

Exploration of Educational competencies of special education teachers working with intellectual disability students in primary school in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: This study explored the needed educational competencies for special education teachers who working with intellectual disability (ID) children in Saudi Arabian schools. Via this study, a scale for determining educational competencies was built, delivered to the jury and administered to a hundred participants (males and females). Respectfully, gender was also calculated and referred that there is no significant differences in the participants' competencies. In addition, qualifications are also essential in stating their effect and asserted that it essential in differentiating potential teachers working intellectual disability students. The study recommended that other variables are really needed to be explored such as building parental skills for treating ID children. Inclusion is portrayed about the child's right to participate in life and school duty to be accepted. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights.

Keywords: educational competencies; special education; intellectual disability students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disability is a term used to describe children with a compromised adaptive functioning, deficit in functional life skills and a sub average intelligence which arises from the developmental period, which starts from conception up to 18 years old(Davis & Florian, 2004). Roughly 1 to 3 per cent of the population is affected by this disability (European Commission, 2011).

In general, intellectual disability is viewed as a type of disabilities. According to the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (European Agency for Special Needs Education (2012), the term "disability" is an umbrella term for limitations in human functioning, where in human functioning refers simply to all life activities in which a person would typically engage. Limitations in functioning are labelled as disability. Disability may result from any problem in one or more of the three dimensions of human functioning which are the body structures and functions, personal activities and participation (Ichijo, 2014).

The common method of identifying the limitations in intellectual functioning is through the performance of intelligence tests, which produce an intelligence quotient or IQ score. The diagnosis of intellectual disability is based on individual IQ scores that fall approximately two standard deviations below the mean of the participating population (Luckasson et al., 2002). However, the diagnosis of intellectual disability cannot be made just based upon an IQ score only.

The second element in diagnosis and classification involves limitations in adaptive behavior. Adaptive behavior is the collection of conceptual, social and practical skills that have been learned by people in order to function in their everyday lives. Adaptive behavior refers to one's ability to respond and cope with daily environmental demands. Definitions of intellectual disability maintain a developmental perspective. It is considered a developmental disability because of its onset during the developmental period (before 18 years old) and can only be diagnosed if the limitations in human functioning manifest during the developmental period (Luckasson, 2002).

Hart et al. (2004) supposed that the main goal of the school personnel where students with intellectual disabilities are taught is to help them attain the functional behaviors needed to assume adult roles and responsibilities when they transition from the school setting in to the community and eventually in the workplace. Hart et al. (2004), also mentioned that a student who is intellectually disabled faces more difficulties in the area of adaptive behavior than in the area of low intellectual functioning.

Special education teachers mainly work in regular schools, and the most common way of organizing this form of support has been a pull-out model where pupils in need of special educational support visit the special education teacher's room during certain lessons. This support is initiated by the class teacher or sometimes the parents. The pupil remains in mainstream education, but is supported by a special education teacher on a weekly basis. However, if the pupil has severe learning difficulties, full-time special education can be suggested. This option merits further research (Klinger et al. 1998 & Huhtanen, 2000).

In the same context, special education teachers have many roles such as identifying, assessing, overseeing and coordinating all special needs. In addition, they prepare individual education plans and provide guidance for teachers (Mahone, 2005). They work in conjunction with a wide range of assistants, parents and therapists. Exceptionally, Teachers' roles are also changing and comprehend living and managing diversity, personalization of learning, integrating formative and summative assessment, cross-curricular teaching of key competencies, team work and shared leadership and partnership with parents and community (Hattie, 2009).

All these roles require excellent organizational, training and problem-solving skills, as well as people skills (Abbott, 2007). The role of special education teacher is wide and has widened. That is why many special education teachers are overwhelmed by the operational nature of their role, with little support, time or funding to consider strategic aspects of special educational needs (Mackenzie, 2007; Cole, 2005). special education teacher carries out their role in diverse settings, with considerable variations in how their role is interpreted (Mackenzie, 2007).

The schools where intellectual students with disabilities are taught provide care and education need supplemental aids, support and continuous follow up different from regular schools. The most important is preparing the special education teachers to acquire certain competencies assist them to teach children with ID thus this study is attempt to determine the educational competencies for SETs in preschool setting in Saudi Arabia.

SEN student have right for appropriate education, based on their interests, needs and abilities together with peer without disabilities. Teachers of special education classes have to be educated in specific areas related to the SEN student way of learning. Process of formal education of future teacher students is directed to develop those competencies that ensure achieving and valuable results. Current educational and school practice requires teacher who is ready for teaching in such demanding conditions created by specific characteristics of student with disabilities. It is reasonable to believe that competent teacher can and will enable sense of success and satisfaction to his or her students. Ashby (2010) commented that the process of inclusion was more social than academic oriented with accepting and developing positive attitudes as main goals. However, government through legislative commits schools, and directly teachers to create individual curriculums for each SEN student.

The main question of the study is: What are the needed educational competencies for special education teachers working with intellectual disability students in primary schools in Saudi Arabia?

This main question was divided into the following sub-questions:

Question 1: What are the needed educational competencies such as planning competencies for educational program content, implementing educational program, assessment and diagnosis and dealing with children with ID and their parents for special education teachers working with intellectual disability students in primary schools in Saudi Arabia?

Question 2: What are the statistical differences among special education teachers working with intellectual disability students in primary schools in Saudi Arabia concerning degree of qualifications?

Question 3: What are the statistical differences among special education teachers working with intellectual disability students in primary schools in Saudi Arabia concerning gender?

Question 4: What are the statistical differences among special education teachers working with intellectual disability students in primary schools in Saudi Arabia concerning years of experience?

This study aimed at identifying the following points: 1. Exploration of educational competencies such as; planning competencies for educational program content, implementing educational program, assessment and diagnosis and dealing with children with ID and their parents.

2. Stating differences of special education teachers working with intellectual disability students such as degree, gender and years of experience.

This study may be significant for the following points: 1. This study is a step in determining the most significant components of competencies required for special education teachers.

2. It is a hint on the way of treating students with intellectual disabilities.

3. Its results provide parents whose children seize intellectual disabilities with beneficial recent results to ease treating their children.

4. In the same respect, it shares the efforts of the Ministry of Education in carrying out studies concerning the field of intellectual disabilities as it is a present issue.

2. METHOD

The methodology used for this literature review was to systematically search internet resources, abstracts and databases including ERIC, British Library Direct, Academic Search Elite, Libris, Questia and High Beam and journal sources such as Emerald, Sage, Science Direct, Intute and Open DOAR. General search engines (Google Scholar, etc.) were used to find 'grey' materials. Searches were also made of relevant websites, online reports and dissertations from Europe and worldwide. These general searches were followed up with more specific citation searches.

In order to validate the preliminary framework, the researchers conducted semi structured interviews with 8 teachers within primary school. The teachers were selected on different criteria, including experience in educational competencies of special education teachers working with intellectual disability students, different types of elementary schools and classes, and on the assumption that the researchers wanted to have teachers with an open mind about intellectual disability. In each class of the participants there was at least one child with a very visible disability or less visible disabilities, but all the children had a clear individual trajectory.

The aim of the study was to investigate which competences a teacher needs in intellectual disability. The data were generated from semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interview transcripts were analysed to identify patterns and regularities, with emerging words used to create categorical themes. Two researchers independently coded the interviews, which augmented the internal reliability (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, Maso & Smaling, 2004). In total 263 coded statements were put into the ten different categories of basic competences. After the first categorization in this framework, a second series of interviews was conducted with the same teachers and with two additional teachers with experience in intellectual disability, to see if all the themes were covered or if elements were still missing. In what follows the authors bring the results and discussions together.

Participants of this study were consisted of primary school teachers. Settings: Self-Contained Intellectual disabilities Centre in Jeddah (IDC), as it comprehends 100 SETs males and females as shown in the table (1) below:

Primary School Setting	Number of participants	Percentage
Inclusion Schools	80	80%
Self-Contained (IDC)	20	20%
Total	100	100%

It is clear from table 1 that 80 % percent of special education teachers (SET) in Jeddah Centre works in inclusion schools but the other 20% works in self-contained schools.

Concerning variables of the participants, they were as follows;

Firstly: Gender

Gender is portrayed in table (2) as males and females

gender	Number of participants	Percentage
Male	60	60%
Female	40	40%
Total	100	100%

It is clear from table 2 that 100 participants are divided into 60 male students formed 60% of the sample and 40 female students formed 40 %

Secondly: Qualification variables

These qualification variables refer to taxonomies of SET working Jeddah Centre is shown in table (3).

Qualifications	Number of participants	Percentage
Bachelors	93	93%
Bachelors with high diploma	4	4%
Master	3	3%
Total	100	100%

It is apparent from table 3 that 93 participants of the sample have bachelors and form 93%. Four participants have bachelor with high diploma and form 4 %. Only three of the participants had master and form 3 %.

Thirdly: Years of experience

This taxonomy comprehends the number of years of teachers teaching in primary school diagnosed with ID disabilities was shown in table (4).

Years of experiences	Number of participants	Percentage
Less than 5 years	12	12%
between 5 and 10 years	38	38%
between10 and 15 years	39	39%
between 15 and 20 years	11	11%
Total	100	100%

It is clear that table 4 shows years of experience of special education teachers working in primary school with intellectual disability children, 12% of the teachers (as participants) have less than five years of experience, but between five years to ten gains 38% of the participant's experience. 39% have experience from 10 to 20 years. From 15 to 20 years of experience have 11%, all these years of work in intellectual disability school refer that participants have bulky amount of experience that qualify them to attain, treat and comprehend those identified students and be able to participate in carrying out this study.

3. DOMAINS OF EDUCATIONAL COMPETENCIES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Educational competencies entail four main taxonomies that were divided into sub components and measured in this study via a scale. All domains and sub-components are shown in table (5).

NO.	Main competencies	Abilities
The first sub-component	Planning competencies for educational program content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Designing curriculum. 2. Stating principles of special learning. 3. Identifying individual educational plan components. 4. Developing and implementing individual educational plan.

The second sub-component	Competencies of implementing educational program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching reading and writing. 2. Teaching self-care skills. 3. Teaching sensory and motor skills. 4. Teaching differential between colours, shapes and smells. 5. Stating individual differences. 6. Using a variety of methods in the education contexts. 7. Utilizing appropriate reinforcement methods. 8. Using suitable teaching aids. 9. Creating and preparing classroom environment
The third sub-component	Competencies of assessment and diagnosis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assessing the individual educational plan. 2. Understanding of the field of special education. 3. Diagnosing and classifying the children with intellectual disabilities 4. Applying the tests and scales. 5. Interpreting the results of the tests. 6. Observing and recording the behaviours. 7. Measuring the current performance. 8. Assessing the development.
The fourth sub-component	Competencies of dealing with children with ID and their parents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explaining the intellectual disability to the families. 2. Helping families to accept the disabled child. 3. Providing periodical reports for families about child's progress. 4. Developing a plan for how to dealing with the disabled child.

4. PROCEDURES OF ANALYSIS

Questionnaire concerning the participants of the study were gathered and checked. There were (109) questionnaire and there as an exclusion for 9 because the participant did not complete them, thus the valid questionnaires after check and revising were (100), I numbered each questionnaire application from 1 to 100 to be sequentially and easy to use in my computer.

5. STATISTICAL METHODS

In this study I adopt average (mean of scores) and the standard deviations to identify to the most important competencies necessary for SET and use T test and the differences between the two samples, and to the one-way analysis of variance.

6. ADMINISTRATION OF THE COMPETENCIES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' SCALE

In order to validate domains of teacher' competencies of special education, the researcher used the SPSS statistical package to calculate means, standard deviation of the mean scores and the value of the "t" test for the four components of competencies such as; planning competencies for educational program content, competencies of implementing educational program, competencies of assessment and diagnosis and competencies of dealing with children with ID and their parents. These variables also included; the teachers' years of experiences. In the same context, they belong to a similar social background, culture and the standard of living. Table (6) shows the results.

Table (6) T-test of the post administration of the the competencies of special education scale comparing the pre and post administration.

Competencies	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Designing curriculum	Pre	100	2.150	.6622	-4.870	39	.05
	Post	100	2.700	.4641			
Stating principles of special learning	Pre	100	2.275	.7841	-2.966	39	.05
	Post	100	2.725	.4522			

Identifying individual educational plan components	Pre	100	2.400	.5905	-2.562	39	.05
	Post	100	2.700	.4641			
Developing and implementing individual educational plan	Pre	100	2.150	.4267	-4.457	39	.05
	Post	100	2.600	.4961			
Teaching reading and writing	Pre	100	1.800	.6485	-7.081	39	.05
	Post	100	2.550	.5038			
Teaching self-care skills	Pre	100	1.825	.6751	-5.589	39	.05
	Post	100	2.475	.5986			
Teaching sensory and motor skills	Pre	100	2.200	.8829	-4.759	39	.05
	Post	100	2.850	.3616			
Teaching differential between colours, shapes and smells	Pre	100	1.975	.6597	-6.754	39	.05
	Post	100	2.700	.4641			
Stating individual differences	Pre	100	1.900	.5905	-5.356	39	.05
	Post	100	2.575	.5006			
Using a variety of methods in the education contexts	Pre	100	2.250	.6304	-1.599	39	.11 Not sig.
	Post	100	2.450	.5524			
Utilizing appropriate reinforcement methods	Pre	100	2.250	.5883	-1.854	39	.07 Not sig.
	Post	100	2.475	.5541			
Using suitable teaching aids	Pre	100	2.325	.5723	-1.361	39	.18 Not sig.
	Post	100	2.500	.5064			
Creating and preparing classroom environment	Pre	100	2.550	.6385	-4.000	39	.05
	Post	100	2.950	.2207			
Assessing the individual educational plan	Pre	100	1.750	.6699	-5.331	39	.05
	Post	100	2.525	.5541			
Understanding of the field of special education	Pre	100	1.875	.5633	-3.981	39	.05
	Post	100	2.300	.4641			
Diagnosing and classifying the children with intellectual disabilities	Pre	100	1.925	.5256	-4.878	39	.05
	Post	100	2.525	.5057			
Applying the tests and scales	Pre	100	2.075	.4168	-4.891	39	.05
	Post	100	2.600	.4961			
Interpreting the results of the tests	Pre	100	2.125	.4634	-4.694	39	.05
	Post	100	2.600	.4961			
Observing and recording the behaviours	Pre	100	2.050	.3889	-6.426	39	.05
	Post	100	2.650	.4830			
Measuring the current performance	Pre	100	2.175	.3848	-3.139	39	.05
	Post	100	2.450	.5038			
Assessing the development	Pre	100	1.850	.5335	-5.608	39	.05
	Post	100	2.475	.5057			
Explaining the intellectual disability to the families	Pre	100	1.375	.5401	-5.124	39	.05
	Post	100	2.025	.6597			
Helping families to accept the disabled child	Pre	100	2.275	.5541	.227	39	.8 Not sig.
	Post	100	2.250	.5883			
Providing periodical reports for families about child's progress	Pre	100	2.000	.3889	-1.554	39	.13 Not sig.
	Post	100	2.175	.5495			
Developing a plan for how to dealing with the disabled child	Pre	100	1.600	.5454	-4.000	39	.05
	Post	100	2.000	.4529			
Total	Pre	100	51.850	6.8070	-12.227	39	.05
	post	100	62.950	4.8882			

7. DISCUSSION

As reported by table (6) there is a statistically significant difference at 0.005 level between the attained mean score of pre and post administration of the competencies of special education on the experimental group of special education teachers in favor of the post administration. The estimated t-value is (-12.227); it's significant at 0.05 level in favor of the post administration of experimental group in the pre-post administration. The deviation of the post administration is higher than that of pre-administration of the experimental group. The deviation of the post administration is (4.8882) and that of the pre-administration is (6.8070) which means that values of the experimental group in pre administration were greater than those of the experimental group.

7.1. The first question

Hypothesis 1 “there is no statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies needed for special education teacher dealing with children with ID and their parents.”

Question 1: What are the needed educational competencies such as planning competencies for educational program content, implementing educational program, Assessment and Diagnosis and dealing with children with ID and their parents for special education teachers working with intellectual disability students in primary schools in Saudi Arabia?

To verify that question, the researcher used the mean scores and the standard deviations for each dimensions and sorted sequentially as following in the next table

Table (7) explain the relative importance of the four dimensions of competencies required for SETs working with intellectual disability students.

Scale Dimensions	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	η^2	Effect size
Planning for content educational	Pre	40	1.18	.712	-6.919	39	.05	.551	Middle
	Post	40	2.15	.533					
Implementing educational program	Pre	40	1.20	.911	-6.333	39	.05	.507	Middle
	Post	40	2.18	.636					
Assessment and diagnosis	Pre	40	1.15	.362	-4.462	39	.05	.337	Middle
	Post	40	1.85	.949					
Dealing with families and their children	Pre	40	1.13	.463	-3.365	39	.05	.225	Middle
	Post	40	1.73	.987					
Total	Pre	40	5.90	1.837	-9.776	39	.05	.710	Middle
	Post	40	10.45	2.375					

Table (7) reveals that all the educational competencies of special education teachers of four dimensions of competencies scale and in the total score of the four dimensions of competencies pre-post scale. Table (7) also reveals that planning for educational content, implementing educational program, assessment and diagnosis, dealing with families and their children are the most important dimension (i.e. mean= 2.15, 2.18, 1.85 and 1.73). However, all differences between the pre-post administrations of the experimental group were significant at 0.05 level. So the alternative hypothesis is accepted entitled as “there is a statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies of special education teacher in qualifications”.

7.2. The second question

Are there any significant statistical differences in assessing the necessary competencies for SETs based on qualifications?

Hypothesis 2 “there is no statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies of special education teacher in qualifications”.

In order to substantiate this hypothesis, the Independent Sample T-test for two groups, according to the demographic factor, was used. Results are shown in table 8

Table (8) One-way Anova of the post administration of educational competencies of special education teacher qualification.

Scale Dimensions	Mean	F-Value	P-Value
Bachelors	3.510	3.970	0.004
Bachelors with high diploma	3.694	2,228	0.064
Master	3.145	2.559	0.037
Total	3.721	3.905	0.004

Through reviewing and checking table (8), it is obvious from One-way Anova statistics that the scale is totally insignificant, and this means that the second hypothesis is not accepted and the alternative hypothesis enclosed in ‘*there is a statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies of special education teacher in qualifications.*’

In the same context, teachers with master’s degrees are more effective than those who have only bachelors.

7.3. The third Question

Are there any significant statistical differences in assessing the necessary educational competencies for SETs based gender?

Hypothesis 3 “*there is no statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies of special education teacher in gender?*”

To verify the third question, the researcher counted the statistical mean scores and the Independent Sample T-test for two groups, according to the demographic factor for differences to responses of participants regarding necessary competencies for SETs were used. Results are shown in table 9

Gender	number	Mean score	S. D.	T. Value	D. F	Significance
Males	60	108.9400	7.31792	0.170	198	0.865
Females	40	108.7500	8.42840			

Via surfing table (9), it is clear that there are no significant differences between males and females in necessary competencies for SETs, so the null hypothesis is accepted and asserted that “*there is no statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies of special education teacher in gender. In the same respect, it is considered that males and females are equal in the above-mentioned competencies.*”

Instrument of the study (Questionnaire):

For substantiating the questionnaire, the researcher built according to Lickert’s system for stating necessary competencies for SETs. For achieving reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher re-administered it for a separate piloting sample comprehended 25 participants and they got (0.847). Concerning validity of the questionnaire, the researcher presented it to a group of seven jurors of specialists in psychology. The specialists juried and stated its suitability for the aim of the study and linguistic properness. The validity rate was between 79 -89%. So, the instrument is validated for application.

7.4. The fourth Question

Are there any significant statistical differences in assessing the necessary educational competencies for SETs based on years of experiences?

Hypothesis 4 “*there is no statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies of special education teacher in years of experiences?*”

To verify the third question, the researcher counted the statistical mean scores and the Independent Sample T-test for two groups, according to the demographic factor for differences to responses of participants regarding necessary competencies for SETs were used. Results are shown in table 10

Table (10) One-way Anova and means of the effect of educational competencies of special education teacher qualification and Years of experiences

Years of experiences	Mean	F-Value	P-Value
Less than 5 years	3.510	3.960	0.004
between 5 and 10 years	3.694	2,238	0.064
between10 and 15 years	3.135	2.549	0.037
between10 and 15 years	3.731	3.905	0.004
between 15 and 20 years	3.142	2,238	0.064
Total	3.123	3.231	0.003

Through reviewing the previous table, it is apparent that the following hypothesis “*there is no statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies of special education teacher in years of experience*” is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted “*there is a statistically significant difference at 0.005 levels in educational competencies of special education teacher in years of experience*”. So, it is regarded that the more experience the teacher gains, the more he become efficient in dealing with ID students.

7.5. General discussion

It is a significant issue in our recent life as many families face difficulty in treating their ID children even so at schools too. According to the results of the recent study, it become obvious those competencies are significant for all teachers who work with special education teachers working with intellectual disability students in primary school in Saudi Arabia. In the same context, qualifications have an effective role in shaping teachers effectiveness but in contrast gender has no effect. Also, years of experience are so important in dealing with intellectual disability students.

Cooperation between the teacher and the parents is a critical factor for special education to succeed. The teacher must be able to accept that parents are very much present at school, and that they are partners in an open discussion on objectives, adaptations, evaluation, approach and future prospects. In the same respect, they need more help and support in dealing with their disable child. As a teacher you must show your interest to parents, not using jargon and adopting an open and authentic attitude. Next to that, the teacher must be able to discuss the learning process and the developments of the child, in relation to the individual process of the child, not in comparison to other children. It is important that the child, and broader, that each child can be who it wants to be, with its capabilities and its disabilities.

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