

For Immediate Release



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International conference on inclusive education held at AUB

Research for Education Accessibility Challenges (REACH) is an international conference organized by Together for Inclusive Educational Systems (T.I.E.S), in partnership with the American University of Beirut (AUB) through its Office of Information Technology and the Education Department. The event was held on January 16 and 17, 2020, and focused on inclusive education as an opportunity and a challenge for educational systems.

The conference was opened with the Lebanese national anthem performed by the Lebanese School for the Blind and the Deaf, followed by a welcome note by Dr. Basma Frangieh, president and co-founder of T.I.E.S, and a keynote speech by Dr. Yousif Asfour, chief information officer at AUB.

“Making higher education available and accessible to everyone, without exception, is one of our overarching goals at AUB,” said Dr. Asfour. He added, “I hope that what you see, hear and learn at this conference will inspire you and help you make education more inclusive.”

The REACH conference is part of the awareness and capacity building activities of ABLE (Accessibility for a Bolder Learning Experience), an AUB initiative that aims at increasing the retention and success rates of students with disabilities and to support their readiness for life after university by developing and deploying accessibility to campus-wide IT resources.

In its first edition, REACH invited researchers and practitioners to reflect broadly on the opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education within educational systems as well as to conceptualize and produce knowledge and advice around the development of future research and practice aiming to enhance inclusive education. The conference also featured a comparative study of national and international success stories in inclusive education.

“Students with impairments may not be disabled by them. Students without impairments maybe disabled by other factors,” said Dr. Kenneth Reimer, who was one of the conference keynote speakers.

The event hosted international speakers who are experts in the field of inclusive education, such as Dr. Serge Thomazet from ACTé Laboratory Clermont Auvergne in France, Dr. Nicole Monney from the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi in Canada, and Dr. Kenneth Reimer from Winnipeg University in Canada.

REACH presented an opportunity to discuss the conceptual, political, social, structural, and practical dimensions of inclusive education. It targeted researchers; representatives of concerned ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Health; school professionals including teachers and administrators; socio-medical professionals such as psychologists and speech therapists; trainers; academics; as well as stakeholders from associations working on programs and initiatives related to inclusive education.

Four thematic fields were selected for this conference, based on the recent Guide to Inclusion and Equity in Education (UNESCO, 2017). The first focused on concepts, seeking to clarify what inclusive education is and how technology is helping in bridging gaps. The second was policy declarations and legislation around inclusive and equitable education system, delving into the practical applications and implications, to understand how they limit, or promote, the emergence and sustainability of inclusive and equitable schools. The conference also made it possible to analyze the legal and regulatory framework related to inclusive education in Lebanon. As for the third theme, it focused on practices and their impact on inclusive education, as well as proposing any changes that may be necessary. The final theme was around technology; the role that accessible technology plays in fully inclusive education and required adaptations of systems and technology.

The event featured accessibility facilities including sign language interpretation and English/French translation.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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