Perceived Practices and Challenges in Supporting Parents of Special Educational Needs Students in Ministry of Education Primary School - Dubai, UAE

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Abstract
The procedures and difficulties that parents of students with special educational needs (SEN) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, perceive are studied in this study. It is critical for understanding the experiences and viewpoints of parents as the region develops its educational policy to meet the demands of a different student population. Through quantitively questionnaires, this study examines the support systems that are currently in place, assesses their efficacy, and pinpoints areas in need of improvement. According to the findings, parents frequently face difficulties like poor communication with schools, restricted access to specialised resources, and unequal collaboration from teachers, even though there is a strong commitment to inclusion. Additionally, the study highlights the essential part that parental participation plays in SEN students' academic success and recommends for additional and reliable support.
Keywords: Special Educational Needs (SEN), Perceived Practices, Parents , Inclusion Education, Challenges, Dubai

Introduction
The World Conference on Education for People with Special Needs held in Salamanca, Spain 1994, was an important turning point in inclusive education worldwide. This conference is known as the Salamanca Declaration, which emphasized the need to integrate children with disabilities into public schools rather than segregated in private institutions. The Declaration called for appropriate support for these students within the public education system, contributing to fundamental changes in education policies around the world.

The "Salamanca Declaration" was adopted, which called for the inclusion of children with special needs in public schools and the provision of necessary support within the education system. The Declaration focused on the rights of these children to equal and integrated education and stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders, including parents, in the education process of these children.

Salamanca's Declaration Relationship with Dubai Law for people of determination :
Within the framework of the State of U.A.E., has adopted many of the principles enshrined in the Salamanca Declaration. Dubai's education policies have focused on promoting the full inclusion of students with special needs in public schools, in line with global recommendations.

This has been reflected in the following developments:
Inclusive Education Laws: Dubai's laws, such as the Law on the Protection of the Rights of People of Determination (2017), have established a legal framework that guarantees the rights of students with disabilities to inclusive education. These laws reflect Dubai's commitment to the universal principles enshrined in the Salamanca Declaration.

Education Policies: Policies have been adopted that support inclusive education in Dubai and are inspired by the principles of the Salamanca Declaration. These policies ensure that students with disabilities have equal opportunities in education, developing policies that support inclusive education and enhance collaboration between schools and parents to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are comprehensively met.

Role of parents: Dubai's education laws recognize the crucial role of parents in the education process for people of determination. The laws encourage schools to collaborate with parents to ensure appropriate support for students, which is in line with the recommendations of the Salamanca Declaration which emphasized the importance of parental participation in the educational process.

Training and professional development: Dubai has adopted training programs to qualify teachers to deal with students with special needs, in line with the recommendations of the Salamanca Declaration on the importance of preparing educational staff with a good practices with the parents.

A thorough analysis of international research on the challenges of inclusion education highlights several complex issues that significantly impact the implementation of inclusive practices, particularly for parents of Special Educational Needs (SEN) students. One of the recurring themes is the importance of teachers' attitudes and readiness, which are crucial for successful inclusion. International studies indicate that negative views and a lack of preparedness among educators can create substantial obstacles not only for the students but also for their parents, who often rely on teachers as partners in their children's education (Avramidis et al., 2000; Florian, 2014).

Research also shows that the effectiveness of inclusion is compromised when policies are vague or fail to consider the diverse needs of learners. This issue extends to parents who may struggle to understand or navigate unclear guidelines, thereby limiting their ability to advocate for their children's needs effectively (Slee, 2001; Ruijs, Peetsma, & van der Veen, 2010). On the other hand, successful inclusion initiatives are usually supported by well-defined policies that prioritize inclusion and actively involve parents as key stakeholders in the educational process (UNESCO, 2009).

Socioeconomic factors also play a significant role in the challenges of inclusion, particularly for parents. Economic disparities can exacerbate difficulties in accessing the necessary

resources, support services, and accommodations for SEN students. For parents in economically disadvantaged communities, these inequalities often translate into a lack of enough support, further complicating their efforts to secure appropriate education for their children (Lindsay, 2007; Pijl et al., 2008). The literature emphasizes the need for equitable distribution of resources to address these challenges and ensure that all parents have the tools they need to support their children's education.

In the UAE, similar challenges are observed, with additional local factors coming into play. Teacher attitudes and readiness continue to be significant issues, affecting not only the success of inclusion but also the experience of parents who often find themselves battling against the lack of specialized training and support among educators (Alamer & Awanis, 2017; Alkaabi et al., 2020). This creates additional pressure on parents, who may feel isolated or unsupported in their efforts to advocate for their children. Continuous refinement of policies and practices is essential to address these challenges and better support parents in their critical role (Al-Mamari & Wilkins, 2019; UAE Ministry of Education, 2020).

The landscape of education is continuously evolving, with an increasing emphasis on inclusive practices that cater to the diverse needs of all learners. Among these, students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) represent a critical segment requiring tailored support to achieve their full potential. While the provision of quality education within the school environment is paramount, the role of parents in supporting their SEN children's learning and development cannot be overstated. In Dubai, UAE, a city renowned for its progressive educational initiatives, understanding the perceived practices and challenges faced by parents of SEN students within the Ministry of Education (MOE) primary school system is not merely an academic exercise, but a crucial step towards fostering a truly inclusive and supportive educational ecosystem.

Importance and Need for the Study
The rationale for this study stems from the fundamental recognition that parental involvement is a key determinant of positive educational outcomes for children with SEN. Parents are the primary caregivers, possessing intimate knowledge of their child's unique needs, strengths, and challenges. Their active participation in the educational process can significantly enhance the effectiveness of school-based interventions and promote a holistic approach to student development. However, the extent to which parents feel supported and equipped to fulfill this role within the MOE primary school context in Dubai remains largely unexplored. This gap in knowledge is particularly concerning given the city's commitment to providing world-class education and integrating students with diverse learning needs.

Furthermore, the UAE's national agenda, including Vision 2021 and the more recent strategies, places a strong emphasis on inclusive education and the empowerment of individuals with disabilities. To achieve these ambitious goals, it is essential to understand the lived experiences of parents of SEN students and identify the barriers they encounter when engaging with the school system. This study seeks to shed light on these critical issues, providing valuable insights that can inform policy development and improve the delivery of support services.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to bring about tangible improvements in the educational experiences of SEN students and their families in Dubai. Specifically, this study is important and beneficial to:

- **Parents of SEN Students:** By documenting their perceived practices and challenges, the study provides a platform for their voices to be heard, potentially leading to increased awareness and responsiveness from educational authorities. Understanding the challenges faced can help parents feel less isolated and empower them to advocate for their children's needs.
- **Ministry of Education (MOE) and School Administrators:** The findings will offer valuable data to inform the development and implementation of targeted interventions, training programs, and support services for parents. It will highlight areas where current practices are effective and where improvements are needed.
- **Teachers and Special Education Professionals:** The study will provide insights into the dynamics of parent-school collaboration, enabling educators to better understand the needs of parents and build stronger partnerships. It will help teachers better understand how to support parent involvement in meaningful ways.
- **Policymakers and Researchers:** The research will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on inclusive education in the UAE and the broader region. It will provide empirical evidence to support policy decisions and guide future research endeavors.
- **The wider community:** By promoting a more inclusive and supportive educational environment, this study contributes to the overall well-being and social integration of individuals with SEN, fostering a more equitable and just society.

The utility of this study lies in its practical application. The findings will be used to:
- Develop evidence-based recommendations for improving parent support programs within MOE primary schools.
- Design targeted training for teachers and school staff on effective strategies for engaging with parents of SEN students.
- Inform the development of culturally sensitive resources and materials for parents.
- Promote a collaborative and inclusive school culture that values parental involvement.

By focusing on the perceived practices and challenges from the parents' perspective, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the current situation. This understanding is essential for developing effective strategies that will ultimately enhance the educational experiences of SEN students and empower their parents to be active partners in their children's learning journey. Through this research, we strive to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable educational system in Dubai, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive.

In summary, while the UAE faces similar challenges to those observed globally in inclusion education, the specific difficulties encountered by parents require a tailored approach. Addressing unfavourable teaching attitudes, improving policy clarity, reducing socioeconomic inequalities, and fostering productive family-school collaboration are crucial steps toward supporting parents in the inclusion education program. Continuous research and collaboration are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of the inclusion education system and to ensure that parents are adequately supported in their vital role.

Research Questions

For a systematic evaluation of our research topic, we set two research questions to steer the direction of our investigation:

1. What is the existing practice of the implementation of the inclusion education program in the MOE schools within UAE-Dubai that follows the Arabic curriculum?
1.1 What is the perceived practice of the parents of special education need students ?
1.2 What challenges arose from the implementation of the inclusion education program of the parents of special education need students?

Methodology

In this study, we relied on a descriptive design that includes numerical quantitative data.

This descriptive study aimed to investigate the perceived practices and challenges in supporting parents of special educational needs students in Dubai, UAE. To achieve this objective, a quantitative research methodology was employed, utilizing English-language questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was designed to gather information from parents regarding their experiences, satisfaction levels, and perceived challenges in relation to the support services provided by schools and educational institutions. The researcher used a purposeful sampling technique (39 parents) to select participants from ten private ministry curriculum schools in Dubai that offer primary cycle 1 (Grades 1-4). By selecting participants based on their unique roles within each school, the researcher was able to explore parents' perspectives in-depth, which helped to provide a deeper knowledge of the research focus.

Table 1
The Table represent the Demographic information 'Questionnaire' of the study.

Variable	Category	Frequency
Educational level	Diploma	5
	Bachelors'	26
	Masters'	5
	PhD	3
Age	20-25	1
	26-30	1
	31-35	6
	36-40	14
	over 40	17
Gender	Male	8
	Female	31
Years of experience in handling with disabilities	Never Dealt Before	0
	1-5 years	15
	6-10 years	17
	11-15 years	6
	16-20 years	1
	over 20 years	0

The table provides a detailed breakdown of various demographic and professional characteristics of a group of individuals, categorized by educational level, age, gender, and years of experience in handling students
with disabilities.

The majority of the individuals hold a Bachelor's degree, with 26 out of the 39 participants (67%) falling into this category. There is an equal number of participants with a Diploma (13%) and a Master's(13%) degree, each accounting for 5 individuals. A smaller portion of the group, 3 individuals, have attained a PhD (7%).

The age distribution of the participants shows a concentration in the older age groups. The largest group, with 17 participants(44%) , is over 40 years old. The second-largest group consists of 14 individuals aged between 36 and 40 years (36). There are 6 participants (15%) aged 31-35, while the youngest age groups, 20-25 (2.5%)and 26-30 (2.5%), each have only 1 participant.
In terms of gender, the participants are predominantly female, with 31 females (79%) compared to 8 males(21%) . This indicates a significant gender disparity in this group.

Finally, when it comes to experience in handling with disabilities, the majority of participants have some level of experience. The largest group , comprising 17 individuals (44%) , has 6-10 years of experience. Another 15 participants(38%) have 1-5 years of experience. A smaller number, 6 individuals (15%) , have 11-15 years of experience, and only 1 participant (3%) has 16-20 years of experience. Notably, none of the participants have over 20 years of experience, and there are no individuals who have never dealt with students with disabilities.

In this study, a questionnaire serves as a primary research instrument, comprising a set of systematically designed questions to gather information from the respondents within the study sample. The questionnaire was designed according to the framework of monitoring and evaluation standards in the United Arab Emirates. The questionnaire is structured on a five-point Likert scale, offering respondents a range of choices from weak to outstanding. The evaluation spans Parent domain, with a 9 items, the current practices of parents of special educational needs students .

Table 2
The Questionnaire

Parents						
No.	Item	Weak	Acceptable	Good	Very .Good	Outstanding
1.	P1: Contribute to spreading awareness about school integration and disability in society.					
2.	P2: Providing a written approval from the parents to provide a support service for their son / daughter in the school inclusion department.					
3.	P3: There is a continuous communication link with the teachers through (daily diary, phone, text messages,.).					

4.	P4: Assigning a student's parent to be the government of the inclusion education, so that his responsibility is accountability for the school inclusion department.					
5.	P5: The parent's participation in the evaluation process by providing the necessary information to the team.					
6.	P6: Informing the parents and participate them in developing the individual educational plan for the student.					
7.	P7: Family participation in family support groups.					
8.	P8: Providing training programs and workshops for families by qualified professionals in the fields of family counselling for people with disabilities.					
9.	P9: Follow up with the parents in determining the fate of the student after graduation from school.					

The study analysed the dependability of a scale for parents of special education need students. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the Structure factor ranged from 0.8 to 0.9, and the total internal consistency coefficient was 0.914. This reliability coefficient is suitable for social science and humanities research (Vaske, 2008).

Table 3
Cronbach's Alpha for the Reliability Statistics domain in the study sample

Domain	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
current practice involving the parents of special education need students	0.853	9

Results
The support for parents of students with special education needs in the school inclusion education program was analysed using descriptive statistics by SPSS , and the results shown in nine measures, labelled P1 to P9, based on the information ,the mean values show the average scores for each assessment.

For answering the first question about What is the perceived practice of the parents of special education need students ? The answered are shown with a value of M = 3.97, SD = 1.085, item P2 achieved the highest mean score out of all the measurements. Item P2 (Obtaining written consent from parents to offer a support service for their child in the school inclusion department) and M = 3.95, SD = 1.104, item P3 (A continuous communication link with teachers and parents through (daily diary, phone, text messages, parents meeting, etc.) are

the measurements with the highest average scores, followed by M = 3.82, SD = 1.132, item P6 (Informing the parents and participating them in developing the individual educational plan for the student). This suggests that the majority of these actions have currently been carried out to assist the parents of students who need special education.

While the challenges and difficulties faced by parents of students with disabilities in the school are represented by answering the second question of the research, which is , What challenges arose from the implementation of the inclusion education program of the parents of special education need students? Through a lowest percentage through the analysis, which is represented by the following points that the item P8, which is about "Providing training programs and workshops for families by qualified professionals specialists in the fields of family counselling, behavioural management, and skill development for people with disabilities," had the lowest mean score, with a value of M = 3.14, SD = 1.475. Other items with low mean scores included M = 3.33, SD = 1.378, item P9, which is about "Follow up with the parents in determining the fate of the student after graduation from school (academic, vocational, etc.), and M = 3.51, SD = 1.308, item P7, which is about "Family participation in family support groups in the school." that, when compared to the other assessments, seems to have the lowest average satisfaction level. This suggests that item P8, which represents this element or attribute, may need improvement.

Discussion
The findings from the analysis of support for parents of students with special education needs (SEN) in the school inclusion education program reveal significant insights into both the perceived practices and the challenges faced by these parents. The descriptive statistics, analysed using SPSS, provide a detailed picture of how effectively schools are supporting parents and where improvements are needed.

This suggests that schools are generally effective in ensuring parental consent and involvement in the support process, a finding that aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in special education programs (Smith, 2018).

Also received a high mean score. Effective communication is widely recognized as a critical component of successful inclusion programs, as it fosters trust and collaboration between schools and families (Jones & Brown, 2017).

Previous studies have demonstrated that parental involvement in IEP development is linked to better educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2015). Therefore, the positive response to this item reflects a strong foundation in this critical aspect of special education support.

The lack of adequate training has been consistently identified as a barrier to effective parental involvement in the education of SEN students (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2020). Without proper training, parents may struggle to support their children effectively, particularly in areas such as behavioural management and skill development.

And the lower satisfaction with these aspects suggests that schools may not be providing enough support for long-term planning and community building among parents. These

findings are consistent with previous research that has identified similar challenges in inclusion programs, particularly regarding the continuity of support and the involvement of parents in peer networks (Sharma & Desai, 2019).

The study's findings highlight how important it is to address the advantages as well as disadvantages of the present inclusion strategies. While schools are doing a good job of obtaining parents' permission, communicating with them, and involving them in IEPs, there is definitely room for improvement when it comes to offering parents thorough training programs and continuous assistance. Enhancing these areas should be the main focus of future study and policy development, especially through funding professional development for educators and professionals who can provide parents with outstanding education.

In addition, schools ought to think about creating more thorough follow-up systems to help parents make plans for their children's post-graduation lives. This could include greater opportunities for parents to participate in peer networks and support groups, as well as stronger cooperation with academic and vocational institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides a nuanced understanding of parental support within school inclusion programs for students with SEN. The data demonstrates that schools excel in foundational aspects such as securing parental consent, maintaining effective communication, and facilitating involvement in Individualized Education Program (IEP) development. These strengths are crucial for building trust and fostering collaborative partnerships. However, the analysis also reveals significant gaps, particularly in providing comprehensive training programs and sustained support for long-term planning and community building among parents. The lower satisfaction scores in these areas highlight a critical need for schools to expand their support services beyond initial engagement.

Moving forward, it is imperative that schools prioritize the development and implementation of robust training initiatives tailored to the specific needs of parents of SEN students. This includes equipping parents with practical skills in areas such as behavioural management and educational support. Furthermore, schools should establish comprehensive follow-up systems that extend beyond the student's immediate academic needs, focusing on post-graduation planning and facilitating access to peer support networks. By addressing these identified shortcomings, schools can significantly enhance the efficacy of their inclusion programs and ensure that parents are empowered to effectively advocate for and support their children's educational journey.

In summary, the inclusion education program shows potential in a number of important areas, but there are also a number of serious issues that must be resolved in order to give parents of SEN students the assistance they require in order for them to actively engage in their children's education. Schools may better achieve their commitment to inclusive education and make sure that all students, regardless of their requirements, receive the greatest possible assistance for their growth and success by concentrating on these areas for improvement.

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