

🌀 **Name of the study:** Educational perceptions of school-principles, supervisors, and educational-leaders in regard of inclusion of adults with intellectual disability in educational programs as workers

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## Abstract

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The inclusion and integration of students with special needs in the education system is a complex process that reflects the social mindset of various parties within society. This changing mindset is influenced by the social and cultural processes taking place in any society, and hence the differences in implementation of inclusion in different countries. Moreover, the inclusion of people with special needs changes during their lifetime, from when they are pupils at school to when they are adults in society. Methods for implementing inclusion are diverse and change according to disability type and age. In Israel, for example, during their inclusion in mainstream education, children with special needs are accompanied by many professionals who focus on teaching and learning in various domains, together with encouraging their social integration in accordance with the amended Special Education Law of 2018. However, when it comes to integrating into society as adults with special needs, they encounter many kinds of difficulties that stem mainly from the fact that in contrast to their days in the school system, integration into society is not institutionalized and is not obvious to all parties concerned. While the various professionals working with them are familiar with the changes they face and do everything they can to integrate them, there are other members of society who are party to this process and who have different social views about the inclusion of people with special needs, and very often they do not feel any ethical commitment to be involve in it. Social integration is even more complex when it comes to adults with Intellectual Development Delay (IDD) who sometimes attended school in closed institutions for special education until the age of 21 and thus hardly experienced social integration (Lifshitz, 2020). Furthermore, the social stigmas regarding adults with IDD cause many people to refrain from including them in society in general and in employment in particular (Petner-Arrey et al. 2015).

The integration of adults with special needs into employment and into society has recently gained momentum, in light of certain studies highlighting the contribution of employment to their improved quality of life, as expressed mainly in their independence, moral social ties and sense of efficacy (Reiter, 2008). Consequently, certain countries, including Israel, began to develop employment training programs for adults with special needs in general and for those with IDD in particular (Trembath et al., 2010). And yet, the development of these training programs is based on the perspective of the integrating society as to where the inclusion will be more effective and what is better suited to an adult with IDD. This approach is contrary to the humanistic approach (Reiter, 2008) according to which one should elicit from the adults themselves what their goals are and where they would prefer to work, and only after that to check which training program best suits them.

According to the Law of Special Education and the Law of Inclusion and Integration, children diagnosed with IDD attend educational frameworks in which they receive the necessary scholastic support they need alongside integration into mainstream settings as much as possible. Despite the clear message that they and their classmates are given – that people with special needs should be integrated into society, when they finish their schooling at the age of 21, their contact with the education system comes to an end. While the Ministry of Welfare is responsible for their employment training in various settings, they are not openly offered any option to become part of the education system they attended for so many years. Moreover, even though Israel's 1988 Law of Equal Rights for people with disabilities permits people with IDD to work in the education system if they wish, it is rare that any of them do so. In light of the fact that the reasons for the absence of adults with IDD from the education system are not known for sure, the main aim of this preliminary research was to examine the issue from the perspective of inclusion leaders in Israel's education system. The research aims focused on understanding the attitudes and perceptions of the participants regarding the inclusion of adults with IDD as staff members in schools and kindergartens, alongside the understanding the needs of the educators, the decision makers and inclusion policy leaders in this context. This is, in our opinion, a necessary precursor to asking adults with IDD about their desire to work in the education system.

Data collection in this research was conducted through individual in-depth semi-structured interviews in which the participants were a total of 75 inclusion policy leaders in Israel, of whom 15 are principals, 15 principals in training, 15 social workers accompanying adults with IDD, 15 directors of NPOs or of hostels for adults with IDD, and 15 heads of local authority education departments. The meticulous content analysis conducted by two separate researchers yielded the following eight categories providing information about the ways in which one might promote the inclusion of adults with IDD in the education system: the interviewees' familiarity with

children or adults with IDD; perceptions of the goals of inclusion of students with IDD in Israel's education system; participants' attitudes toward the inclusion of adults with IDD in the education system; understanding the advantages of including adults with IDD in the education system; understanding the disadvantages of including adults with IDD in the education system; positions within the education system in which adults with IDD can be included; the conditions needed for the inclusion of adults with IDD in the education system; guiding principles for the inclusion of adults with IDD in the education system.

As mentioned above, the main aim of this study was to learn about the perceptions of leaders of inclusion policy in education regarding inclusion of adults with IDD in the system in order to further promote this process in the future. From the responses of all the participants in this study, it emerges that despite their knowledge of Israel's laws on inclusion, accessibility, and equal rights for people with disabilities, it never occurred to them that it might be possible to include adults with IDD in the education system. However, following the interviews, they expressed agreement that such inclusion processes are necessary in a humanistic society, but that they must be backed up with suitable budgets and professional accompaniment both of the adults with IDD and of the community of the including schools.

## Synopsis

Integrating adults with special needs into society in general and into the education system in particular is a cultural and social challenge. In order for this challenge to be successfully met, we must fully recognize the integrators' attitudes so as to adapt what is required in the integrating educational setting. While the integration of adults with learning, sensory or motor disabilities into the education system has been studied over the years and even gradually implemented, this is not the case for adults with Intellectual developmental disability (IDD). In this study, for the first time, 75 leading figures in the field of education and integration in Israeli society were asked about the possibilities of integrating such adults into the education system. Most of the participants presented positive attitude toward the possibility of including adults with IDD in the educational system. They also contributed to the understanding of the complexity of integrating adults with IDD, understanding the needs of the integrating system and of the adults being integrated, alongside proposals for possible solutions for implementation.

## Keywords

Intellectual Developmental Disability, Inclusion, Intervention programs, School principals, Integration leaders, Social workers

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