). It also explains the process that PwDs need to follow in order to apply for exemption from an institution's standard academic requirements for enrollment (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). Under the Law, a committee reviews exemption applications, and must take into consideration the applicant's disability and the specific academic requirements from which they are seeking exemption (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). The committee also takes into consideration the availability of educational adaptations offered for PwDs to help them without need for formal exemption (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). Article 61 clarifies the process and scope of coverage of educational expenses, including educational, social, sports, and medical aids, for PwDs attending special education institutions or vocational training centers (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). Article 62 emphasizes the right of PwDs to sit official exams under appropriate conditions and with proper accommodations where necessary (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). Article 63 clarifies the process for the establishment of a joint committee referred to as the "Committee on the Education of PwDs and People with Special Needs" (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). This committee is responsible for the development and implementation of educational policies and programs for PwDs. Article 64 raises awareness on the rights of PwDs within the national curriculum, particularly in the area of civic education (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). Article 65 calls for the preparation of specialized educators to help in the rehabilitation of PwDs in mainstream and special schools, and for conducting training sessions for all staff working with students with SEND (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). Article 66 stresses the right of PwDs to create sport teams and to participate in sports competitions (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). Finally, Article 67 established a joint committee called the "Specialized Committee on PwDs Sport" responsible for all issues related to sports activities for students with SEND (Lebanese Law 220, 2000).

3. Implementation of The Law Regarding IE

Successful implementation of any law requires a significant level of responsibility, solid commitment, and meaningful participation of all actors, partners, and relevant stakeholders. The journey to promoting IE and implementing Law 220/2000 in Lebanon has been very slow and efforts exerted by the government to achieve its goals have not risen to all stakeholders' expectations, particularly that of NGOs and the parents of students with SEND. Almost all articles related to the education of students with SEND in the Law are still awaiting implementation (Kabbara, 2013; Koplewicz et al., 2018). Moreover, the Law's articles on reasonable accommodations for students with SEND have still to be implemented by both MEHE and MoSA (Koplewicz et al., 2018).

However, it may be said that the state of implementation of Law 220/2000 in the private educational sector is far better than in the public sector, where challenges are present at many levels within the Lebanese public education system. This is clearly reflected when the number of students with SEND enrolled in private schools is compared to that of public schools. The Center for Educational Research and Development [CERD] (2022b) noted that the total number of students enrolled in Lebanese schools for the 2021-2022 scholastic year amounted to 1.07 million students. The CERD (2022b) added that 9,104 students of these 1.07 million were identified as having SEND. Those students were distributed between the public and private sectors as follows: 1,255 students enrolled in public schools, which are largely unready and incapable of accommodating those

students; 7,329 students enrolled in private fee-paying schools, which generally have a better level of equipment and follow-up; 326 students enrolled in no-fee private schools; and 194 students registered in the United Nations Works and Relief Agency (UNRWA) schools for Palestine refugee students (CERD, 2022b). These figures clearly confirm the renowned pioneering initiative and superiority of the private educational sector in Lebanon in implementing the IE agenda over the country's public educational sector.

Under Article 63 of Law 220/2000, a Council of Ministers was required to establish a "Committee on the Education of PwDs and People with Special Needs" with responsibility for the development and implementation of educational policies and programs for PwDs. However, this committee was not established until 4 years later (Lebanese Decree No. 11853, 2004) which exemplifies the slow progress made in implementing Law 220/2000. In this regard, Koplewicz et al. (2018) highlighted that the "Committee on the Education of PwDs and People with Special Needs" has not produced any work to support the inclusion of students with SEND. They added that the last meeting conducted by the Committee for its members was in 2008, according to an official from MoSA.

The MEHE, in coordination with the CERD and in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Lebanon, launched an "Inclusive School Program" in 30 public schools across Lebanon in 2018 (MEHE, 2023; UNICEF Lebanon, 2018). The aim of this pilot program was to increase access for students with SEND to public schools and to respond to their diverse needs within the mainstream classes of these public schools (MEHE, 2023; UNICEF Lebanon, 2018). In order to achieve that aim, MEHE rehabilitated the buildings and infrastructure of those schools, provided training for teachers, conducted awareness sessions among parents of students with SEND, provided educational resources and tools for those inclusive schools, and established five mobile teams of specialists, including speech therapists, psychologists, and psychomotor therapists, to support the 30 participant schools deliver specialized support for students with SEND (MEHE, 2023; UNICEF Lebanon, 2018). According to the CERD (2022b), the total number of schools in Lebanon for the school year 2021-2022 was 2,782 across all educational grades (K-12). These schools were distributed between the public and private educational sectors as follows: 1,232 public schools, 1,152 private no-fee schools, 333 private fee-paying schools, and 65 UNRWA schools (CERD, 2022b). However, the number of inclusive public schools across Lebanon today amounts to just 110 (MEHE, 2023), which constitutes only 9% of the total number of public schools in the country. These 110 public schools are clearly inadequate to accommodate all students with SEND across Lebanon, especially with the huge move seen of students from private schools to public schools amid the ongoing economic and financial crises that have affected Lebanon since 2019. In this regard, the UN estimate that, from 2019 to 2021, between 100,000 and 120,000 students moved from Lebanon's private schools to its public schools, as a result of financial constraints hindering families' ability to pay for the continuance of their children's private education (Human Rights Watch, 2021). These numbers are expected to rise for the school year 2023-2024 as most private schools across Lebanon have substantially increased their tuition fees and converted them largely to US Dollars rather than the Lebanese pound due to a substantial weakening of the local currency's exchange rate. Shuayb and Doueiry (2023) pointed out that some families prioritized educating their children without SEND over their children with SEND during the current crises.

The MEHE (2023), in collaboration with the CERD and with support from UNICEF, developed a national IE policy to provide a national framework for the implementation of IE in Lebanon. The development of the national IE policy was part of program 1.3 of Lebanon's 2021-2025 general education plan which aims to enhance school diversity and inclusion, and to eliminate obstacles to the participation and learning for all students (MEHE, 2021). The national IE policy took into consideration lessons learned from the pilot IE project launched in 2018 and the established international best practices in IE (MEHE, 2023). In line with this, the CERD is currently working to

develop new inclusive curricula that meets the diverse learning needs of all students, including those with SEND, under strategic goal three of the policy (MEHE, 2023) 25 years after the development of the current national curricula (CERD, 2022a). The development of inclusive curricula formed part of priority area five (curricula reform, learning assessments) of Lebanon's 2021-2025 general education plan (MEHE, 2021), with the aim to develop inclusive and effective curricula to equip Lebanon's students with 21st century skills following the development of an endorsed reformed national curriculum framework (MEHE, 2021). The Lebanese National Framework for Pre-University General Education Curriculum was developed in response to national and international educational, social, economic, technological, and environmental developments, including the adoption of the IE agenda (CERD, 2022a). This framework provides a roadmap for the development of new inclusive current curricula meeting the unique learning styles and needs of every student (CERD, 2022a). According to Lebanese Decree No. 10227 (1997), national curricula should be continuously and periodically reviewed for improvement; however, in reality this has not happened over the past 25 years. The belated development of a national IE policy and the National Framework for Pre-University General Education Curriculum by more than two decades reflects the Lebanese government's halfhearted commitment to implementing Law 220/2000.

The MEHE (2019, as cited in MEHE, 2023), in its Decision No. 12, replaced the term "disabled people" with "people with special needs" throughout all official documentation, and assigned the third of December, every year, as the "National Day for Inclusion of Children with Special Needs." Moreover, according to Lebanese Decree No. 9138 (2022, as cited in MEHE, 2023), all necessary exemptions/adaptations are to be provided on an individual basis for students with SEND in grades seven, eight, nine, and 12 while taking school and official exams.

As part of program 2.2 of the Lebanon's 2021-2025 general education plan (MEHE, 2021), national education systems should provide high quality, equitable, and inclusive early childhood education (ECE) within mainstream ECE learning environments for all children. However, the implementation of educational inclusion at Lebanese educational institutions still faces many barriers. El Ahmad (2023), in his scoping review of empirical literature on the educational inclusion of students with SEND published between 1999 and 2023, identified two types of barriers to IE in Lebanon; internal barriers and external barriers. El Ahmad (2023) pointed out that the internal barriers to IE comprise the inaccessibility of schools (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Wehbi, 2007), inappropriateness of educational curricula and programs (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Wehbi, 2007), limited availability of experienced support personnel (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Daoud, 2016; Khochen & Radford, 2012; Wehbi, 2006, 2007); insufficient teacher preparation and professional development (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Kayal, 2014; Khochen, 2017; Khochen & Radford, 2012; Kobrossy, 2019; Wehbi, 2007), teachers and students' negative perceptions and attitudes towards educational inclusion (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Khochen & Radford, 2012), poor resources (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Khochen & Radford, 2012), absence of guidance for teachers (Kayal, 2014), large class sizes (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022), fragmented approach to education (Khochen, 2017), students' poor awareness on IE (Kayal, 2014; Wehbi, 2007), absence of a commonly shared vision for schooling (Kobrossy, 2019), inflexible and discriminatory education policy frameworks (McBride et al., 1999; Wehbi, 2007), lack of funding (Daoud, 2016; Khochen & Radford, 2012), personal health concerns of students with SEND (Wehbi, 2007), and inappropriate and troublesome behavior of students with SEND (Kayal, 2014). El Ahmad (2023) listed the external barriers to IE as parents' socioeconomic hardship (Wehbi, 2007), transportation difficulties (Wehbi, 2007), pressures of family (Wehbi, 2007), parents' limited knowledge and understanding of IE (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Kayal, 2014; Wehbi, 2006, 2007), parents' limited information reach (Khochen, 2017), community leaders and parents' negative attitudes (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Khochen & Radford, 2012; Wehbi, 2007), and lack of communication, coordination, and

collaboration between the local community and parents on one side, and schools on the other (El Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022; Kayal, 2014).

4. Critical Evaluation of The Law

On the one hand, Law 220/2000 can be said to have certain strengths. First, Koplewicz et al. (2018) described Law 220/2000 as comprehensive and aspiring, since it covers a wide range of topics and issues that concern students with SEND in its seventh part, such as enrollment in educational institutions, coverage of educational expenses, adaptations for and exemption from official exams, as well as addressing sports activities for students with SEND. Second, Damaj (2008) emphasized that Law 220/2000 adopted a rights-based approach to issues of disability. Moreover, the term “rights” appears in the title of parts three through eight of the Law. Additionally, Law 220/2000 provides a new social conceptualization of disability that aligns with the social model of disability rather than the traditional medical model (Damaj, 2008). Damaj (2008) added that Law 220/2000 promotes the rights of students with SEND rather than their need for care and rehabilitation services. Finally, Law 220/2000 includes an awareness of the essential policy concepts on disability, including prevention and rehabilitation (Damaj, 2008).

On the other hand, Law 220/2000 also presents certain weaknesses. First, it has no decrees or mechanisms to facilitate or enforce its implementation in educational institutions (Combaz, 2018; Damaj, 2014; Humanity & Inclusion, 2022; Loutfy, 2019). Second, the definition of PwDs in Article 2 reflects the outdated medical model for understanding disability since it highlights the impairments of PwDs rather than how these impairments interact with environmental barriers (Combaz, 2018; Humanity & Inclusion, 2022). As such, this definition is inconsistent with international human rights standards and instruments (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2016). Third, Humanity and Inclusion (2022) added that the Law does not include services such as social inclusion, although it guarantees a few rights. Fourth, the Law still maintains the segregated educational model in special schools (Koplewicz et al., 2018; Loutfy, 2019), which contradicts the international agenda for IE. Fifth, Damaj (2008) argued that a needs-based disability perspective is reflected or understood from the subtext of the larger part of the Law articles. For instance, Article 61 guarantees coverage of fees for children registered and placed in specialized institutions (Damaj, 2008). This promotes segregation and exclusion which contradicts Articles 59 and 60 calling for the concept of IE (Damaj, 2008). Article 62 ensures proper accommodations for students with SEND when sitting official exams (Lebanese Law 220, 2000). However, the MEHE interpreted Article 62 as the establishment of segregated centers for official exams within specialized institutions for students with SEND (Damaj, 2008). Sixth, Damaj (2008) and Loutfy (2019) criticized that only PwDs with a PDC would benefit from the rights highlighted in Law 220/2000, as reflected in Article 4. Nevertheless, Damaj (2008) concluded that a huge under-registration exists for the PDC, leading to disability issues being misrepresented and a markedly restricted outreach of privileges and benefits to the holders of such rights. Moreover, Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon (2023) stated that around 400,000 PwDs hold a PDC issued by the MoSA, out of a total of 900,000 PwDs (based on an estimate by Combaz, 2018). In line with this, Loutfy (2019) indicated that the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (LPHU) considers the PDC to be an implicit discrimination against PwDs. Seventh, the executive responsibility for Law 220/2000 articles lays is assigned to the MoSA, despite that they are extended to a number of different ministries (Damaj, 2008). Assigning that responsibility to the MoSA limited the role of the NCDA and hindered the effective engagement of concerned government bodies (Damaj, 2008). Such responsibility assignment identified Law 220/2000 and issues related to disability and PwDs as part of the MoSA’s responsibilities rather than transforming the perception among stakeholders to recognize and affirm that PwDs have rights within the other ministries as well (Damaj, 2008). Damaj (2008) added that because the NCDA is affiliated with the MoSA, it is unable to act as a watchdog to breaches of PwDs’ rights, as

stated by Law 220/2000. Eventually, it deprived PwDs from receiving official and proper advocacy representation by the formerly existing disability movement (Damaj, 2008). The establishment of the NCDA weakened the impact of the disability movement on government affairs related to disability since it has not remained the main voice of PwDs (Damaj, 2008). In addition, Saqr (1999, as cited in Damaj, 2008) criticized the NCDA's failure to represent key partners in implementing Law 220/2000, such as parents' organizations, schools, and others. Moreover, the structure of the NCDA limited or excluded part of the PwDs population, such as children with SEND, and gave more voice for representatives of social institutions (Damaj, 2008; Loutfy, 2019). Eighth, Law 220/2000 does not include suggestions for campaigns or programs to raise awareness about disability within Lebanese society at large (Damaj, 2008). It also does not contain any conditions for adequately making the Law itself widely known among the public (Damaj, 2008). Finally, Law 220/2000 neglects strategies or protocols for early screening, identification, and intervention which may deprive children with SEND from opportunities for rehabilitation and self-empowerment (Damaj, 2008). This neglect may be attributed to the focus of Law 220/2000 and research on disability in Lebanon on adult PwDs (Damaj, 2008).

5. Future Directions for Improvement of The Law and Its Implementation

Due to obstacles within Law 220/2000 (Loutfy, 2019), there is a need for carrying out legal changes to the Law in order to promote disability inclusion in Lebanon. The following are some future directions where improvements could be made to the Law and its implementation.

1. Development of decrees or mechanisms to facilitate and enforce Law 220 within educational institutions.
2. Provide an updated definition for PwDs that is consistent with international human rights standards and instruments, taking into consideration how impairments interact with attitudinal, environmental, and societal barriers.
3. Include "social inclusion" among the services and support provided for children with SEND.
4. Replace the segregated educational model in special schools with the adoption of a fully-inclusive schooling model.
5. Rewrite the sub-text of the larger part of the Law articles so that the needs-based disability perspective is not reflected or understood by disability stakeholders.
6. Allow all PwDs to benefit from the rights and privileges of the Law using the national ID card only, and not the PDC.
7. Assign executive responsibility for Law 220 articles related to education to the MEHE, not the MoSA.
8. Give more voice for children with SEND and their parents as key partners in the implementation of Law 220.
9. Include suggestions for campaigns or programs that aim to raise awareness on disability and Law 220 that address Lebanese society at large.
10. Add measures for early disability identification and intervention to the Law.

6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this critical analysis has provided significant insight into the state of Law 220/2000's implementation regarding educational inclusion, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, and directions for improvement of the Law and its implementation, the study's reliance on non-empirical evidence weakens the certainty of its findings and conclusions. Hence, further research backed up with empirical data is needed in order to fully validate the claims revealed in the current study.

7. Conclusion

Law 220/2000 titled “Law on the Rights of People with Disabilities” is a legal document passed by the Lebanese parliament in May 2000 that addresses issues for PwDs on health and rehabilitation services, accessibility, transportation, housing, education, employment, social benefits, and tax payment. In its Articles 59 and 60, Law 220/2000 emphasizes that students with SEND have the right to receive education in mainstream learning environments at public and private schools. Nevertheless, the Law has been poorly implemented in schools, with demonstrably better implementation outcomes in Lebanon’s private schools compared to public schools, since no decrees or mechanisms were developed to enforce the implementation of Law 220/2000. Despite certain weaknesses that have limited the Law’s implementation and impact on students with SEND and their inclusion, it can be said that Law 220/2000 has paved the way for IE in Lebanon.

Declarations

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