

Models of inclusive education support for children with disabilities: More than 20 years of practice in Vietnam

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Abstract

Inclusive education (IE) has been recognized and implemented in most of countries around the world in its practice for children with special needs in general and children with disabilities (CWDs) in particular. Nevertheless, each country with its typical characteristics of economic, cultural and social conditions promotes various models of IE support for CWDs. This article presents the findings of the studies presided and participated by the author from the best practices of IE for CWDs in Vietnam since 1991 with reference to other research organizations and individuals. The article refers to key issues as following: (i) definition and types of disability; (ii) IE and its support programs ; (iii) models of IE support for CWDs; (iv) community involvement in IE for CWDs.

Key words : Inclusive Education, children with disabilities, supports, circle of friends, special supporting room.

Introduction

Vietnam began inclusive education (IE) of children with disabilities (CWDs) with the first pilot projects sponsored by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in some of pre and primary schools in 3/63 provinces at 03 regions all over the country. Since the school year 2002-2003, IE has been recognized by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to meet the CWD's basic rights, including the right of access to a quality education. This decision of the MOET followed the supporting models of IE which had been set up gradually with some achievements and positive impact on the development of CWD, his/her school, family, community and other stakeholders.

On that basis, along with legal documents on education in general and IE for CWDs in particular issued by the National Assembly and Government of Vietnam, *Law N° 51/2010/QH12 on Persons with Disabilities* enacted by Congress of Vietnam in 2010 and its by-law documents from 2010 up to now has paid attention to organization and implementation for IE for CWDs. Since then, a system of legal

documents and models of IE support has been improved in both theory and practice, therefore, to meet better the requirements of IE in schools quantitatively and qualitatively.

Definition and types of disabilities according to Law on Persons with Disabilities 2010

Law on Persons with Disabilities 2010 (Law N° 51/2010/QH12) defines people with disabilities as follows: Persons with disabilities by definition of this Law are those who have impairment of one or more parts of their body, or functional impairment, which are shown in different forms of disability, and may cause difficulties in work, daily life and learning. The Law also recognizes *06 basic types of disabilities*: (i) Physical disability; (ii) Hearing and speaking disability; (iii) Visual disability; (iv) Mental and psychiatric disability; (v) Intellectual disability; (vi) Other disabilities (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2010)

Up to present, only one national survey on education for CWDs has been conducted by the MOET in 2005.

Accordingly, prevalence of CWDs is accounted as

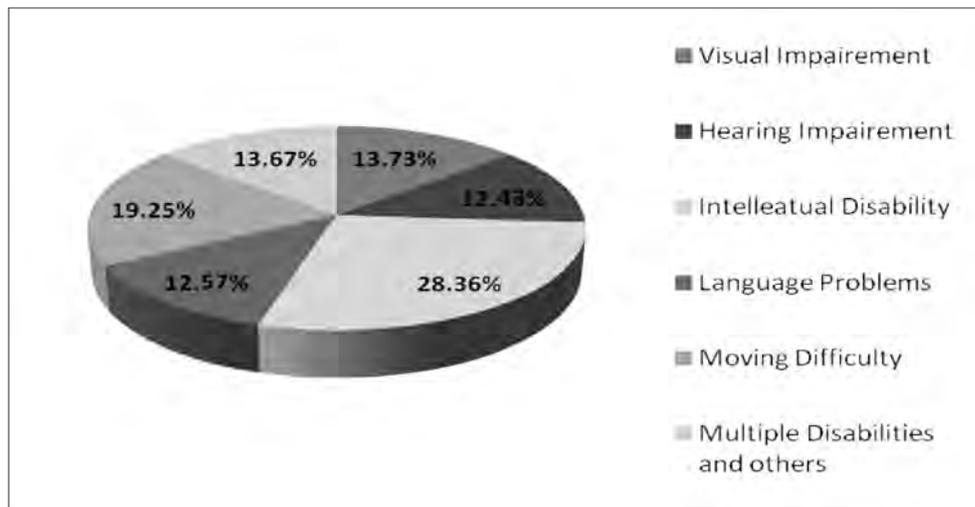


Fig.1 Prevalence of children with disabilities in Vietnam

Fig.1.

Inclusive education for children with disabilities in Vietnam

Concept of IE

Three forms of education for CWDs are currently practiced in Vietnam: specialized education, integrated education, and IE, among which IE is a main education form. The most common concept of IE which is understood and used in Vietnam is that, *a form of education in which children with disabilities can learn with other typical children at general schools in their neighborhood.*

There are three points of characteristics of IE for CWDs in Vietnam: 1) Education for all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic or any other factors that may lead to exclusion; 2) Children go to schools in their neighborhood; 3) Do not equate all children, each child is unique; 4) Modification and accommodation of educational objectives, contents, methods and assessment to meet the children's needs and abilities.

Support programs of IE for CWDs

Support programs of IE for CWDs indicate their supporting goals, contents, methods, forms and conditions. These are closely linked and shown by factors that affect to the children's development and facilitate their participation in their inclusion into their schools, families and communities.

Support programs of IE for CWDs aim to help them about:

- *Academic knowledge and skills:* They can reach to an optimal development with their abilities in a

suitable period of time and educational environment.

- *Social skills:* They are equipped with socially age-appropriate knowledge and skills.

- *Functional rehabilitation:* They can improve in their physical and mental functions caused by their impairment or damage.

- *Vocational education and training:* They can be trained and oriented in their vocational institutions to get a job or contribute to the society.

There are two groups of support programs of IE for CWDs: (i) Early intervention and support programs at centers, and (ii) support programs at schools, of which the contents are indicated as Fig.2.

Models of IE support for CWDs

After more than 20 years of practice, the models of IE support for CWDs in Vietnam are defined with 05 components: (i) Policies on IE of CWDs; (ii) Management system of supporting IE for CWDs; (iii) Resource center as a support service; (iv) IE supports for CWDs at schools; (v) Community supports for IE of CWDs.

Policies on IE of CWDs

In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals on Education, Vietnam has commitments to the international community to follow as herein after:

- All schools need to meet and accept every child, regardless of any disadvantaged conditions such as physical, intellectual, social, emotional,

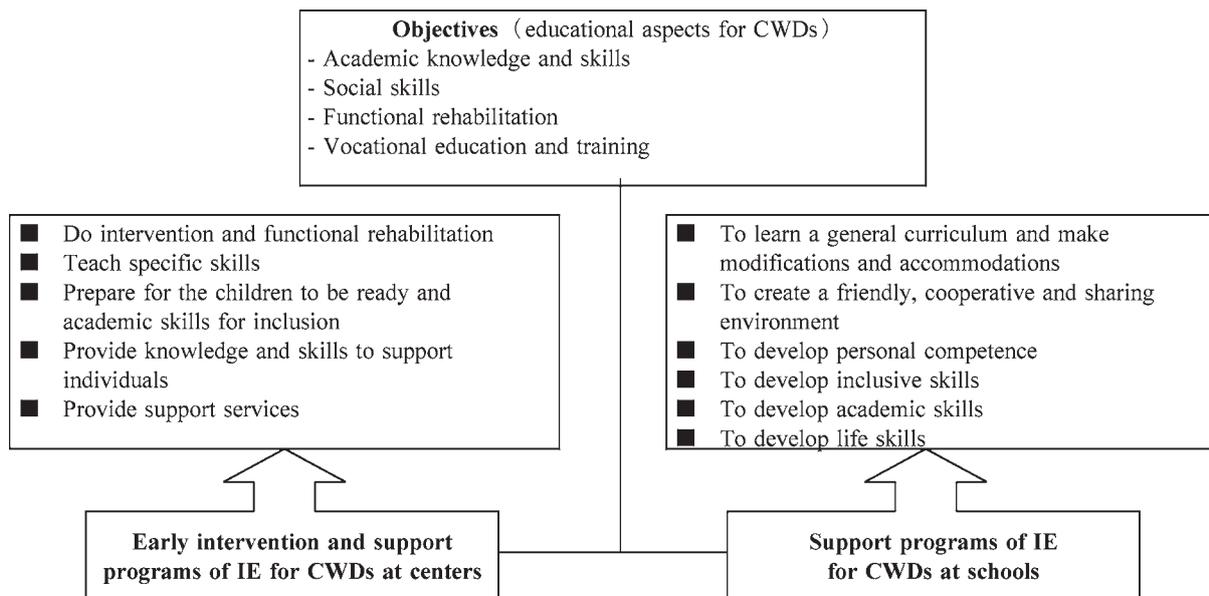


Fig.2 Support programs of IE for CWDs at centers and schools

linguistic or other conditions.

- To recognize and respect the right to education of every child. The education system of each country should actively seek children, especially those children who are not involved in the educational process of the school, then develop and implement flexible educational programs, which meet the needs of learners.

To implement the strategic goals of education development in Vietnam, including the goal of 70% of CWDs to go to school by 2020, many legal documents on protection, care and education of CWDs have issued by the Parliament, Government of Viet Nam. The legal documents have positive effects in:

- Orientation for the actions of civil society organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as the departments to participate in the participation and support of IE for CWDs.
- Initial steps to create a legal lobby, as a basis to implement the programs of education for CWDs. Some national programs of education for CWDs have been ratified and facilitated the resources to promote the protection, care and education of CWDs.

Policies on IE of CWDs in Vietnam are developed toward these basic directions: (i) Priority concern

for CWDs based on a perspective of building a fair society, equal opportunities in education; (ii) The policy refers to the compulsory right to education for all children, including CWDs; (iii) Implementing the compulsory right to education for all children requires to ensure *the conditions of learning and the quality of education* such as the financial support, resources, management, education programs and other issues; (iv) To build a comprehensive policy on IE of CWDs, it needs the commitments of ministries and departments to ensure implementation of the policy.

Although the system of legal documents of Vietnam on the education of CWDs should continue to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency in practice, however, they are to facilitate sustainable development of IE for CWDs based on the initial legal framework..

Management system of supporting IE for CWDs

Management system of supporting IE for CWDs at all levels in Vietnam was established in 2002 through Steering Committee of Education for CWDs. In 2009, it was changed to be “Steering Committee of Education for Children with Disabilities and Disadvantages”.

Management system of supporting IE for CWDs includes: MOET - Steering Committee of Education for CWDs, DOET - Steering Committee of Education for CWDs. For each Office of Education and Training, there is one personnel in charge with IE for CWDs to consult, advise and support directly

for the Head of Office in managing IE practice in its local area. Besides, it also includes Resource Center for supporting inclusive education development at all levels, mostly in provincial levels. This following Fig.3 demonstrates the management system of supporting IE for CWDs:

At school level, the management system of supporting IE for CWDs is considered as *an integrative cooperation task* in managing overall activities of the Head of the school. It is a *complex and flexible task* in management process, such as planning, organization, direction, monitoring and assessment. To do this management task, it involves a diversity of students in educational activities and becomes *socialized education* in which there are participation and commitments of in- and out-of-school stakeholders (teachers and students, families, communities, local organizations and authorities, etc.).

Resource Center for supporting IE development

Joint Circular N°58/2012/TTLT-BGD ÷ T-BL ÷ TBXH dated December 28th, 2012 by Ministers of MOET and MOLISA stated that:

Article 2. Concept and Types of Resource Center (RC) for supporting inclusive education development: *Resource Center for supporting inclusive education development* is an institution to provide curriculum contents, facilities and equipments, teaching and learning materials, services of advising, supporting and organizing educational activities in accordance with the characteristics and situation of persons with

disabilities. The center has a separate legal status, seal and accounts. Type of a center can be public or private.

Article 3. Functions and tasks of a RC

1. Identify CWDs for consultations of choosing appropriate educational methods;
2. Implement measures of early intervention for CWDs in the community to choose appropriate methods of education;
3. Provide psychological, health, educational, vocational consultations to choose appropriate methods of education;
4. Support people with disabilities in their families, educational institutions and communities;
5. Provide specific contents, materials and equipments for teaching and learning regard to type and degree of disability.

To date, there have been over 10 specialized centers/ schools in Vietnam to transform their name, functions and tasks to be a RC for supporting IE development or to establish a new one, including: Educational and Supportive School for Disadvantaged Children in Thai Nguyen Province, School of Education for CWDs in Cao Bang Province, School of Education for CWDs in Bac Kan province, RC for supporting IE development in Da Nang City, Hope School of Education for CWDs in Dak Lak province, Research Center on Education of CWDs in Ho Chi Minh City, School of Education for CWDs in Vinh Long province, School of Education for CWDs in Tien Giang province, etc. The goal of the MOET, Vietnam is that in 2020, in each province/city there will have been at least one

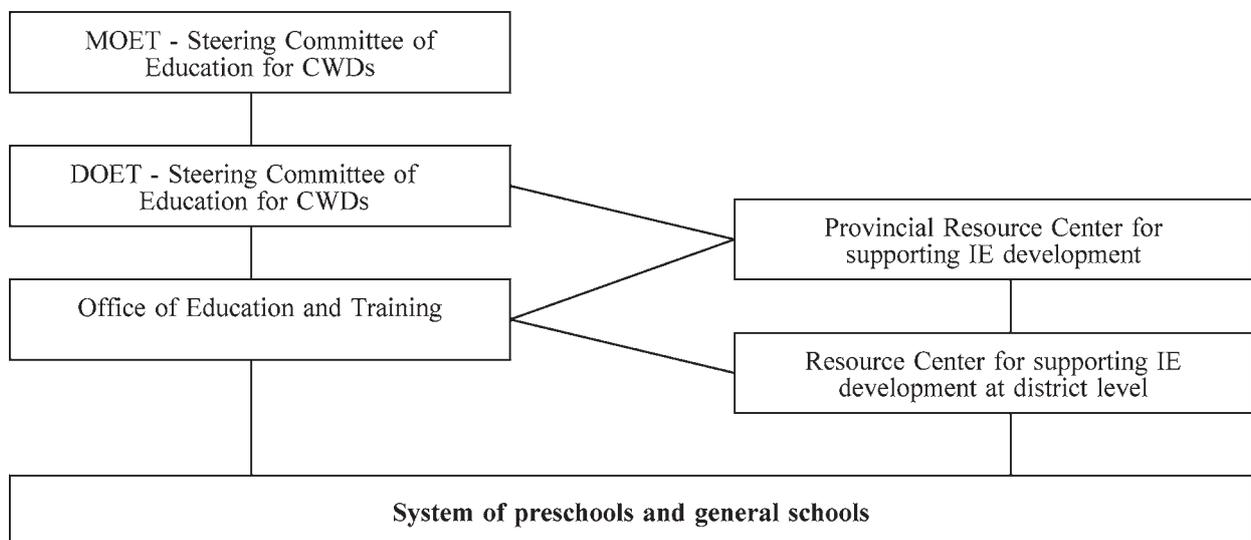


Fig.3 Management system of supporting IE for CWDs in Vietnam

RC for supporting IE development. These are important to deliver support services for CWDs to learn and develop in their schools, communities and families.

IE supports for CWDs at schools

There are supportive activities of IE for CWDs in Vietnam schools currently through the following models:

a) “Circle of Friends” for each CWDs: This model is a theory on building social relationships to determine the way to behave properly and facilitate for an individual to develop. Different from natural

relationships, “Circle of Friends” for each CWDs in the school is heavily about psychological and voluntarily factors of the child to become more responsible better than a duty or an obligation existing purely in each individual in the family and community.

b) “Resource room of special support”

This model was first piloted in Vietnam in the 2007-2008 school year for primary and secondary school, and became the official model from the academic year 2010-2011 with the aim of creating a support system of expertise, technical skills and other conditions to ensure the implementation of IE

Table 1 Difference between “Friendship Circle of CWDs” and “Natural Relationship Circle”

No. of Circle	Friendship Circle of CWDs (the order in accordance with the reliability)		Natural Relationship Circle of each individual (the order in accordance with the responsibility)	
	People	Role	People	Role
1	People of intimacy, those are closest to the child	Kind, Love, Support	Family: father, mother, husband/ wife, daughter/ son	Concern, take care and nurture unconditionally
2	People of friendship	Concern, share and support	Relatives: brother(s) / sister(s), and so on	Concern, take care regularly
3	People of participation	Support if having condition	Close/Dear friends	Ready to share and help
4	People of exchange	Create a comfortable environment	Social friends	Support to benefit from each other, help if asked

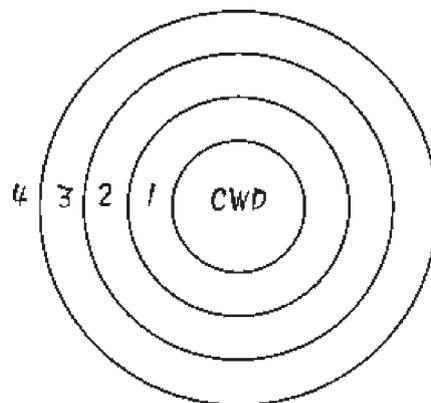


Fig.4 Circle of Friends for each a CWD in an inclusive setting

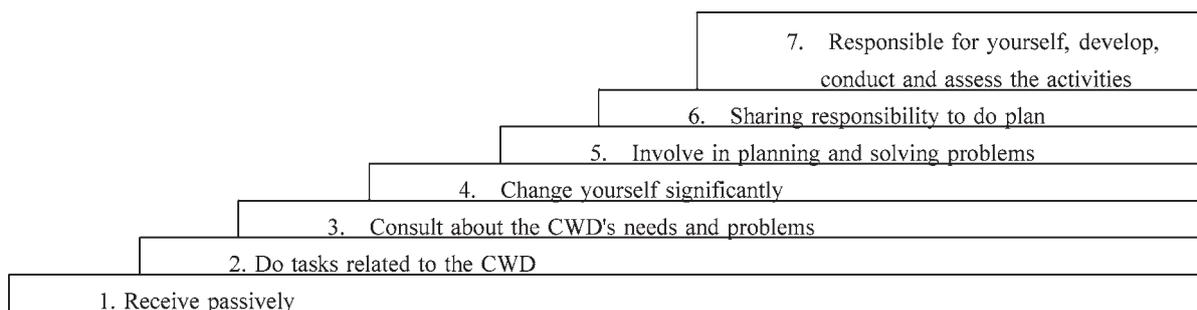


Fig.5 Levels of participation of Friends to support CWDs in IE

and individual intervention activities for CWDs, active collaboration with the provincial RC for supporting IE development and community support activities of IE for CWDs at schools.

A resource room of special support has main functions:

- A support center of IE activities for CWDs at schools.
- A placement for CWDs (also other children with disadvantages) to learn and get advice on life skills, social skills and other academic or vocational skills.
- A place to develop a “Circle of Friends” for CWDs and other special needs.
- A place to share experiences, exchange of expertise, planning of teachers and students to support CWDs and other special needs.
- A place for exchanges between schools, communities and families to develop plans on IE, on supports for CWDs and other special needs.
- A place to organize meetings, advocacy on socialization and development of IE for CWDs and other special needs.

Community supports for IE of CWDs

To do the goal of IE for CWDs, it requires not only the educational sector but also the involvement and cooperation of other stakeholders such as families, communities, local authorities, individuals and civil society organizations and other volunteers. The involvement and cooperation of these stakeholders with the school is done through the Community Support Team.

A Community Support Team includes members

from a community of a commune, who are voluntary to contribute their resources into a group to help one or more than one CWDs or disadvantages to include the society.

Upon the current local conditions, a Community Support Team have different members, often includes some representatives from the union/association/organization of Education, Health, Women, Population, Farmers, Youth Union, and Red Cross, Commune Head, the CWD’s family and other volunteers, etc.

To support a CWD in his/her community, the Community Support Team often follows this procedure (as indicated in Fig.6).

A Community Support Team in IE of CWD includes these tasks:

- *Raising the parents’ awareness and participation* of the CWD’s development, sharing sympathy with the community in order to increase their belief in the children’s development, and pay much more attention to education of CWD.
- *Consulting to transfer significant knowledge and skills* for the CWD’s family members so that they can instruct their children in living, learning and participation in the activities of the community and residential area.
- *Finding support resources*: mobilizing governments, unions, mass organizations and individuals to help children and their families through advocacy in various forms to mobilize the participation of stakeholders.

In sum, the model of supporting IE for CWDs in Vietnam is visualized as Fig.7.

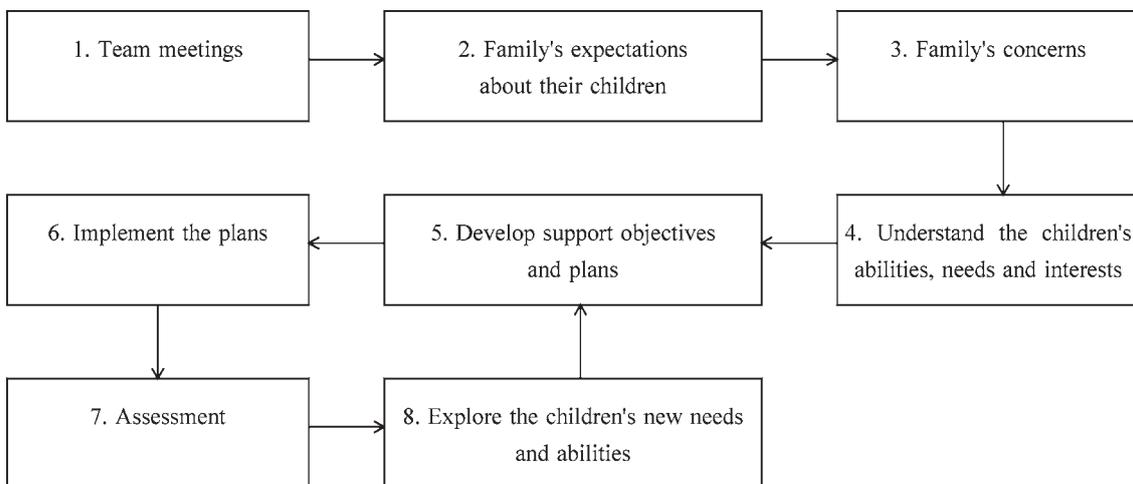


Fig.6 A process of supporting a CWD in community

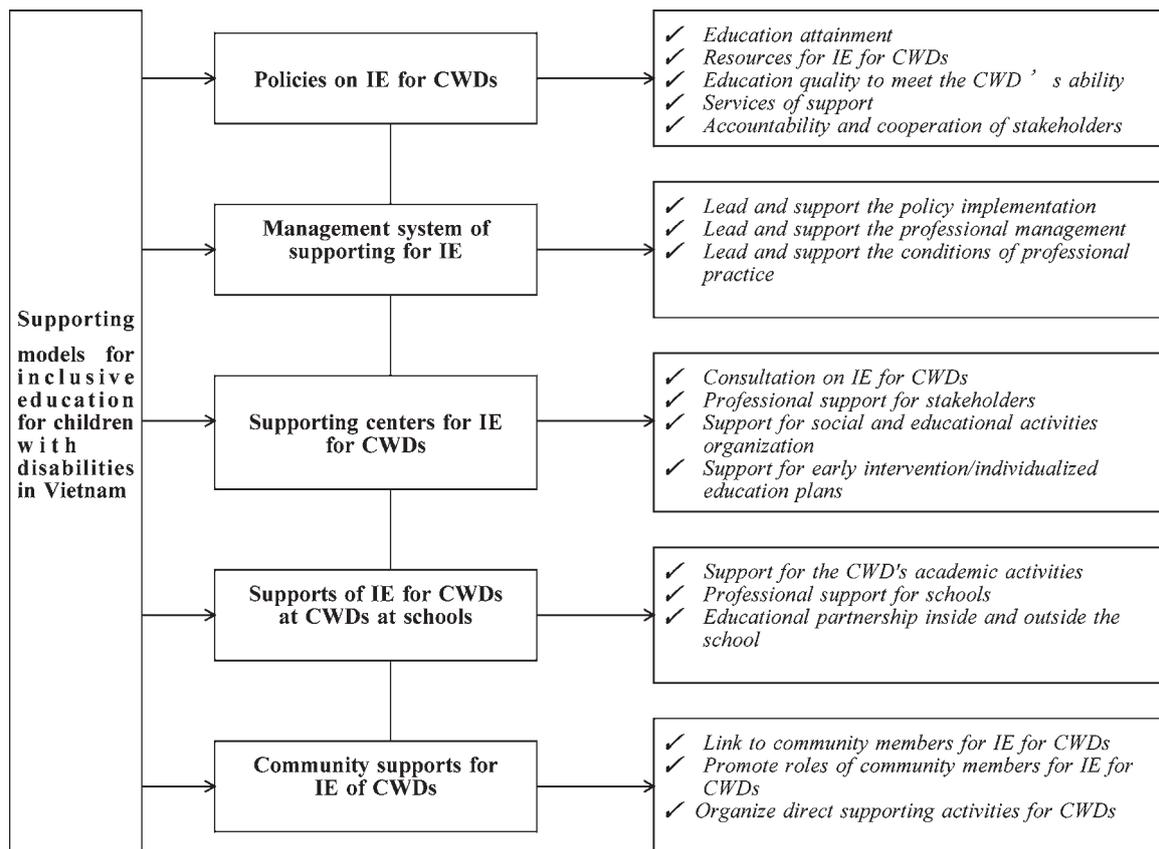


Fig.7 Models of inclusive education support for children with disabilities

Discussions and conclusions

Given the findings of theoretical and empirical research on IE for CWDs in Vietnam, especially on supporting models of IE for CWDs, some discussions and conclusions are given as follows:

1) A general model of IE for CWDs with 05 components and their contents is characterized and consistent with Vietnam's economic, cultural and historical conditions. Findings of empirical research indicate that the model requires a comprehensive development of 05 components to operate effectively, even though there has been a certain priority to focus on each or some of 05 components during each country development stage in order to meet the requirements of IE for CWDs. Good practice of our national policies along with the efforts of a whole management system will enable the schools to perform better their roles of direct support for CWDs and involvement of communities. In contrast, the practice changes require an adjustment and addition of national policies, to create a legal framework for a whole operational system.

2) A development a support system of IE for CWDs is always a process of step-by-step research, search and improvement to meet the IE needs of CWDs and their family and community with an increasing quality and efficiency. Therefore, this model of Vietnam at the present time should continue to provide research, development. The model at present, therefore requires more continued research and development.

3) IE is the right direction for the implementation of the fundamental rights of children, especially CWDs in Viet Nam. Although the supporting models of IE for CWDs are quite new, they have initially contributed to IE practice for CWDs in Viet Nam and enabled an increasing number of CWDs to better attend the schools.

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