



Teachers' Perception of Inclusive Education in Gaza City

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Abstract

This research concerns itself to examine teachers' perception of inclusive education in three constructs of inclusive education in the Gaza City, namely comfort level when engaging with people with disabilities, acceptance of learners with different needs, and concerns about inclusive education. A random sample of in-service educators was selected. The analytic descriptive method was used and the SACIE Scale was used after standardizing the scale on the Gaza City environment. The result showed that the scale is reliable and valid, the outcomes also revealed that teachers have high level of concerns, low levels of comfort and acceptance toward inclusive education, those levels indicate to some extent negative perception about inclusive education. In addition, the outcome revealed statistically significant differences in the levels of comfort, acceptance, concerns and the total score of the scale among teachers due to specific variables.

Introduction

The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has, from its birth, aimed to provide education to all children regardless of their diverse and varying needs. Faced with scarce specialized human and material resources, the ministry elected inclusive education (IE) to address these needs as this would utilize the already existing schools and staff.

In 1997, the MoEHE, with the help of a number of non-Palestinian organizations, piloted inclusive education (education that excludes no child regardless of her/his challenges and that takes into account students' individual differences and the diversity of their needs). Inclusive education counselors were trained and appointed in twelve Palestinian directorates, awareness meetings were held with students, teachers, parents and directors, teachers of the participating schools were trained, schools were equipped with the necessary resources and efforts were made to make the buildings and the school environments more welcoming. By the end of the pilot phase, 89 schools were involved.

In the year 2000, the MoEHE adopted IE as a general program to be implemented in all schools between 2006 and 2007, during which it facilitated the registration of many students with a range of additional needs in mainstream classrooms. The support available for these students was inadequate (for many reasons, including: lack of support staff in some schools, numbers of students per class, curriculum density and its disregard for diverse learners, lack of teacher training, lack of policy). This was addressed by assigning a teacher from each participating school to act as a mediator between the school and the directory and to see to it that the students' needs were being met.

In 2014, an Inclusive Education policy was drafted and launched and is currently being adapted to accommodate the feedback of the participants and stakeholders.(Ministry of education, 2014).

Theoretical Frame

An inclusive approach is understood as meaning that the education of all students covering the spectrum of diversity takes place in adequately supported regular classrooms in the educational context that would be attended if the form of diversity were not present, normally the neighborhood school. While originally focusing on the inclusion of students with specific disabilities—or learning difficulties as used in the United Kingdom—inclusion has increasingly become broadened to refer to catering for the needs of all children, including those who may be disenfranchised, vulnerable, from different cultures or ethnic groups, in poverty, or for any other reason find accessing the regular school challenging (see Calgary Board of Health, 2008, for a definition of diverse populations; Gause, 2011; Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2009). The inclusion of all students in regular schools is a result of the international movement towards providing equal opportunities and access for all learners in the same schools whenever possible. The advent of the first World Conference on Education for All in Jomtein, Thailand (UNESCO, 1990), followed by the Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments at the World Education Forum at Dakar, Senegal (UNESCO, 2000), and the development of the powerful Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), reaffirmed that inclusive education represents the most equitable way of educating the majority of children in all countries.

The philosophy of educating children has gradually focused more on providing equal educational opportunities from a rights-based perspective, which has led to inclusive education continuing to be promoted and implemented to varying degrees in most regions over the past three decades. In some regions, inclusion has become embedded within legislation; for example, in the United States the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (United States Department of Education, 2004) or within policy as in the United Kingdom the Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2001). Regarding the practicality of fully implementing inclusive education, many jurisdictions, though, continue to be reluctant to wholly support inclusion (Woolfson & Brady, 2009). Indeed, in some instances there is very little support for inclusion (Alghazo & Gaad, 2004), especially when learners have more challenging support needs (Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005).

Following this movement towards an inclusive educational approach in schools, teacher education has also had to undergo a major shift in its focus in order to prepare teachers for this change (Forlin, 2008; Forlin, 2010a). Alongside a standards-based reform in many regions, such as the United States, inclusion has challenged educators to achieve high standards for all students, including those with disabilities (Voltz & Collins, 2010). Similarly, the expectation of the No Child Left Behind Act (Government of the United States of America, 2001) undoubtedly has had a high impact on pre-

service teacher education in the United States (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman & Merbler, 2010). The most recent Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nation, 2006) articulated the right of persons with disabilities to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. It also advanced the notion that professionals and staff must be trained to work at all levels of education and that “such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities” (UNESCO, 2006, Article 24, 4)

Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education

Understanding pre-service and in service teachers’ beliefs about inclusion is important as positive attitudes towards inclusion are amongst the strongest predictors of the success of the inclusion reforms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin, 2010). Effective inclusionary practices have been found to depend to a noticeable extent on the sentiments of teachers about the nature of disability and their perceived roles in supporting students with special education needs (Jord, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Prior experience and knowledge about students with disabilities have been found to be directly linked with more positive attitudes by teachers towards inclusion (Burke & Sutherland, 2004).

A better understanding of teacher attitude towards inclusion can assist in improving the learning environment (Ross-Hill, 2009). Educators with apprehensive attitudes may use practices that promote exclusion rather than inclusion in their classrooms (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008). On the other hand, educators who hold positive attitudes towards inclusion tend to use teaching strategies that allow them to accommodate individual differences (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Forlin, 2010a).

Concerns of Educators

While educators’ attitudes are important as potential predictors of success or failure of inclusion, equally important are their concerns about inclusion (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009). Agbenyega (2007) investigated attitudes and concerns of 100 teachers about teaching in inclusive classrooms in Ghana. He found that teachers’ major concerns related to their lack of skills to effectively teach students with disabilities and lack of resources to accommodate individual differences, concluding that teachers’ acceptance and commitment to implementing inclusion are likely to be affected by their attitudes and concerns. Changpinit, Greaves, and Frydenberg (2007) examined attitudes and concerns of 702 in-service educators to teach in inclusive classrooms in Thailand. They found that there was a significant and negative correlation between participants’ attitudes and concerns. Participants who had relatively positive attitudes towards inclusive education were likely to have lower degree of concerns about it or vice versa. In a recent study, Forlin and Chambers (2011) expanded on the work by other researchers by examining how confidence in teaching students with disabilities and knowledge about local policies impacted pre-service teachers’ attitudes and concerns. They reported that level of confidence and knowledge of legislation were positively and significantly correlated with attitudes towards including students with disabilities and conversely negatively correlated with concerns about inclusion. They also found, though, that increasing knowledge about legislation and policy related to inclusion, and improving confidence did not likewise address the

participants' concerns or perceived stress associated with having students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Research Problem:

The research problem concerns itself to examine teachers' perception of inclusive education in three constructs of inclusive education in the Gaza City, namely comfort level when engaging with people with disabilities, acceptance of learners with different needs, and concerns about inclusive education accordingly the research problem can be illustrated by the following questions:

1-How comfort, acceptance and concerns about inclusive education can be described among in-service teachers?

2-Are there statistically significant differences in comfort, acceptance and concerns among teachers due to their majors (art- science)

3-Are there statistically significant differences in comfort, acceptance and concerns among teachers due to years of experience ?

4-Are there statistically significant differences in comfort, acceptance and concerns among teachers due to teachers gender?

5-Are there statistically significant differences in comfort, acceptance and concerns among teachers due to type of school (governmental- UN)

Research Aims:

The research aims include the following:

To realize and understand the teachers perception, comfort, acceptance and concerns of teacher about inclusive education in the Gaza Strip

To examine whether there are statistically significant differences in the levels of comfort, acceptance and concerns about inclusive education among teachers due to teachers majors, years of experience ,sex ,and type of the school.

Importance of the research:

The importance of such research is involved in gathering data about the concept of inclusive education among teachers in the Gaza strip , such data will help us to understand more the position of teachers regarding inclusive education, and the outcome of such research may reveal critical issues concerning the implementation of inclusive education in the Gaza Strip.

Procedures and Method:

Instrument

The researcher used the SACIE Scale designed by Chris, Chris, & Tim (2011) after standardizing it on a random teachers sample counted about 40 teachers, the outcomes of such standardization can be shown as follow:

The scale consists of 15 items, distributed on 3 dimensions, 5 items for each dimension, the dimensions are comfort, acceptance and concerns. The high score on comfort dimension means low comfort, the high score on the acceptance dimension means high level of acceptance and high score on the concerns dimension means high level of concerns. The high total score on the scale means negative perception of inclusive education, whereas low total score means positive perception of inclusive education.

First, reliability

Internal consistency was used to examine the reliability of the scale, correlations were calculated for every item with its dimension, and correlations also were made for every dimension with the total mark of the scale the following tables show the correlations:

Table 1: Correlations of every item with the total score of the first dimension(Comfort)

Item	Correlation	Sig
I find it difficult to overcome my initial shock when meeting people with severe physical disabilities	0.919**	.000
I am afraid to look a person with a disability straight in the face	0.870**	.000
I tend to make contacts with people with disabilities brief and I finish them as quickly as possible	0.954**	.000
I would feel terrible if I had a disability.	0.885**	.000
I dread the thought that I could eventually end up with a disability	0.765**	.000

Table 2: Correlations of every item with the total score of the second dimension(Acceptance)

Item	Correlation	Sig
students who have difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally should be in regular classes	0.950**	.000
Students who frequently fail exams should be in regular classes	0.875**	.000
Students who need an individualized academic program should be in regular classes	0.794**	.000
Students who are inattentive should be in regular classes.	0.657**	.000

Students who require communicative technologies (e.g. Braille/sign language) should be in regular classes.	0.906**	.000
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Table 3: Correlations of every item with the total score of the third dimension(concerns)

Item	Correlation	Sig
I am concerned that my workload will increase if I have students with disabilities in my class	0.928**	.000
I am concerned that it will be difficult to give appropriate attention to all students in an inclusive classroom.	0.886**	.000
I am concerned that I will be more stressed if I have students with disabilities in my class	0.710**	.000
I am concerned that students with disabilities will not be accepted by the rest of the class.	0.876**	.000
I am concerned that I do not have knowledge and skills required to teach students with disabilities.	0.727**	.000

Second, scale Validity:

The validity of the scale was calculated by using split half method and Cronbach Alpha the following tables show the results

Table 4:Correlations of the 2 half's of every dimension and the total score of the scale

Dimensions	No. of Item	Correlation before modi.	Correlation after modi.
Sentiments	5	0.893	0.944
Attitudes	5	0.825	0.904
Concerns	5	0.906	0.951
Total Score	15	0.850	0.919

Table 5: Alfa for every dimension and the total score of the scale

Dimensions	No. of item	Alfa
Sentiments	5	0.924
Attitudes	5	0.888
Concerns	5	0.883
Total score	15	0.883

Sample:

A random sample composed of(100) teachers was. selected from basic education schools, the sample can be described according to gender , female composed 51% and male composed 49%. 54% of teachers are from governmental schools and 46% of the sample are from UnRWA schools. Regarding teachers major,55% of the teachers are majored in arts whereas 45% of the teachers are majored in science. Finally the sample also was distributed according to the years of experience ,27% of the sample have got (5-1)years of experience whereas 73% of the total sample have got (6-10) years of experience in teaching .

Results

1-How comfort, acceptance and concerns about inclusive education can be described among in-service teachers?

Table (6)

Dimension	N	Total score	Mean	S.D	%	Order
Comfort	5	20	17.55	2.350	87.75	2

Acceptance	5	20	10.22	2.873	51.1	3
Concerns	5	20	17.61	2.558	88.05	1
Total	15	60	45.38	5.720	87.3	

To answer this question the researcher calculated the means and percentage for every dimension and the total score of the scale the, following table shows the result:

As it is shown in the table number (6) the sample of the research has scored high level of comfort, also the sample has scored moderate level on the acceptance dimension, the sample scored relatively high score on the concerns level. Regarding the total score of the scale it is obvious that it is below the average.

2-Are there statistically significant differences in comfort, acceptance and concerns among teachers due to their majors (art- science)?

Table (7)

	Major	No.	mean	S.D	T value	Sig	
Comfort	Art	55	17.78	2.477	1.092	0.278	
	Science	45	17.27	2.178			
Acceptance	Art	55	10.91	2.933	1.199	0.233	
	science	45	11.60	2.783			
Concerns	Art	55	17.2	2.62	1.792	0.076	
	Science	45	17.1	2.414			
Total	Art	55	45.89	6.076	0.945	0.347	
	Science	45	45.97	5.259			

To answer this question the researcher used T. test as a statistical method to examine the differences between 2 groups according to major, the . Table number 11 shows the result:

According to table number (7), it is clear that there are no statistically significant differences in all dimensions and the total scores of the scale among in-service teachers due to the major (art, science).

3-Are there statistically significant differences in comfort, acceptance and concerns among teachers due to years of experience ?

Table (8)

	Years of experience	No.	mean	S.D	T value	S.g	
Comfort	1-5	27	16.74	2.611	2.131-	0.036	
	6-10	73	17.85	2.190			
Acceptance	1-5	27	14.52	3.836	3.844-	0.000	
	6-10	73	12.85	2.442			
Concerns	1-5	27	16.44	2.455	2.871-	0.005	
	6-10	73	18.04	2.475			

Total	1-5	27	48.70	4.983	4.229-	0.000	
	6-10	73	53.74	5.393			

To answer this question the researcher used T. test as a statistical method to examine the differences between 2 groups according to years of experience, table number(8) shows the result: According to table number (12) there are statistically significant differences in all dimensions and total score of the scale among teachers due to years of experience, according to the result, teachers who have less years of experience have less concerns and better acceptance and comfort, and their total score is still below average.

4-Are there statistically significant differences in comfort, acceptance and concerns among teachers due to teachers sex?

Table(9)

	sex	No.	mean	S.D	T value	Sig	
Comfort	m.	49	18.37	2.028	3.610	0.000	
	F.	51	16.76	2.388			
Acceptance	M.	49	11.04	2.685	2.904	0.005	
	F.	51	10.43	2.851			
Concerns	M.	49	18.20	2.466	2.327	0.023	
	F.	51	17.04	2.537			
Total	M.	49	54.61	5.259	4.122	0.000	
	F.	51	50.24	5.354			

To answer this question the researcher used T. test as a statistical method to examine the differences between 2 groups according to sex, table number (9) shows the result. According to table number (13) there are statistically significant differences in all dimensions and total score of the scale among teachers due to teachers' sex, according to the result, female teachers have less concerns and better acceptance and comfort, and their total score is less than the male teachers , this reflects better perception compared to male teachers' score.

5-Are there statistically significant differences in comfort, acceptance and concerns among teachers due to type of school (governmental- UN)

Table(10)

	Type of school	No.	mean	S.D	T. value	S.G	
Comfort	Govern.	54	17.98	2.415	2.020	0.046	
	U.N	46	17.04	2.190			
Acceptance	Govern.	54	11.33	3.204	3.532	0.001	

	U.N	46	13.26	2.005			
Concerns	Govern.	54	17.11	2.703	2.151	0.034	
	U.N	46	18.20	2.267			
Total Score	Govern.	54	50.43	6.245	4.122	0.001	
	U.N	46	47.50	4.866			

To answer this question the researcher used T. test as a statistical method to examine the differences between 2 groups according types of school, table number(10) shows the result: According to table number (14) there are statistically significant differences in all dimensions and total score of the scale among teachers due to type of the school, according to the result, teachers who work at UN schools have better levels of comfort, acceptance and less concerns, compared to those teachers who work at governmental schools. Concerning the total score it also obvious that the total score of U.N teachers reflects more positive perception compared to the perception of those teachers who work at governmental schools.

Conclusion and discussion

The research outcomes revealed that the sample of the research has scored a high level of comfort however the high score in this dimension means low level of comfort as all items of this dimension are negative, also the sample has scored moderate level on the acceptance dimension, this means that the acceptance of teachers for students with special needs to be improved to a higher level, this is true if we take into account the sample scores in the comfort and concerns levels, as it is clear the sample scored relatively high score on the concerns level. Regarding the total score of the scale it is obvious that it is below the average, such score indicates to some extent positive perception of students with special needs among in-service teachers as low score in the used scale means positive perception whereas high score means negative perception.

Moreover, the outcomes revealed that there are no statistically significant differences in all dimensions and the total scores of the scale among in-service teachers due to the major (art, science). This means that a teacher major has nothing to do with the levels of comfort, acceptance and concerns. According to the outcomes there are statistically significant differences in all dimensions and total score of the scale among teachers due to years of experience, according to the result, teachers who have less years of experience have less concerns and better acceptance and comfort, and their total score is still below average this reflects to some extent a positive perception as the low score on the scale means a positive perception of students with special needs. This result can be justified by saying that teachers who have less years of experience are still more motivated and active for learning in order to prove their selves compared to those teachers who have a long experience. In addition the research outcomes revealed that there are statistically significant differences in all

dimensions and total score of the scale among teachers due to teachers' sex, according to the result, female teachers have less concerns and better acceptance and comfort, and their total score is less than the male teachers, this reflects better perception compared to male teachers' score. The researcher thinks that such differences could be reasonable and justified, as the nature of female is different mainly in dealing with children, females are still more emotional and patient than males. Finally the research outcomes indicated that there are statistically significant differences in all dimensions and total score of the scale among teachers due to type of the school, according to the result, teachers who work at UN schools have better levels of comfort, acceptance and less concerns, compared to those teachers who work at governmental schools. Concerning the total score it is also obvious that the total score of U.N teachers reflects more positive perception compared to the perception of those teachers who work at governmental schools. The researcher thinks that such result is actually justified, as U.N schools have more facilities for students with special needs compared to the governmental schools and U.N teachers are more motivated to work with students with special needs, they have ongoing training and better monitoring system, in addition the salaries of U.N teachers are significantly better than the teachers who work at governmental schools.

Recommendations:

According to the research out, it seems necessary to improve the perception of teachers toward inclusive education in the Gaza City, as it is the key stone of applying inclusive education, also the ministry of education has to double its efforts to decrease the level of teachers concerns and to improve the level of teachers comfort by addressing different procedures in the educational system such as training, educative and awareness programs.

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