The Differences in the Attitudes of Students With and Without Learning Disabilities Towards Including Students With Mild Intellectual Disability in Elementary Regular Schools in Bahrain

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences in the attitudes of the students with and without learning disabilities (LD) towards including the learners with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools. Participants were 120 elementary boys and girls in Bahraini elementary schools. A survey was used here to identify the students’ attitudes towards the inclusion of the children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools. The results indicated that: (1) There was a positive attitude among elementary students towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools; (2) there were statistically significant differences among the students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools in favour of the typically developing group; and (3) there were statistically significant differences among the male and female students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools in favour of females.

Keywords: attitudes, inclusion, learning disabilities, mild intellectual disability

Introduction

Including the students with special needs in society is a great and advanced step and different rehabilitation programs recently consider a main purpose for the rehabilitation of the individuals with special needs. The Kingdom of Bahrain has given more attention to and interest in the individuals with intellectual disability and their services. The view to this group has changed much at the policy makers’ and public levels.

Inclusion does not mean teaching all the disabled-children in regular classrooms, but providing equal learning opportunities to the children with mild intellectual disability through enrolling in a learning environment more convenient and able to meet their special needs. The method of inclusion means providing enough services and care to the individuals with special needs in a setting far from offering its services to the students with special needs for a specific period of time.

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2005), inclusion is a dynamic approach to a respond positively to different students with various potentials, abilities, and needs and to see their individual differences as an opportunity to enrich and activate their learning, not as problems.

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Educational inclusion means providing opportunities to the students with simple special needs to receive education with typically developing learners as much as possible. This means their participation in instructional activities that they can do effectively and successively. In case those students are not able to participate due to lacking necessary academic skills, it is possible to make all efforts to include them in non-academic activities, such as physical education, rest time, some special academic activities and subjects (Al-Khateeb, 2004).

Problem of Research

There is no doubt that inclusion has its own educational, scientific rules and terms that should be available before, during, and after its implementation. Moreover, inclusion has become an overwhelming issue in the field of special education. The opponents of inclusion are concerned about depriving the students with special needs of facilities, services, and care: educational, psychological, social, or others. Although there is a world agreement and approval concerning inclusion, it is not easy; it requires preparing not only a good administration, well-qualified staff, and learners, but also collaborative efforts through educational authorities and the whole society.

Students’ attitudes towards including their peers with intellectual disability in regular schools play a vital role in determining the success of the inclusion process. Students’ negative attitudes may turn the inclusion process into a passive experience for the students with intellectual disability (Al-Khateeb & Al-Hadidi, 2011). Research, such as Johnston and Dixon (2006), Al-Jendy (2004), and Thompson, Emrich, and Moore (2003), indicated that the students, who did not receive training or had no experience in working with disabled individuals had passive attitudes towards inclusion. Accordingly, it is very important to identify the students’ attitudes towards their peers with intellectual disability who are included in regular schools. Negative attitudes towards including the students with intellectual disability in regular schools lead to decisions, such as rejection, segregation, separation, denial, negligence, and ignorance.

There is no enough information about the students’ attitudes towards including the learners with intellectual disability in regular schools. Therefore, this study aims to identify the differences in the attitudes of the students with and without learning disabilities towards the inclusion process of the individuals with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools.

Research Questions

Research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the elementary school students’ attitudes towards the inclusion process of the individuals with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools?

2. Are there statistically significant differences among the students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools in favour of the typically developing group?

3. Are there statistically significant differences among the male and female students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools in favour of females?

Research Objectives

This study has three objectives:
(1) To identify the elementary school children’s attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools;

(2) To investigate the differences among the students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools in favour of the typically developing group;

(3) To examine the differences among the male and female students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools.

**Importance of Research**

The importance of this study lies in its theme. Inclusion represents and embodies all the human, ethical and cultural aspects. However, inclusion will not be easy and achievable with the students with intellectual disability if there are not reasons for its success, particularly the students’ attitudes towards their peers with intellectual disability. Hence, this research seeks to identify the differences among the students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools.

**Terminology**

**Attitude**

Tesser (1993) argued that an attitude is a hypothetical structure that represents love or hatred to a specific object. Some believe that an attitude is a relative, constant, learned mental, and emotional predisposition that determines one’s feelings and behaviour towards all different parameters. An attitude, in this study, is procedurally defined as the students’ attitude towards the inclusion process for the students with mild intellectual disability from psychological, social, and educational sides. This is expressed in a student’s score on the instrument used here.

**Inclusion**

Inclusion means to provide all services and care to the individuals with special needs in a setting free from separation and segregation; it is a regular classroom in a regular school, or a special classroom in a regular school, or in what is called a “source room” which offers its services to the students with special needs for some time (Al-Zayyat, 2009).

**Learning Disabilities**

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada defined learning disabilities in 2002 as:

Learning disabilities refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency. Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering, or learning. These include and not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g., planning and decision-making).

**Students With Learning Disabilities**

Al-Qaruti, Al-Saratawi, and Al-Samadi (2012) referred to students who suffer from learning difficulties as normal students in terms of mental disability, with no physical disability or emotional disorders. Yet, they are not
able to learn basic skills. Procedurally, in this study, they are defined as those learners diagnosed by school to have learning disabilities, attending regular classrooms and resources room in regular schools.

**Intellectual Disability**

The American Association for Mental Retardation (2002) defined an intellectual disability as “a deficit in functional performance and adaptive behavior through social, conceptual, and applied adaptive skills before the age of 18” (Beirne-Smith, Patton, & Kim, 2006).

**Regular Schools**

Regular schools are those public and private schools for boys and girls, which apply and provide inclusive programs for the children with special needs.

**Typical Developing Students**

Typical developing students are learners with normal mental abilities and achievement level. Procedurally, they are regular students in governmental general education schools in terms of regular curriculum, with average or above average academic achievement.

**Research Limits**

This study occurs during the school year 2017-2018 in Bahraini elementary schools with typical developing and learning-disabled children in the sixth grade. Participants are the children with mild intellectual disability with IQ 55-70.

**Theoretical Framework & Literature**

**Attitudes.** An attitude is an individual behavior towards a person, principle, theory, or a situation, positive or negative. An attitude consists of three elements:

(1) Emotional: This component is an individual emotional position towards a stimulus, theme, thought, or an idea, which is represented in the form of love, hatred, pleasure, or comfort;

(2) Cognitive: This component concerns knowledge, experiences, and beliefs related to an attitude;

(3) Behavioral: This element represents experiences and the style of socialization which form behavioral patterns supposed to match and fit the two elements mentioned above.

The most influential factors in an attitude are: (a) common public culture; (b) parental social and cultural status; (c) peers and local community; (d) personal experiences; (e) physical and health state; and (f) the media. An attitude can be expressed verbally or practically.

An attitude has several jobs:

(1) Utilitarian: It means to get more reward and less punishment;

(2) Self-defensive: It means an individual’s attitudes to protect him or her against understanding his or her deficit through refusal mechanism which avoids dissatisfactory facts, thus more related to an individual’s needs, motives than objective properties;

(3) Expressing values: A person tries to express his or her values and commitments and to admit and confess them;

(4) Cognitive: This means that there is harmony in different situations in a way to have a constant attitude, avoiding waste or distraction.

Negative attitudes towards the individuals with special needs are considered one of the most outstanding social and psychological barriers in the field of special education. The concept of attitudes is one of the most
outstanding and common in the field of psychology. Attitudes towards a disability have occupied a big position in psychological research. The concept of attitudes is one of the most important outcomes of socialization process, and at the same time, one of the most important behavioral motives which play a central role in controlling and directing this conduct.

**Inclusion.** This increasing interest in non-typically developing individuals with their different groups in all societies in our contemporary world indicates growing awareness. Paying attention to this social group and providing care, services, and suitable job opportunities to this specific class of individuals have become one of the fundamental requirements for advanced societies. The individuals with special needs, like other groups, have rights and duties to their society and nation. The individuals with disabilities need inclusion and adaptation in and with society.

**Concept of inclusion.** The definition of inclusion is affected by the way and form it is used and applied in educational institutions. Al-Khateeb (2004) pointed to a set of definitions mentioned and described by Lewis and Doorlag:

1. Inclusion is placing the students with special needs with typically developing peers in normal classrooms, and the special education teachers provide help through resources room. This definition corresponds and fits the learners with learning disabilities;
2. It is integrating the disabled students, sociably and educationally, in regular classrooms for something in a day;
3. It means teaching the students with special needs in a normal learning environment as much as possible provided that it meets their educational and other needs in a satisfactory setting.

Inclusion can be defined as placing mild mentally disabled learners in regular classrooms, partially or wholly, to meet their needs as much as possible to adjust the living requirements as active individuals. Moreover, the concept of inclusion has no longer been limited to convince the school community and external society to accept the students with special needs to share the place, but the concept extends this border to the stage of convincing regular schools and educational decision makers to reorganize the school community in a way not to view a social education child as a true problem or barrier for the existing teaching conflict. Valid academic curricula and the level of teachers’ competences are the essence of conflict and the main point that should be the basis of questions if those children fail in regular schools.

Finding a convenient teaching place for the children with special needs is no longer the biggest burden for all workers in the field of special education. Regular schools start to occupy the front and leading position in terms of being convenient and suitable for many children with special needs, therefore, all efforts are centered around making important and necessary changes in first and primary procedures and precautions in the learning process to include the children with special needs with typically developing peers in regular schools.

The success of the children with special needs in general education schools requires co-operation among all parties having those children including teachers, specialists, typical peers, and families of those children, to facilitate providing true and realistic inclusion and proper teaching services to those children (Tapasak & Walther-Thompson, 1999).

Additionally, the opportunities for a child with special needs to acquire appropriate social and linguistic skills remain the best in regular schools where there is a suitable model that can be replicated and imitated in such skills and others among all typically developing children who share a child this school. A lot of research
indicated that the probability of academic performance improvement is related to positive, emotional, and psychological changes which occur for children with special needs due to improving their self-concept. This improvement in those children’s self-concept happens because of the improvement in the level of social skills and language. Both aspects apparently contribute to improving social interactions and the ability to build and form successful relationships with others in a way to provide those children with better opportunities to learn and acquire teaching skills (Freeman & Alkin, 2000).

**Intellectual Disability**

The American Association for Mental Retardation defined an intellectual disability as:

> …An essential deficit in the present functional performance concurring below average mental performance with deficit in two or more fields of communication, self-care skills, domestic living skills, social skills, using the community sources, self-direction skills, health and safety skills, functional academic skills, spending free time, work and independence skills in life, which manifests before the age of ten.

In 2002, the American Association for Mental Retardation (2002) defined an intellectual disability as “a deficit in functional performance and adaptive behavior through social, conceptual, and applied adaptive skills before the age of 18” (Beirne-Smith, Patton, & Kim, 2006).

An intellectual disability can be defined as a developmental mental deficit that has a negative effect on an adaptive behaviour which suits this deficit represented in social, conceptual, and training aspects.

**Literature**

Al-Qaruti, Al-Saratawi, and Al-Samadi (2012) aimed to identify the attitudes of the national university towards disabled individuals and their relationship with some variables: gender, major, and the school year. The sample consisted of 93 male and female college students. A scale to measure the attitudes towards disabled students was used in this study. The results indicated that there were positive attitudes towards disabled students, and there were no significant differences attributed to variables.

Malinen and Savolainen (2008) examined students’ attitudes towards including disabled children in general education. The sample consisted of 523 Chinese students. An inclusion survey was used to assess public attitudes towards inclusion. Findings showed that the sample had negative attitudes towards inclusion. There were four necessary factors for the inclusion process: social justice, meeting severe intellectually-disabled learners’ needs, education quality, and teachers’ competence.

Judy (2007) investigated the attitudes of foreign studies students in News Land University towards handicapped students in the light of some variables (sex, age, experience) and the effect of introducing a study unit in curriculum for the disabled children on the attitudes towards the disabled individuals. Participants were 219 male and female students in the second and third years. Results showed that there were no significant differences in the attitudes of the second- and third-year students in both groups on attitudes scale and no significant differences attributed to the impact of a study unit on the students’ attitudes towards the disabled learners.

Johnson and Dixon (2006) examined the effect of a training program for developing the attitudes of Sidney university students towards the disabled learners. The sample was 379 male and female students in the second year. Findings indicated that the college students had positive attitudes towards the disabled learners, and there were significant differences in favour of the females.
Bataineh and Al-Jarrah (2005) investigated the nature of students’ attitudes towards disabled learners and the relationship between these attitudes and gender, academic level, GPA (grade point average), major, and residence. Participants were 340 male and female students. An attitude instrument was used here. Findings showed that the participants had positive attitudes towards the disabled, there were significant differences in their attitudes in favour of females and the fourth-year students, and there were no significant differences attributed to different GPA or residence.

Al-Rahaal (2005) investigated students’ attitudes towards disabled individuals in the light of some factors (specialty and gender). The sample included 204 male and female students. The results indicated that there was no difference in participants’ attitudes towards disabled individuals by their specializations, female students’ attitudes were more positive than males, and there were no differences in the sample’s attitudes relative or not relative to disabled people.

Al-Jendy (2004) aimed to develop a training program to change the attitudes of the typically developing children towards their special needs peers, increase their cognitive level about disabled individuals and disability, and raise their acceptance for and interactions with them. Participants included 60 sixth male and female graders assigned into two boys and two girls schools. Two tools were used: attitudes towards special needs students and knowledge about disability and disabled students. Findings showed that there were statistically significant differences among the attitudes of the experimental and control groups towards the students with special needs on the post-test in favour of the former group.

Thompson, Emrich, and Moore (2003) examined the effect of curriculum and experience on students’ attitudes towards their disabled peers in the light of prior experience and chronological age. Participants were 41 students exposed to situations and experiences that helped them to recognize and understand a disability and its types. Attitudes scale was used (pre- & post-). Results revealed that older students had positive attitudes towards a disabled person compared to younger students. Moreover, more experienced students had more positive attitudes, and curriculum and experience affected their attitudes.

After this comprehensive review for the literature, it is concluded that there were differences in attitudes towards the inclusion process, and most students had negative attitudes towards disabled individuals. Moreover, some variables (gender, specialization, and level) affected students’ attitudes towards the disabled students. Research pointed out the importance of examining students’ attitudes towards their peers with disability and the significance of these attitudes as a basic element in preparing and facilitating the task of inclusion, thus increasing opportunities to accept the learners with disability in regular schools.

**Methodology & Procedures**

**Method**

A comparative and descriptive method was used here because it was convenient and suitable to the study objectives.

**Variables**

Research variables were attitudes, inclusion, and an intellectual disability.

**Participants**

Participants in this study included 120 boys and girls (60 with learning disabilities and 60 without learning disabilities, 80 females and 40 males).
Instrument

A survey was specially developed, and both researchers reviewed and benefited from books and research that examined the inclusion process.

Validity

Validity criterion was used through exposing the survey items to a panel of special education and educational psychology specialists (N = 6). The initial form of the tool consisted of 40 items, and all items got 80 and more were included in the tool. All notes concerning modification and change were taken into account, and the final form of the instrument consisted of 36 items as seen in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Reliability

Test-retest was used with a sample of 35 students to assess the instrument reliability with a two-week interval. Reliability coefficients ranged from 0.76 to 0.87. Additionally, a coefficient of internal consistence for the sample was computed by using Alpha Cronbach, and reliability coefficients ranged from 0.86 to 0.90.

Scoring

Positive items earned 5 to the response “very strongly agree”, 4 to “strongly agree”, 3 to “fairly agree”, 2 to “little agree”, and 1 to “disagree”. Scores were reversed in negative items.

Procedures

After verifying the instrument validity and reliability, it was administered to the sample including typically developing and learning-disabled students.

Research Questions

(1) What are the elementary school students’ attitudes towards the inclusion process of the individuals with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools?

(2) Are there statistically significant differences among the students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability?

(3) Are there statistically significant differences among the students with and without learning in regular elementary schools in favour of the typically developing group?

(4) Are there statistically significant differences among the male and female students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools?

Results

Question 1: What are the elementary school students’ attitudes towards the inclusion process of the individuals with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools?

Table 1 shows that elementary school students’ attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability were positive. A limit degree (LD) between positive and negative attitudes was 128, median was 154.43, and the difference between them was statistically significant.

Question 2: Are there statistically significant differences among the students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools in favour of the typically developing group?
Table 1

Attitudes of Elementary School Students Towards Including the Children With Mild Intellectually Disability in Regular Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>LD</th>
<th>FS</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>154.43</td>
<td>7.95</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>47.453</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Differences Among the Students With Learning Disabilities and Typically Developing Students in Their Attitudes Towards Including Mild Intellectually Disabled Children in Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>fd</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>57.704</td>
<td>5.422</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>9.110</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45.610</td>
<td>6.737</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61.601</td>
<td>2.650</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>2.347</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>59.180</td>
<td>2.301</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55.241</td>
<td>3.257</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1.978</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51.420</td>
<td>3.465</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>173.255</td>
<td>6.124</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>7.229</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>160.220</td>
<td>7.760</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 2, there were statistically significant differences among the learning-disabled and typically developing individuals in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools in the three dimensions and the total score on the scale, in favour of the typically developing group.

Question 3: Are there statistically significant differences among the male and female students with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools?

Discussion

Question 1:

The results for the first question showed that the elementary school children’s attitudes were positive, in the three dimensions and the scale total score, towards including their peers with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools, and matched cultural, ethical, and human values regardless of the availability of the objective conditions for the success of the inclusion process.

Table 3

Differences Among Females and Males With Learning Disabilities in Their Attitudes Towards Including Children With Intellectual Disability in Regular Elementary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>fd</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>52.505</td>
<td>6.656</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>3.778</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47.501</td>
<td>6.748</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>63.580</td>
<td>2.551</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>2.873</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55.825</td>
<td>2.447</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>59.524</td>
<td>3.272</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1.718</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53.353</td>
<td>3.342</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>166.171</td>
<td>7.585</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>3.483</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>160.732</td>
<td>7.976</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen in Table 3, there were statistically significant differences in the three dimensions and the total score on the scale among females and males with learning disabilities and typically developing ones in their attitudes towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools, in favour of the females.

Question 2:

Findings showed that there were statistically significant differences among the children with and without learning disabilities in their attitudes, in the three dimensions and the total score, towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools, in favour of the typically developing students. This result revealed that typically developing students recognized and understood the inclusion process and the characteristics of the children with mild intellectual disability and felt more sympathetic with them. Furthermore, normal students were more able than the students with learning disabilities in the success of the inclusion process.

Question 3:

The results in this question indicated that there were statistically significant differences among females and males learning disabilities in their attitudes, in the three dimensions and the total score, towards including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular elementary schools, in favour of females.

This finding may be explained that females are generally more sympathetic and sensitive than males to the state of the children with intellectual disability because a girl extends a home as a mother and is more open to absorb the mild intellectually disabled children. Those children may need more care, attention, and love, and females embody this more than boys.

**Recommendations**

A few recommendations are offered here:

(1) To promote including the children with mild intellectual disability in regular schools provided that all means of success should be available;

(2) It is necessary to prepare regular school children to accept the children with mild intellectual disability;

(3) Assessing the inclusion experiment as perceived by parents, teachers, and personnel.

**References**


