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## Development of a Local Model of Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs in the Exceptional Education Organization

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Inclusive education plays an important role in improving the situation of students with special needs. The present study was conducted with the purpose of developing a local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization due to the lack of a local model in this field.

**Methodology:** This study was applied in terms of purpose and qualitative in terms of execution method. The research community was professors and experts in educational management and psychology of exceptional children in the field of inclusive education in Tehran in 2020-21, and 10 people were selected as a sample using the purposeful sampling method according to the principle of theoretical saturation. The tool of the present study was a semi-structured interview, which its validity was confirmed by the opinion of experts and its reliability was calculated by the coefficient of agreement between two coders at 0.85. TO analyze data, the method of coding and thematic analysis was used in MAXQDA version 20 software

**Findings:** The findings indicated that the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs had 40 indicators, 16 components and 7 categories; so that the categories included the development of cultural capital, development of human resources, communication between family and school, preparation of educational infrastructure, response to educational needs, continuous monitoring and follow-up, and continuous interaction with education. Finally, the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs was designed and developed in the exceptional education organization.

**Conclusion:** The results of this research can be used by specialists and planners of exceptional education. Through planning to improve the components and categories identified in the current research, they can provide the basis for improving inclusive education for students with special needs in exceptional education organizations.

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## 1. Introduction

The pioneers of exceptional education in the past decades believed that education in special schools and classes is appropriate to the abilities and needs of children and the discussion of segregation is necessary for their education. They believed that the concentration of exceptional children in one place, the presence of exceptional education teachers and special facilities and equipment in one environment causes to facilitate the provision of services, and in these conditions, and in this situation, it is better to enable the development of exceptional children's skills, but the recently, they believes that separating the education of exceptional children is not correct and exceptional children should be placed in the mainstream of the education system (Tani, Xu & Zhi, 2021). In the last few decades, the special education system has been criticized and challenged by the inclusive education system, and this method emphasizes concepts such as attention to human rights, education for all, creating equal opportunities, social acceptance of the citizens of a society, and facilitating socialization (Fernandez, 2017).

One of the topics that is always discussed is the difference in perspective of education on the topic of inclusive education, which in this way by placing students with disabilities in integrated classes, has caused many discussions and controversies (Kuyini, Desai & Sharma, 2020). According to the underlying philosophy of inclusive education, all children should be enrolled in school alongside their peers in order to benefit and flourish to their fullest potential, where they would have enrolled if they did not have a disability (Love & Horn, 2021). Inclusive education is a special view and approach to learning, in which it demands the acceptance of all students as members of a learning group regardless of their individual differences, and emphasizes their right to use optimal, effective education appropriate to their potential alongside their peers (Lindsay, 2018). Therefore, education is the natural right of all children, and inclusive education aims to ensure that all children achieve an appropriate and effective education in society (Robiyansah & Mudjito, 2020). Inclusive education should follow a process based on which the educational system, school and teacher are changed, so that they can educate all normal and special needs children under one roof and alongside their normal peers (Butakor, Ampadu & Suleiman, 2020). Inclusive education aims to make children with disabilities an integral part of normal education and this work should be conducted in such a way that all members of the inclusive environment benefit from it. This method gives all children with disabilities the opportunity to participate in classroom and extracurricular activities and to learn and communicate with their peers (Duncan, Punch & Croce, 2021).

The most important laws approved on inclusive education are: 1) every child has a fundamental right to education and should be given the necessary opportunity to reach and maintain an acceptable level of learning. 2) Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. 3). Educational systems and educational programs should be designed to meet a wide variety of these characteristics and needs. 4) People who need special education should have access to schools and institutions to adapt them to child-centered education and training and their educational programs should be established on this basis. 5) Schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of fighting against discriminatory attitudes, creating pleasant communities, establishing an inclusive community and providing everyone to access education, as well as providing effective education for most children, improving their efficiency and ability, and also they are the most cost-effective educational system (Farahbod, 2003).

Inclusive education is fundamentally different from separate or special education, and in such a structure, decisions can often be called school-based decision-making, in which decisions are made by involving all the people in the school, including the principal, assistants, teachers, students, parents, professionals and education stakeholders about policies, activities, services and educational programs at the school level (Asongu, Nnanna & Acha-Anyi, 2020). The foundations of special and inclusive education are different. Special education believes that some students can be considered exceptional due to the existence of individual differences; on the other hand, inclusive education believes that even though people have different characteristics, they should be accepted in social institutions with each characteristic. In special

education, the emphasis is on separating students with physical and mental problems in special schools, but the flexibility of schools according to the needs of the audience is emphasized in inclusive education. Special education believes that it is better for students with similar problems to be educated together so that an expert, interested and capable teacher can be chosen for them, on the other hand, inclusive education believes that a disability should not overshadow other people's abilities and cause ignore them and all students should learn life skills together and interact each other (Habibi & Davoudi, 2020). Inclusive education system is a kind of dynamic education system and all involved including teachers have an important and fundamental role. Therefore, a program should be developed that keeps teachers constantly dynamic, and it is necessary to provide them with suitable educational and professional programs in order to maintain and continue it (Al-Shammari, 2021).

Surveys indicate that few researches have been conducted about inclusive education, and the results of the most important researches in this field are presented below. Gholami (2021) conducted a research and concluded that the knowledge and information of the majority of normal school teachers were weak and inappropriate about special needs and inclusive education and their preparation for admission to the classroom. Habibi & Davoudi (2020) conducted a research on the evaluation of the effectiveness of integrated-inclusive education and concluded that the status of integrated education include creating equal educational opportunities, creating preparation for entering society, improving the quantitative and qualitative indicators of education and proper interaction with the teacher and peers were better than the assumed average. Page, Boyle, McKay & Mavropoulou (2019) concluded in a research that teachers have a negative attitude towards students with special needs who need special attention, and although the presence of teaching assistants or liaison teachers leads to improve the situation to some extent, it is important to create a correct understanding of disability to implement inclusive education as well as possible. Adib, Mir Mahmoud, Rafieyan, Rashidzade & Katmi (2018) concluded that the most important merits and benefits of inclusive education in schools with special needs include social benefits, individual and psychological benefits, and family benefits, and its most important disadvantages include the implementation defects of the inclusive education plan and psychological defects of the inclusive education plan, how to teach in the inclusive plan, including the method of education in the inclusive plan, and the educational goals of the inclusive plan and its foundations, including cultural and social foundations and facilities. Hemati Alamdarlou & Molaei Arpanahi (2018) concluded that peer support causes to develop social skills, increases interactions and social competences and has positive consequences such as reducing prejudices, understanding facts, accepting differences, increasing socialization and increasing positive interactions with each other for students with and without disabilities. Yada & Savolainen (2017) concluded that despite teachers' positive feelings towards students with special needs, many teachers have concerns about implementing inclusive education in their classrooms. Kabini Moghadam, Sayahi & Khalkhali (2009) in a research introduced the most important areas of inclusive education development, including the culturalization necessary for the implementation and development of inclusive education, the characteristics of human resources for the implementation and development of inclusive education, the scope of the implementation of the inclusive education plan, support for the implementation and development of inclusive education, intra-organizational opportunities and obstacles for the implementation and development of inclusive education plan, extra-organizational opportunities and obstacles for the implementation and development of inclusive education plan and the viewpoint of the executives about the inclusive education system. Alizadeh, Saeidi & Hoseinzadeh (2009) concluded that in-service training had a significant impact on the attitude of normal school teachers towards the inclusive education of hearing-impaired students and led improving their attitude.

About a century of separate education experience, in which people were grouped based on different characteristics such as the type of disability and were subjected to special education and separated from their peers without disabilities, could not meet many of the real needs of people (Adib et al, 2018). Unfortunately, the concept of inclusive education in Iran has not yet been developed, and not only most

teachers, but also researchers and thinkers in the field of education, learning and upbringing are alien to this concept, and in many cases, experts in various fields involved in education do not accept this educational method at all. While many foreign and even domestic research indicated its effectiveness (Kashi, Ghorbanzadeh & Shirvaniha, 2018). The importance of inclusive education is that today, education experts and organizations related to the rights of people with special disabilities believe that the only way to create a suitable way to educate children with special needs in the world is to integrate them into inclusive education systems. In addition, in order to have efficient, humane and ethical classes and schools, it is very important to put all students together and pay attention to their individual needs. The last thing about the importance and necessity of the current research is that little research has been conducted on inclusive education and no local model was found for it. As a result, the current research was conducted with the purpose of developing a local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization.

## 2. Methodology

This study was applied in terms of purpose and qualitative in terms of execution method. The research community was professors and experts in educational management and psychology of exceptional children in the field of inclusive education in Tehran in the educational year of 2020-21, and according to the principle of theoretical saturation, 10 people were selected as a sample using the purposeful sampling method. In principle, the theoretical saturation of sampling continues until the research reaches saturation in terms of information and the new samples cannot add new information to the previous information. In this research, saturation was reached after conducting an interview with the ninth person, but an interview was also conducted with the tenth person. In the purposeful sampling method, the samples are selected according to a series of predetermined criteria, which in the present study, the criteria for selecting people include the minimum educational rank of assistant professor, work experience of more than 10 years, educational field of educational management or psychology of exceptional children, having an article, book, research project or guided thesis and dissertation about inclusive education, willingness to participate in research and agree to record interviews while respecting ethical points.

To conduct this research, first the theoretical foundations of inclusive education were studied, and then, with the help of professors, questions were designed for interviewing with professors and experts. In the next step, samples were identified and selected according to the desired criteria, and then interviews were conducted with the samples, and this process continued until the current research reached saturation, i.e. ten interviews. It should be noted that after selecting the samples and before conducting the interviews, the importance and necessity of the research was explained to the samples and they were reassured about observing ethical points. In addition to participating in the research, their consent was also obtained about recording the interviews. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured and individual manner and the interviewees were free to answer the questions, but if they deviated from the framework of the question during the interview, the researcher guided them. After completing the interview with each of the interviewees, they were praised for accepting the effort and participating in the research.

The tool of the present study was a semi-structured interview with six main questions and a number of sub-questions and guides, which were used when needed. The questions were prepared with the help of professors and based on theoretical principles, and each interviewee was interviewed individually; in this way, the first question was stated by the researcher and then the interviewee was asked to answer the question freely, and then the second to sixth questions were asked according to the same process. It should be noted that during the interviews, the researcher, in addition to noting important and key content, recorded the entire interview process for review. The average duration of the interview with each person was between 40 and 55 minutes. The validity of the interviews was confirmed by the opinion

of experts and its reliability was calculated 0.85 by the agreement coefficient method between two coders.

The method of coding and thematic analysis was used in the MAXQDA software version 20 software to analyze the data after collecting with the help of a semi-structured interview.

### 3. Findings

The samples of this research were 10 professors and experts in educational management and psychology of exceptional children in the field of inclusive education. The results of the frequency and frequency percentage of demographic information of the interviewees for the design and formulation of the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization were reported in Table 1.

**Table1.** The results of the frequency and frequency percentage of demographic information of the interviewees for the design and formulation of the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization

Demographic characteristics	Sections	Frequency	Frequency percentage
gender	Male	8	80%
	Female	2	20%
University rank	Assistant Professor	3	30%
	Associate Professor	3	40%
	Professor	4	30%

As can be seen in table 1, most of the interviewees were male (80%) and had an educational rank of associate professor (40%). The results of open, central and selective coding for the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization are reported in table 2.

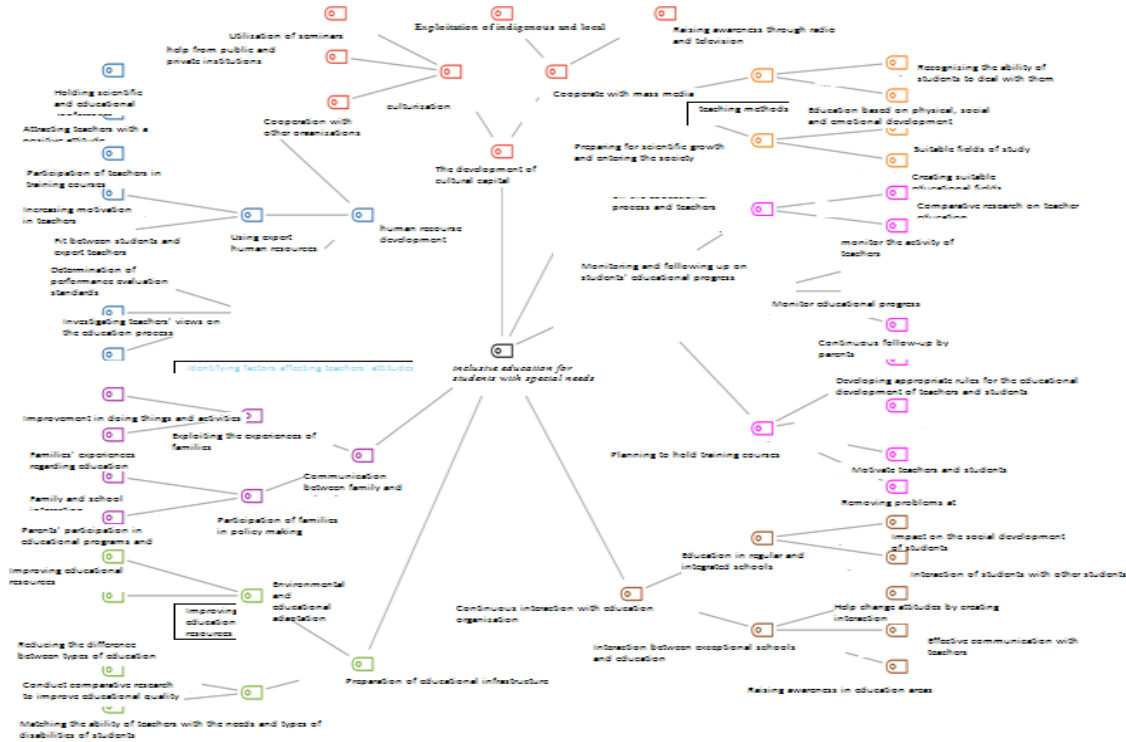
**Table2.** Results of open, central and selective coding for the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization

Row	Category	Component	Index	Frequency	
1	The development of cultural capital	Cooperate with mass media culturization	Raising awareness through radio and television	11	
2			Exploitation of indigenous and local media	14	
3			Utilization of seminars	1	
4			help from public and private institutions	3	
5			Cooperation with other organizations	4	
6	human development recourse	Training of teachers with special expertise	Holding scientific and educational conferences	6	
7			Attracting teachers with a positive attitude	7	
8			Participation of teachers in training courses	9	
9			Using expert human resources	Increasing motivation in teachers	11
10			Fit between students and expert teachers	13	
11			Evaluating teachers' educational performance	Determination of performance evaluation standards	15
12				Investigating teachers' views on the education process	5
13				Identifying factors affecting teachers' attitudes	4
14	Communication between family and school	Exploiting the experiences of families		Improvement in doing things and activities	2
15		Families' experiences regarding education	1		
16		Participation of families in policy	Family and school interaction	7	

17		making	Parents' participation in educational programs and evaluation	5
18			Improving educational resources	4
19	Preparation of educational infrastructure	Environmental and educational adaptation	Improving the physical space of schools	9
20			Reducing the difference between types of education	3
21		Infrastructural foundation and preparation of inclusive education	Conduct comparative research to improve educational quality	8
22			Matching the ability of teachers with the needs and types of disabilities of students	4
23	Responding to educational needs	teaching methods	Recognizing the ability of students to deal with them	2
24			Education based on physical, social and emotional development	6
25		Preparing for scientific growth and entering the society	Suitable fields of study	8
26			Creating suitable educational fields	9
27	Continuous monitoring and follow-up	Monitoring and follow-up on the educational process and teachers	Comparative research on teacher education	4
28			monitor the activity of teachers	2
29			Daily review or take the exam	1
30		Monitoring and following up on students' educational progress	Monitor educational progress	4
31			Continuous follow-up by parents	6
32		Planning to hold training courses	Adaptation of teaching and evaluation methods in different students	8
33			Developing appropriate rules for the educational development of teachers and students	9
34			Motivate teachers and students	11
35			Removing problems at schools	17
36	Continuous interaction with education organization	Education in regular and integrated schools	Impact on the social development of students	14
37			Interaction of students with other students	12
38		Interaction between exceptional schools and education	Help change attitudes by creating interaction	11
39			Effective communication with teachers	7
40			Raising awareness in education areas	5

As seen in Table 2, the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs had 40 indicators, 16 components and 7 categories; so that the categories include development of cultural capital (with five indicators and two components of cooperation with mass media and culturization), development of human resources (with eight indicators and three components of training teachers with special expertise, utilization of expert human resources and evaluation of teachers' educational performance), communication between family and school (with four indicators and two components of exploiting the experiences of families and participation of families in policy making), preparation of educational infrastructure (with five indicators and two components of environmental and educational adaptation and infrastructure foundation and preparation of inclusive education), responding to educational needs (with four indicators and two components of teaching methods and foundation for scientific growth and entering the society), continuous monitoring and follow-up (with nine indicators and three components of monitoring and following up on the educational process and teachers, monitoring and following up on the educational process of students and planning to hold training courses) and continuous interaction with education organization (with five indicators and two components of education in normal and integrated

schools and interaction between exceptional schools and education organization). According to the coding results, the design and formulation of the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization was reported in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Designing and formulating the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization

As can be seen in Figure 1, the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization was designed and formulated with 40 indicators, 16 components and 7 categories.

#### 4. Discussion

Inclusive education or inclusivity is a philosophy based on social justice thinking that favors equal access of all students to all educational opportunities regardless of individual differences. The primary and main responsibility of students with disabilities rests with the teachers of normal classes, therefore, education and rehabilitation specialists play an effective supporting role in their education program. Therefore, inclusivity is a fundamental ideology that aims to rebuild the education system to create equal opportunities for all children and students, regardless of individual differences that arise from ability, race, culture, and religion. Inclusive education plays an important role in improving the situation of students with special needs. Few researches have been designed and formulated about the model of inclusive education for students with special needs. Therefore, the current research was carried out with the purpose of developing a local model of inclusive education for students with special needs in an exceptional education organization.

The findings of the current research showed that the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs had 40 indicators, 16 components and 7 categories; so that the categories include the development of cultural capital (with two components of cooperation with the mass media and culturization), the development of human resources (with the three components of training teachers with special expertise, exploiting expert human resources and evaluating the educational performance of teachers), the relationship between family and school (with two components of exploiting the experiences of families and participation of families in policy-making), preparing educational infrastructure (with two

components of environmental and educational adaptation and infrastructure foundation and preparation for inclusive education), responding to educational needs (with two components of teaching methods and foundation for scientific growth and entering the society), continuous monitoring and follow-up (with three components of monitoring and follow-up on the educational process and teachers, monitoring and follow-up on the educational process of students and planning for holding training courses) and continuous interaction with education organization (with two components of education in normal and integrated schools and interaction between exceptional schools and education organization).

Although little research has been conducted on inclusive education and no research was found on the local model of inclusive education for students with special needs, but the results of the current research are in some ways aligned to the results of Gholami (2021), Habibi & Davoudi (2020), Page, et al (2019) ), Adib, et al (2018), Hemati Alamdarlou & Molaei Arpanahi (2018), Yada & Savolainen (2017), Kabini Moghadam et al (2009) and Alizadeh et al (2009). In interpreting and explaining these results about the category of cultural capital development with the two components of cooperation with mass media and culturization, it should be said that by using indicators such as raising awareness through programs on media, using local and indigenous media, using seminars, asking government and private institutions for help and cooperation with other organizations can improve the category of cultural capital and its components and provide the basis for the realization of inclusive education.

Another category was the development of human resources with the three components of training teachers with special expertise, exploiting expert human resources and evaluating the educational performance of teachers. In order to properly implement the aforementioned issues in the exceptional education organization, some solutions were used such as holding scientific and educational conferences, attracting teachers with a positive attitude, teachers' participation in educational courses, increasing the motivation of teachers, matching between students and expert teachers, determining performance evaluation standards, and checking teachers' point of view in the process of education and identification of factors affecting teachers' attitudes. Regarding the category of communication between family and school with the two components of exploiting the experiences of families and the participation of families in policy making, it can be said that several indicators must be used such as improvement in doing things and activities, experiences of families regarding education, interaction of family and school and participating parents in educational programs and evaluation in order to properly implement inclusive education for students with special needs.

Also, about the category of educational infrastructure preparation with the two components of environmental and educational adaptation and infrastructure foundation and preparation of inclusive education, it should be said that we can improve the category of preparing the educational infrastructures and its components and provide the context for the realization of inclusive education for students with special needs using indicators such as improving educational resources and facilities, improving the structure and physical space of schools, reducing the difference between the types of education used in schools, conducting comparative research to improve the quality of the educational system and match the ability of teachers with the needs and types of disabilities of students. Another category was responding to educational needs with the two components of teaching methods and creating a platform for scientific growth and entering the society.

It is possible to use solutions such as recognizing the ability of students, how to deal with them and knowing all their positive and negative characteristics, providing education based on physical, social and emotional development, creating appropriate fields of study and education to select them and create suitable educational fields in order to properly implement the mentioned matters in the exceptional education organization. Regarding the category of continuous monitoring and follow-up with three components of monitoring and follow-up on the educational process and teachers, monitoring and follow-up on the educational process of students and planning for holding educational courses, it is necessary to use some indicators such as comparative research on teacher education, monitoring of various educational



activities of teachers, daily review of students' performance and even weekly and monthly review programs of their performance, monitoring of students' educational progress, follow-up of various educational, research, moral, social, and disciplinary situations. etc. students on behalf of their parents, adapting teaching and evaluation methods for students with different characteristics, formulating appropriate rules for the educational growth of both teachers and students, creating motivation for both teachers and students and solving various educational and non-educational problems in schools benefited in order to properly implement inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization. In addition, about the category of continuous interaction with education organization with two components of education in normal and integrated schools and the interaction between exceptional schools and education organization, it should be said that the category of continuous interaction with education organization and its components can be improved using indicators such as the impact on the social development of students, the interaction of students with other students in the classroom and school environment and even in the neighborhood, helping to change the attitude through creating interaction between students, effective communication with teachers and justifying them, and raising awareness in the areas of education organization and positive and constructive interaction in this context, and provided the context for the realization of inclusive education for students with special needs in the exceptional education organization .

The current research is a qualitative research and has all the limitations of this research method. Therefore, it is suggested to design a questionnaire based on its categories, components and indicators and examine the status of inclusive education for students with special needs according to a local model. This research was conducted only on the professors and experts of educational management and psychology of exceptional children in the field of inclusive education in Tehran, and it is possible to obtain different results if the same research is conducted on professors and experts of other educational fields and even other cities. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct more research on the design and formulation of other local models for inclusive education in students with special needs.

The results of the current research indicated the achievement of 40 indicators, 16 components and 7 categories, including development of cultural capital, development of human resources, communication between family and school, preparation of educational infrastructure, response to educational needs, continuous monitoring and follow-up, and continuous interaction with education. Therefore, inclusive education for students with special needs, according to the identified categories and components, needs to be reviewed and re-politicized in order to expand equal opportunities and comprehensively provide educational and training justice. Since teachers are the most important factor in shaping educational activities and must respond to the diverse conditions and status of students with different abilities and cultures, therefore, they need to increase their awareness and improve their skills, for this purpose, it is necessary to plan to hold teacher's empowerment training courses.

Considering the different conditions of the students to achieve educational and training justice, it is necessary to manage and distribute the existing resources and facilities in a fair manner and according to the different conditions of the learners, and provide the context for the entry of students with special needs into the society. Another practical suggestion is to use all the elites, thinkers and experts on educational, cultural and breeding issues in the educational system due to the impact of the culture of participation and using their opinions in policy making for inclusive education. Since the educational system of Iran is centralized and the policies are made by a special group of experts and then announced to the educational organizations of other provinces, therefore it is suggested that an effective step must be taken in order to eliminate the deficiencies caused by macro-administrative and educational policies and to amend the current laws and regulations in the comprehensive education.

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