

## **The Attitudes of General Education Teachers toward Inclusion program of Students with Autism in KSA**

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**Abstract:** *The study aimed to know The Attitudes of General Education Teachers Toward Inclusion program of Students with Autism in KSA. And use Descriptive method. The sample of the study consisted of (93) male and female with General education teachers in KSA. Questionnaire trends were applied to data collection. The results showed that the did not indicate considerable differences among educators' attitudes regarding their current grade level, the results did not indicate a considerable overall attitude based on gender. In other words, attitudes concerning inclusion scores did not change between males and females, the higher the number of teaching experience, the less receptive the educators were towards involving learners with autism, especially in the regular education learning environment. In light of the results, the study suggested some recommendations.*

**Key Words:** *Attitudes, General Education Teachers, Students with Autism, KSA.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Studies have demonstrated that although Saudi Arabia's education system dates back to hardly two centuries ago, its special education system and services were inceptioned in 1957 (Alamri & Tyler-Wood, 2016). Since its formation, Saudi's special education borders have expanded rapidly, and the growth is still ongoing hitherto. According to Alamri and Tyler-Wood (2016), the education system has significantly transformed from focusing on citizens are blind to a more diverse approach of dealing with individuals with special needs. Learners with such needs have received proper education care thanks to the laws implemented by the Saudi Ministry of Education (Denman, Smart, Dallos, & Levett, 2016; Laserna, Seih, & Pennebaker, 2014; Karim, Cook, & O'Reilly, 2012). These legal frameworks have ensured that Saudi policies offer inclusion of learners with special needs, especially in their least restrictive environment (Al-Nahdi, 2007). Learners with autism have increasingly gained media attention; forcing learning institutions in Saudi to Therefore, the developments and the dramatic increase in the number of students with autism have prompted learning institutions to implement more programs to cater for students with autism (Gaad, 2010; Jonsdottir, Saemundsen, Antonsdottir, Sigurdardottir, & Olason, 2011). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that teacher's attitude determines whether an inclusion program will succeed or fail (Booth, & Statham, 2003; Hepburn, & Potter, 2011; Lester & Paulus, 2012). In other words, it is appropriate for educators to have a positive attitude regarding the need to make inclusion successful in the learning environment. At the same time, many different elements often affect teachers' position concerning including students with autism like the level of teachers training.

### **The Problem of the study is determined by the following questions:**

Studies have demonstrated that learners with disabilities did not receive an adequate education in regular classrooms to learn normally as their nondisabled counterparts. However, these trends have significantly changed in the last decade in Saudi Arabia. More often than not, learners with autism obtained knowledge from separate classes or different learning institutions (Abelson, 2018). However, Saudi's current focus is only ensuring that students learn in an inclusive environment regardless of their status. In this regard, many learners with autism are increasingly joining the general education-learning environment (Bohner, & Wanke, 2002; Monsen, Ewing, & Boyle, 2015). For this reason, regular education classrooms have encountered challenges due to the dramatic increase in the number of students enrolled in regular classrooms. Today, regular education teachers are facing issues for which they never trained themselves to handle (Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson, & Scott, 2013). This study focused on the attitudes of regular education teachers in Saudi Arabia concerning inclusion of learners with autism.

The primary purpose of this research was to determine the views of regular education teachers regarding the inclusion of learners with autism in the general classroom to identify personal characteristics that influenced teacher attitudes about including students with autism in Saudi Arabia. While the independent

variable was regular education teacher attitude towards the inclusion of learners with autism, the independent variables were prior experience with inclusion, past training about autism, present teaching placement, and duration of experience (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Teachers fulfil essential roles in providing an enabling environment that contributes to social and academic well-being for all learners. Inclusion is an appropriate approach for all students with exceptions like autism (Boutot & Bryant, 2005). Therefore, there was a need to answer many questions.

1. What are some of the regular education teachers' attitudes concerning inclusion of learners with autism?
2. Do the years of teaching experience, present grade level assignment, past experience with inclusion, gender, and past training about autism influence the regular education educators' attitudes concerning the inclusion of students with autism (Hernandez, Hueck, & Charley, 2016).
  - a) Do educators' attitudes toward inclusion of learners with autism differ based on their teaching experiencing duration?
  - b) Do teachers' attitudes about inclusion of learners with autism differ based on current grade level profession?
  - c) Does teachers' previous experience influence their attitudes concerning inclusion?
  - d) Do educators' attitudes about inclusion differ based on gender?
  - e) Does previous training regarding autism influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of learners with autism?
3. How precise can the attitudes of regular teachers regarding the inclusion of learners with autism be estimated from a linear integration of teaching experience duration, present grade level, experience with inclusion, gender, and past inclusion training (Kuittinen, 2017)?

## **II. Method**

### **2.1 Study Approach**

This study mainly relied on a quantitative research method. Specifically, the investigation incorporated a quasi-experimental static group, which was compared to non-equivalent groups. According to Pierce and Tincani (2007), a quantitative method allows an investigator to use post positivist claims for establishing knowledge and applying different methods of inquiry and data collection towards yielding relevant statistical data. Therefore, the study relied on quantitative approach because of the data collected to examine the links between dependent and independent variables (Weamouth, 2015; Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011). Moreover, the method often helps individuals to understand social issues naturally as opposed to experimentally (Meadows, 2003).

### **2.2 Population and Sample**

This research was mainly conducted in one school district Al Qurayyat, Saudi Arabia. This district comprised of 7 primary schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 secondary learning institutions. When the study was conducted, roughly 8, 000 students were under session within the district. Of the (8, 000) learners approximately (870) were identified as special (Alamri & Tyler-Wood, 2016). Moreover, it was discovered that the district comprises (550) teachers, but the study only considered (300) of them in the general education category while the rest were categorized as special education tutors (Chiner & Cardona, 2013; Boyle, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2013). To present the population accurately, the study narrowed down to a sample size of (168). The participants were determined through random sampling (Bornman & Donohue, 2013). Each of the learning institutions was labelled to differentiate them from the rest. Despite the previous selection of participants, the research further narrowed the number to (60) respondents from primary and middle schools. Although the sample size was 168, the investigators provided (178 ) surveys due to cluster sampling method used in the process.

### **2.3 Instrument**

Based on the limited number of relevant survey instruments to be used in this research, the investigators designed a new survey to investigator teacher attitudes concerning inclusion of learning with autism (Daniels & Gamer, 2013). The instrument was created following a close examination of the study literature (Forlin, 2010). In the process, the study determined that essential elements like academic benefits, administrator support, social merits, and learning environment management as related to whether an inclusion approach could succeed or fail.

**Table (1): Sample distribution by gender and Years of Experience, Previous experience with inclusion**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	30	% 32.3
Female	63	% 67.7
<b>Years of Experience</b>		
5 years and below	28	% 30.1
6 to 15 years	34	% 36.6
More than 16 years	31	% 33.3
<b>Previous experience with inclusion</b>		
No	10	% 10.8
Yes	83	% 89.2

Regarding question one, the study's results based on the data collected showed that teachers had a relatively positive attitude towards the inclusion of learners with autism in Saudi Arabia. Based on the analysis of data collected, the score of the respondents was 0.1813 with a standard variation of 0.5936, showing that teachers slightly preferred including learners with autism in the general classroom. Concerning research question 2a, the research determined that teachers with 0-5 years of experience scored highly compared to educators with 6-15 years, including 16 years and above. In fact, teachers with below 5 years' experience had a score of .55 while those with 6 to 15 years had .14 and 16 years above .14. The following table shows the results.

### III. Results

**Table (2): Descriptive Statistics Attitudes towards Inclusion**

Years of Teaching Experience	N	Mean	SD
Below 5 years	28	0.55	0.50
5 to 15 years	34	0.14	0.58
More than 16 years	31	0.14	0.63

Moreover, regarding question 2b, from the analysis of data using ANOVA approach, the results did not indicate considerable differences among educators' attitudes regarding their current grade level (Hassanein, 2015). Moreover, the results demonstrated that the ANOVA's Overall Score did not reveal any significant variation based on the teaching placement.

In the perspective of question 2c, data analysis showed no considerable differences regarding the overall score and previous experience with inclusion. Further study results demonstrated that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion did not change based on the previous experience with inclusion. The following figure shows the results based on the link between previous experience and attitude.

**Table (3): Descriptive Statics for Previous Experience with Inclusion**

Previous Experience	N	Mean	SD
NO	10	0.43	0.64
Yes	83	0.24	0.59

Regarding question 2d, the results did not indicate a considerable overall attitude based on gender. In other words, attitudes concerning inclusion scores did not change between males and females. The following figure illustrates the results.

**Table (4): Descriptive Statics for Inclusion Attitudes regarding Gender**

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	30	0.25	0.60
Female	63	0.27	0.60

At the same time, question 2e was answered through results, which showed that teachers with 6 hours and above of training scored high compared to those with 0 hours of the process. This finding indicates that educators' attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with autism were not the same across different levels of time spent on training about autism (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003).

**Table (5): ANOVA Results on Attitudes Inclusion, by Amount of Training Regarding Autism**

Variable	df	F	P	n 2
Overall Score	2	4.007	0.022	0.082
Error	90			

In regards to question 3, regression analysis determined that although years of experienced was closely linked to attitudes towards inclusion, it did not determine the attitudes of educators. In fact, the higher the

number of teaching experience, the less receptive the educators were towards involving learners with autism, especially in the regular education learning environment. On the contrary, the time taken on inclusion training was considerably and positively linked to attitudes regarding inclusion (EADSNE, 2003). At the same time, the more time participants took to train, the more receptive they became regarding the inclusion of learners with autism in the regular learning settings. The following table shows the results.

**Table (6): Regression Results for Attitudes toward Inclusion of Children with Autism in the Regular Education Classroom (N=93)**

Model	B	SE	Beta	n 2	t	Sig.
Years of Experience	0.248	0.073	0.334	0.107	3.415	0.001
Previous Experience	0.152	0.183	0.080	0.005	0.829	0.409
Hours of Training	0.298	0.083	0.346	0.111	3.579	0.001

Note. R=.445 and R 2= 198.

### III. Discussion

Data analysis concerning question 2a demonstrated that teachers with 0-5 years of experience scored highly compared to those within 6-15 years and 16 years and above. This finding concurs with an investigation conducted by Halmour and Obaidat (2010), which demonstrated that regular teachers with less than five years of experience possessed high positive attitudes than those with 5 to 10 years, 15 to 20 years, and 20 to 25 years. One conclusion that can be derived from this finding is that younger teachers are abreast with disabilities and technology, which makes them more accommodating of students with special needs in the classroom (Preece & Trajkovski, 2017). Various stakeholders have emphasized the inclusion of technology in the learning environment to help students with disabilities, especially in the regular classroom (Halmour & Obaidat, 2013; Ahsan, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012).

In question 2b, data analysis revealed that the overall score did not affect grade level. This finding corresponds to the issues in the past research concerning attitude based on the grade level of teachers' duties. As reported by Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden (2000), most teachers agreed that their attitudes towards mainstream become negative as their grade level rises. Furthermore, the gap between current and past studies may be attributed to the lack of though research concerning the attitude of teachers towards inclusion in the secondary level of education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Grinker & Cho, 2013). Even more, there has been limited research regarding the relationship between teachers' attitude and autism in the learning environment.

Data analysis about question 2c demonstrated that no considerable differences were present based on the previous experience of educators with inclusion. According to research conducted by Van Reusen, Shoho, and Barker (2001), experienced teachers possessed more positive attitudes. Further studies conducted by author Hassan, Ahmed, and Alasmari (2015) showed that positive attitudes were significantly affected by prior experiences with children with disabilities. Nevertheless, the contradiction in the present research may be attributed to the possibility of negative attitudes of respondents in past studies. Even more, lack of proper relationship between attitude and inclusion may be linked to the increasing number of learners enrolled in the regular education systems in Saudi Arabia (Dukmak, 2013; Hayashi, Raymond & Sidnell, 2013).

Data analysis for question 2d revealed that no considerable difference was noted regarding gender. In this way, this finding corresponds to those demonstrated by Avramidis et al., (2000), and Van Reusen et al. (2001), in which it was found that gender did not have any influence on attitude regarding inclusion. In fact, the link between gender and teacher attitude has remained incomplete due to various reasons present in the past empirical literature (Saloviita, 2018; Mngo and Mngo, 2018; and Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006). For instance, authors have reported that gender and teacher attitude relationship is not consistent. Therefore, gender and teacher attitude link may remain elusive.

Additionally, question 2e analysis revealed that teachers with over 6 hours of training had a higher score than those who had 0 hours of training. This discovery corresponds to past research literature. For instance, Sarı, Çeliköz, and Seçer (2009) (as cited in Little, 2017) demonstrated that teachers with a positive view regarding inclusion are directly related to training. According to Van Reusen, Shoho & Barker, (2006), a teacher's acceptance or resistance to inclusion of students with autism is linked to his or her knowledge base and experiences. As indicated in this study, educators with sufficient knowledge about inclusion and disabilities have a high level of attitudes towards inclusion of students with autism and other special needs (Wilkerson, 2012; Florian, 2012; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995).

Concerning question 3, data analysis revealed that teachers with thorough teaching experience did not have any positive perception regarding inclusion (Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). At the same time, people with expertise from training about autism possess better perceptions about inclusion. Therefore, these findings correspond to past literature about autism and level of teaching experience.

#### IV. Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is important for teachers currently working in Saudi Arabia and have over 5 years of experience to seek further training concerning disability types. Other areas where they should acquire further knowledge include teaching techniques and accommodation of learners with different abilities in the regular education environment (EADSNE, 2003). Secondly, further research is necessary to determine teachers' attitudes towards learners with autism, especially at the secondary level. Moreover, as many teacher education programs are increasingly becoming common in Saudi, more of the initiatives should be designed to expose teachers to disability types and ways of accommodating learners regardless of their disabilities. Furthermore, teachers should have an opportunity to access further education and training regarding topics like disability types to encourage inclusion in the learning environment (Hussien, 2009; Ainscow, 2007; Kluth, 2017). Nevertheless, research has demonstrated that learners with autism and increasingly enrolling in schools in Saudi Arabia. However, the increasing number is not proportional to the number of teachers' present in schools. Educators have a slightly positive attitude regarding learners with autism (Kukoff, 2013; United Nations, 2006). Therefore, the above recommendations must be given the necessary attention to improving teacher attitude and inclusion perceptions.

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