

# Special Education vs. Speech and Language Pathology Services in the Arab World: Mixing Apples with Oranges or Intending to Put them together!

**Ahmed Alduais**

Institute of International and Comparative Education Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, P.R.China

**Corresponding author:** Ahmed Alduais

✉ ibnalduais@gmail.com

Institute of International and Comparative Education Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University, No. 19 Xijiekou Wai St., 100875, Beijing, P.R.China.

**Tel:** +86 132 600 80 166

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## Introduction

Speech-language pathology (SLP) services are distinguished from special educational (SE) services, albeit the integration between them is an unavoidable. Theoretically and practically, the distinction between these two fields/services is like that between apples and oranges. Given this, in the over majority of the Arab World these two types of disorders are still being confused and mixed to the extent that apples and oranges are put together! The definitions of the concepts inclusion, special education and speech-language pathology seem to be dependent (i.e. based on western educational systems) without considering the contextual differences between the West and the East. I intend to present this educational conflict in the Arab world—presenting SLP vs. SE services in terms of theory, policy and practise.

## Editorial

Basically, the Arab World (AW) consists of 22 countries spreading over the Arabian Peninsula, the Eastern Mediterranean (West Asia) and North Africa. Arab League (AL) that was established in 1945 includes also the 22 Arabian countries. These 22 countries in addition to some other countries (i.e. Cyprus, Iran, Israel and Turkey) are referred to as the Middle East countries. Arabic is the official language in the AW with some other dialects and/or languages that are used in some countries (e.g. Amazigh in Morocco, Swahili in Yemen, etc.). Islam is also the major religion in generally all the countries with other religions in some countries like Christianity in Egypt and Lebanon, and Jewish in Yemen, etc.

The AW includes one of the largest economies in the world GDP, namely, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It also includes some of the richest countries in the world (e.g. Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Libya, etc.). Given this, the AW is divided economically into three categories: oil-states (high income countries), non-oil states (middle income countries) and minor-oil states (low income countries). While the high income countries depend on oil production, both minor and non-oil states depend on human capital—migrating to the oil states [1].

In theory, both SE and SLP concepts are defined in the AW using

the western conceptualisation. This conceptualisation includes the provision methods that include inclusion, mainstreaming, segregation and exclusion. The integration yet the confusion among the SE models plays a major role in increasing the level of conflict.

In detail, in the Traditional Model, the explanation is due to the misunderstanding of religion, socially established habits and traditions—children with special educational needs and/or speech and language impairments are interpreted as natural events that have been decided by God and cannot be modified. In comparison, in the Medical Model, the interpretation is due to poverty and lack of medical means in the fields, the children with such kinds of needs— are ignored and left to face their miserable destinies. In contrast, according to the Remedial Model, the situation is more or less similar to that in the Medical Model— adding the an unaffordable high cost for such services for poor families especially from low income countries. In the case of the Social Model, persons with special educational needs and/or speech language impairments are over-humanized—resulting into building a dependent community. As for the Interface Model, it is apparently not available in the AW. Last but not the least, the Biopsychosocial Model which seems to be implemented in a few places of the AW (e.g. Dubai and Qatar—immensely rich countries). Besides, policy documents seem to lack any clear cut

definitions or details about these issues, even when these issues are mentioned in a few countries, only special educational needs SEN will be roughly mentioned.

Having said that, if the description of education in the Middle East states in general and in the AW in particular is gender-biased, class-biased and area-biased, then the status of SLP and SE would be theoretically worse. Furthermore, if the hinders of education in such states are the continuous social, political and economic changes, then the hinders of first mixing between SLP and SE services, then insignificant progress on such areas—would be assumingly the failure to achieve any sustainable or significant level of education for the regular classes. These hinders are similar to those observed in the Asian region [2] in general where the gap can be observed among the variable educational achievements impacted by the economic growth (e.g. Japan, Singapore, South Korea, China [including Hong Kong and Taiwan], Malaysia, Indonesia and India.

Furthermore the transition and transformation processes in the education sector in the AW is a failure by itself. In other words, since these steps are pushed and implemented by external organizations (e.g. UNESCO), then there is a great possibility that they might not be exactly the most appropriate ones to improve the education in such states. Given this, the status of both SLP and SE would be undoubtedly worse. Differently put, since

[inclusion] has become the keyword of issued policies in such states—having the intention to satisfy the external organisations to show that they are respecting human rights, then this failure will continue. At the end, in the Arab states, there is neither an exemplary model of basic education, higher education, nor a model of SLP and SE services. The noticeable efforts in a few places (e.g. Qatar, Dubai) should never be ignored, though.

Given that the highest organization representing the AW are not playing a major role at the educational level. And considering that the Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council has been always looked upon highly with great expectations that have really fallen down. The policy that was issued during the regional conference in 2000 to provide educational services to all citizens including social, cognitive and psycho-social abilities does not exist in the real world after passing about 17 years. Has it been implemented, then this would be very limited to even some areas of the oil-states.

To all intents and purposes, since regular education is not really leading people to [live fully and deeply], then living fully and deeply [3] for those who need special education—would be the miracle that would lead policy makers in the AW to separate apples and oranges or decide to put them together—wisely and practically!

## References

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