



Chapter 12

The Critical Role of Principals in Leading Effective Inclusive Schools

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ABSTRACT

School leaders have had a significantly increased impact on society since inclusive education was recognized as a need in the pedagogy sector. This study investigates the role of principals in promoting inclusivity and differentiating their leadership styles. The study highlights the inclusive behaviors of successful leaders that prepare them to lead effectively in special education schools. The results demonstrate that principals in inclusive schools have an inherent consciousness of inclusivity that enables them to create a culture of equality in the community. In their efforts to foster an inclusive vision, principals undertake and direct various school reform practices to build the capacity of school staff and create a work environment that facilitates collaboration for instructional modification and educational progress.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8504-0.ch012

INTRODUCTION

Principals are major players in operating and directing all administrative functions of schools, and they serve as ambassadors of the school within the community. They are expected to act as role models, promoting ethical standards and professional growth and creating a positive learning environment in the school (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019). However, in the context of inclusive schools, achieving inclusion requires collaborative efforts between school leaders, teachers, parents, and community organizations, working hand in hand at both the school and community level to support all learners (Alkaabi et al., 2022).

Principals play a vital role in forming an educational environment that offers learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs. Inclusive schools integrate children with special needs into general classrooms, which allows them to interact and socialize with other students as part of their general education. Inclusive schools have become increasingly common in the education sector as they provide equal opportunities for children with special needs to grow both academically and professionally (Whitaker, 2021).

As school leaders, principals are responsible for developing and supporting an inclusive culture that can improve students' outcomes and achievements. According to the Disabilities Education Act, it is essential for school administration to incorporate children with special needs into general education so that they can achieve the same mandated standards as their peers. The purpose of this project is to highlight the critical role of principals in leading inclusive schools. The study examines the practices that principals adopt to make a difference while leading inclusive schools. Since principals work as school leaders, their actions and accountability determine their capability and skill in running school activities (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020). However, running inclusive schools can be challenging, particularly in managing the unique needs of children with special needs in the general classroom setting.

In 2006, the UAE government launched the School for All inclusion program under Federal Law No. 29, which mandated that public and private schools provide students with disabilities and students of determination with equal educational opportunities (KHDA, 2019). The Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge has also established policies and legislation to promote the inclusion of students of determination in regular schools to facilitate their social and linguistic development from early childhood. However, the adoption of inclusive practices in the general school setting faces many significant challenges given the unique needs of students of determination. To address these challenges, inclusive schools in the UAE are integrating with other policies and agendas to promote equality among all people (U.ae., 2023).

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