

Parental involvement in inclusive classrooms for students with learning disabilities at Omani schools as perceived by teachers.

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Abstract

Successful implementation of inclusive educational programs requires the involvement and the support from the parents of learning disabilities children at all level. The main aim of the study was to investigate the role of parents in educating their children in inclusive classrooms at Omani schools as perceived by teachers. Specifically, the present study aimed at: (1) examining the importance of parents' involvement in their children education at inclusive classrooms from the teachers' perspectives, (2) identifying activities used by teachers or parents to get involved in their children's education at inclusive classrooms, (3) recognizing barriers of parents' involvement in their children's education at inclusive classrooms from teachers' perspectives. The sample of the study included 100 participants. They were teachers of Learning Disabilities children in inclusive classroom at primary schools in Oman. The present study used descriptive research design which described data and characteristics about the population or phenomenon that being studied. The researcher developed appropriate measuring tools that serve the aims of the present study. The psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of these measuring tools have been examined. Findings showed that teachers believe that the parental involvement is important for the students. They also mentioned that using technology (like android applications) can facilitate the parental involvement. However, the findings showed that there are three types of barriers of parental involvement; school barriers (school rules, school schedule, etc.); parental barriers (time, the presence of baby in the family, feeling shame, etc.); other barriers (distance of schools from the work, relationship with the teacher, age of students, etc.).

Keywords: Learning disabilities, Primary schools, Parental barriers.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is a process of increasing the participation of all students in schools, including those with disabilities and learning disabilities. It is about restructuring the cultures, policies, and practices in schools so they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality [1]. Recent statistics shows that the proportion of students with disabilities who spend 80% or more of the school day in general education classrooms has substantially increased from 34% in 1990 to 61% in 2011 [2,3].

Despite these optimistic statistics, the process of inclusion has been faced with many challenges. Schools have insufficient funds for special equipment, resources and services; a limited number of certified special education personnel; a lack of proper training for teachers in mainstream classrooms, and the lack of clear guiding policies in schools to deal with inclusion issues, even the senior-level administrators are not sufficiently knowledgeable with inclusion practices. There have been also common concerns such as teachers' time taken away from the rest of the students, class size, and safety of children with special needs. Furthermore, the achievement outcomes and post school success for inclusive students remain far below

desirable levels [4]. Given these concerns, there have been several calls from teacher and principal as well as researchers for more parental involvement in the education of inclusive children.

Teachers consider parental involvement in the education of their children with special needs as a parental support in a child's education, linking two important contexts in a child's life education: home and school. It is "...parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" [5] including the child's education, social activities, and athletics. Researchers have shown the positive effects of parent involvement on school learning [6], as well as the importance of home environment and parental support at home for school learning [7]. For students with special needs, research also points to the important role which parents play in their children's education [8]. In a longitudinal study of children with disabilities in secondary schools in the United States, parents' activities in support of education were associated with improved outcomes in several achievement domains [9]. Unlike regular education, parent involvement in special education is formally acknowledged through legislation, for example, with regard to educational program placement and individual planning.

In Oman, the adherence of the government to an established principle of social and economic liberation, which emphasized human dignity, equality of opportunities and freedom of individuals, peace and stability, detribalization and the creation of a national consciousness, has encouraged establishing inclusion education at Omani public schools. This was at the beginning of the academic year 2005/2006. In every school, there is a classroom with 6 to 10 students. One teacher is responsible for the whole class. Those students do not study the curriculum of non-inclusive students because it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to design an Individual Plan for every student according to his/her needs and abilities. Table 1 presents 2014/2015 statistics about children with disability and teachers distributed over Omani governorates.

Rationale of the Present Study

We believe that inclusive education is the right path to follow in order to fulfill every disabled child's right to education. However, creating inclusive educational programs for young children is a complicated and often daunting task. Parents matter in inclusive education as vital partners who contribute much to the work of educators, schools and communities. They matter as parent leaders, parent mentors, and models of commitments to excellence in education, and they matter everyday as they influence and support their children's academic achievement. Active parental involvement has been considered to be an important factor related to better outcomes in the education of young children with and without disabilities in inclusive childhood programs [10,11]. Research has shown that high levels of parental involvement correlate with improved academic performance, higher test scores, more positive attitudes toward school, higher homework completion rates, fewer placements in special education, academic perseverance, lower dropout rates and fewer suspensions [12]. Given the findings of the international literature on the importance of parental involvement, it was considered timely to investigate the role of parents of disabled children in educating these children in Omani schools.

Aims of the Present Study

The principal aim of the present study is to investigate the

parental involvement in educating their children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms at Omani schools as perceived by teachers. Specifically, it seeks to (1) examine the importance of parents' involvement in their children education at inclusive classrooms from the perspective of teachers, (2) identify activities that are used by teachers/parents to get involved in their children's education at inclusive classrooms, (3) identify the hindrances of parents' involvement in their children's education at inclusive classrooms from teachers' perspectives.

Research Questions

1. What is the importance of parents' involvement in their children's education in inclusive classroom at Omani schools from perspective of teachers?
2. What are the activities used by teachers or parents to get involved in their children's education in inclusive classroom at Omani schools?
3. What are the barriers hindered parental involvement in their children's education in inclusive classroom at Omani schools from perspective of teachers?

Literature Review

Extensive evidence for the effectiveness of parental involvement (PI) in facilitating children's academic achievement has been reported by reviews and meta-analyses of the international literature [13,14]. For example, effect sizes, (which assess the size of changes brought about by interventions) for the impact of PI on children's academic achievement have been calculated to be 0.51 for all schools [15] and from 0.70 to 0.74 for urban primary schools [5]. Hattie reports that the average effect size for educational interventions is 0.4, which suggests that PI, with effect sizes estimated to be larger than this, can have a substantial impact on children's academic achievement [15].

Other features of parental involvement that emerge from these reviews and other literature encompass benefits for children, teachers and parents. For children, involvement of their parents is reported to lead to improvements in attitudes, behavior and attendance at school, as well as in their mental health [16]. For teachers, effective parental involvement is reported to improve parent-teacher relationships, teacher

Table 1. Number of children with disability and their teachers distributed over Omani governorates.

Governorate	Children			Teachers		
	Intellectual	Deaf	Total	Females	Males	Total
Muscat	140	0	140	39	9	48
Al Batinah South	148	36	184	83	23	106
Al Batinah North	226	60	286	43	10	53
Ad Dakhiliyah	172	54	226	65	19	84
Ash Sharqiyah North	104	30	134	16	0	16
Ash Sharqiyah South	96	27	123	31	10	41
Al Buraimi	37	16	53	11	18	29
Ad Dhahirah	95	12	107	24	6	30
Dhofar	72	37	109	38	16	54
Musandam	18	5	23	6	0	6
Al Wusta	5	0	5	12	4	16
Total	1113	277	1390	483	368	115

morale and the school climate. For parents, involvement in their children's education has been linked to increased parental confidence in, and satisfaction with parenting, as well as increased interest in their own education. Other important findings from these reviews are that the effectiveness of PI in bringing about these changes applies across gender and various ethnic groups [5] and that this also applies to children of all ages, including children at primary, middle and secondary schools [17].

Literature listed some benefits that the education of children with special needs can take from the parent involvement as well as use parents as teaching resources [18], using parents as volunteer on field trips, or resource person on fund raising, PI can also improve student attendance and decreases at-risk behaviors [19] and children stress in the school.

Even though parent involvement rates are lower in special education programs than in other compensatory programs [20]. Without parent involvement in the school, disagreements may escalate [21], leading to increased stress, costs, and reducing communication and relationships between parents and school [22].

Although the importance of parental involvement in inclusive classroom for children, there are some barriers which faced this involvement such as: the feeling of being intimidated by the school [23], the need to ask difficult questions [24]. Many parents faced some problems like finding transportation, meeting holding at inappropriate time for them (during school hours). Brief, parents have feelings that they are not equal partners to the school.

This research tried to discover the situation and the relationship between Omani parents and Omani inclusive classroom, by getting information from special education teachers about: The importance of this involvement, the activities taken from schools and parents to activate this involvement and the barriers which prevent it.

Research Method

The present study uses descriptive research design which describes data and characteristics about the population or phenomenon being studied.

Researcher employs the use of a survey questionnaire to investigate the Parent involvement among special education teachers in Omani inclusive classroom, in Muscat. This survey relies on the proclaimed accounts of teachers regarding the phenomena of the research. Quantitative statistical methods are used to analyze the findings of the data collected on the Likert-scale used in the survey questionnaire. The instrument used in the current study was adopted from a study recently conducted in Oman by Al Mashaykhi.

Participants

A convenience sample of (100) female special education teachers was used. This sample represents those who work at different schools which have an inclusive classroom, in Muscat governorate. The demographic and independent

variables of teachers were: education, experience, category of disability, marital status, and age. They teach children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, deafness. Their experience ranged from (3-5) years, and their age ranged from 25 to 30 years with mean of 27; their status: 73% of the teachers were married and 27% were single.

Procedure

The data was collected as part of an internal grant which is funded by Sultan Qaboos University. The research was approved by the University Board of Research Ethics. The authors informed the school principals and teachers about the rationale of the study and its aims. Teachers were informed that they would be filling in questionnaires about their personal views. The data was collected, coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, release 21.0).

The psychometric properties (validity and reliability) of the measuring tools will be examined using appropriate quantitative and qualitative procedures.

Measurement Tool

The researcher uses the "Teacher Beliefs about importance and practices of Parental Involvement Scale", adapted to Arabic language and used in Oman by Al Mashaykhi. The scale contains 24 items embedded in 2 subscales. The first one assess the importance of parental involvement, the second one assess the practice of this involvement, The two subscales are filled by the teachers on using 4 point Likert type scale: 1 (*Strongly Disagree*), 2 (*Disagree*), 3 (*Agree*) and 4 (*Strongly Agree*)

The scale psychometric properties were obtained from Al Mashaykhi study. Which validated the measure on an Omani sample and showed that the scale has moderate internal consistency ($\alpha=0.76$). Test retest reliability of the three subscales was as follow: (importance=0.48, practices=0.46, (Idem). Internal consistency estimates for the two subscales in the current study were (important $\alpha=0.80$, practices $\alpha=0.85$)

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlational analysis

Importance and practice of parental involvement in inclusive classroom in Oman: One sample *t* test was used to examine the level of participants' perception of the parental involvement importance and practices in inclusive classroom. The theoretical means of importance ($M=26$) and the practices ($M=20$) subscales were compared to the actual means of these two subscales. The analysis summarized in Table 2, demonstrated that participants' have high perception of the importance of parental involvement in the inclusive classroom but low perception of the practices they use to be involved in these classes.

Correlational analysis: Findings of Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis, summarized in Table 3, among Importance and Practices of parental involvement showed that these variables correlated negatively.

Table 2. Participants' perception of the importance and the practices of the parental involvement.

	N	M	SD	df	T
Importance	100	23.5	2.6	129	0.86
Practices	100	18.2	2.2	129	-2.52

Note: $p < 0.05$ for all instances

Table 3. Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis among importance and practices of parental involvement.

	Practice Involvement
Importance of involvement	0.732
	0.05
Note: $p < 0.05$ for all instances.	N=100

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the perception of teachers regarding the importance, the practices and the barriers of the parental involvement in the inclusive classroom in Sultanate of Oman. Descriptive analyses showed that teachers perceive the parental involvement in the inclusive classroom is important to support the education for the children with disabilities, but the study showed also that less action was taken from the parent to activate this involvement. It reveals that teachers are the one who take these actions; they are the responsible to find a way for the parent to be involved in the school such as correspondence notebooks, some phone calls, some meetings, etc. furthermore, teachers also proclaim that just few parents who response to these ways.

This finding is consistent with the findings of Christenson [16]; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler [11]. Those researchers classified the benefits on three categories: the first one consisted benefits for children; involvement of their parents is reported to lead to improvements in attitudes, behavior and attendance at school, as well as in their mental health. The second one included benefits for teachers; effective parental involvement is reported to improve parent-teacher, teacher morale and the school climate. The last one comprised some benefits for parents; involvement in their children's education has been linked to increased parental confidence in, and satisfaction with parenting, as well as increased interest in their own education.

In the Omani context, parental involvement is more important than other education context because of the variety of the teachers coming from other cultures in the school (Tunisian, Egyptian, Sudanese and Omani). In this context, parents need to know more about teachers, their teaching strategies and their culture. Teachers also need to know about parents, their practices with children at home, their ways of following up with child learning, their treatment, etc. As well, children also get some benefits. So the results showed that the teachers have high perception of the importance of parental involvement in the inclusive classroom.

Regarding the correlation between Importance and Practices of parental involvement, the results showed that it's correlated negatively, that means that even it's important

to be involved in the education of their children, parents of children with disabilities showed less involvement in inclusive classroom. In line with this finding, Harry, 1992 showed that parent involvement rates are lower in special education programs than in other compensatory programs. Their practice on the school meetings and other ways of involvement are poor. Finding also showed that parents signed the Individual Plan without any interrogation, suggestion or intervention, teachers perceived this situation negatively it means for them irresponsibility.

Results showed also that teachers tried to find ways to more involve parents in the school life of their children but parents spoke always about barriers such as the time the presence of baby at home, the work hours, complaints, etc. For example, teachers revealed that rarely when parents accept to be volunteer in the school trip. Literature [23,24] also agreed with this finding by mentioning some barriers which faced parental involvement in the inclusive classroom such as: - the feeling of being intimidated by teachers or administration staff, -the need to asking difficult questions. Furthermore, some other barriers were found such as, finding transportation and meeting holding at inappropriate time. Brief, parents have feelings that they are not equal partners to the school.

Parental involvement is not only a partnership between teachers and parents, it should also include the school principal, it is essentially a partnership between parents and schools. The teachers clearly mentioned that they are the only one who searches ways to involve parents in the school activities.

The major limitation of the present study was the poor number of the sample (100 teachers) and the research don't study the parents' perception; it should clarify more points in this context. The researcher also suggests adding qualitative methods to discuss more related issues with teachers, parents and other stakeholders.

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