



Obstacles of Special Education Services for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Saudi Arabia: Future Directions

Husain R Alruwaili

Saint Louis Univeristy

Abstract: Despite the rapid development of special education services in Saudi Arabia, efforts towards the implementation of special education services must be intensified. The Ministry of Education plays a critical role in addressing the fundamental issues so that it can provide quality services for students with intellectual disabilities (ID). Improvement requires consideration of obstacles that still must be addressed. Substantially, these issues can be addressed through improvement in three main: intellectual disability programs services, education curriculum development, and specialized teachers. This paper discusses these issues and suggests strategies that can be implemented to overcome barriers.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Special Education, Issues, Intellectual Disabilities, Services

INTRODUCTION

Initially, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a country that gives great attention to people with disabilities. Saudi Arabia has a financial strength because of oil, which led to the funding of education in various fields (Alquraini, 2011). Since the 1950s, Saudi Arabia has been providing special education services, including educational services, medical services, and financial support. At this time, however, education services were limited to blind student adult in Saudi Arabia (Al-Wabli, 1996) and they only provided instruction in how to use Braille. Before this time, students with disabilities traveled to other countries to receive education such as Egypt and Jordan, while others received education from their parents (Alquraini, 2013). On the other hand, several ministries in Saudi Arabia provide facilities to ensure people with disabilities have access to rights such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Affairs...etc. In 1960, the Ministry of Education opened its first official Institute for vision-impaired male students (Aldabas, 2015).

OVERVIEW OF LAWS IN SAUDI ARABIA

In 2000, the government of Saudi Arabia established the Disability Law. The Disability Law indicated that all individuals with disabilities have the right to an education, health services, and rehabilitation services provided by public organizations (Aldabas, 2015; Alquraini, 2011). In 2001, Saudi Arabia founded the Policy, Rules, and Regulations of Special Education Programs (RRSEP), that ensured the eligibility of a student to receive special education services. It includes the terms and conditions to enter the school and the quality of services provided by schools (Alquraini, 2013). The RRSEP was created to guarantee that all categories of disability receive special education services based on his or her needs (Aldabas, 2015).

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY PROGRAMS SERVICES

In 1971, the Ministry of Education established the Intellectual Disabilities Institute to provide services that included residential and educational services focused on the development of social behavior and communication ability (Aldabas, 2015). In 1974, the Ministry of Education placed a General Directorate for Special Education (DGSE) to be accountable for preparing and developing special education programs in Saudi Arabia (Al-Ajmi, 2006).

In the 1990s, the Ministry of Education implemented inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities so that those students started their education in self-contained classrooms in the public schools (Al-Ajmi, 2006). Currently, according to Al-Mousa (2010), there are two types of services provided by the Ministry of Education for students with disabilities. First, special education institute services for students with moderate and severe disabilities. Second, special education programs in the public schools that offer services to students with mild disabilities in a self-contained classroom or resource room programs.

Despite the rapid development of education in Saudi Arabia, the special education services still need to be improved. To diagnose and assessment students with disabilities, there are two intelligence tests used in special education programs, which are the Wechsler Intelligence Test and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test, and adaptive behavior skills scale (Alnahdi, 2014b). These standards are inappropriate for the environment of Saudi Arabia because of the Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CLD) between Saudi Arabia's environment and the original country of these standards. Also, the implementation of items RRSEP with the proper placement for students with special needs is limited because of the absence of professional and appropriate instruments to assess special education students (Aldabas, 2015). Teachers should employ the unofficial tests with students such as interviews and observation (Alquraini, 2011).

Alquraini (2013) pointed out that many similarities exist between the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States and the Regulations of Special Education Programs and Institutes (RSEPI) in Saudi Arabia. For example, both of them have similar goals on presenting a free and proper education for individuals with disabilities. Also, schools must implement special education services for students with disabilities that contain an individual education plan (IEP), transition plan, and early intervention services.

Further, Aldabas (2015) pointed out that there is no information in the RRSEP about the services of full inclusion for students with ID, early intervention services, and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). It is necessary to provide early identification services and intervention services for students from birth through coordination and collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health (Aldabas, 2015).

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY CURRICULUM

The majority of students with an intellectual disability receive their education in the public schools (Alnahdi, 2014b). Students with severe disabilities receive their education in the institutes that making them isolated in communicating with others. Additionally, to the individual education plan (IEP) does not satisfy their need (Alquraini, 2014b). A number of obstacles faced by special education teachers at individual educational plan indicated by (Alnahdi, 2014b): (a) a misunderstanding in implementing the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meeting; (b) the number of students per class tends to be more than ten; (c) the existence of an official textbook by the Ministry of Education, which contributes to the confusion between the student's needs and themes in the textbook; (d) no teacher assistance in the classroom.

Assistive technology is considered necessary for students with disabilities to achieve their goals in education and quality of life. Assistive technology should be provided for students with disabilities and help them to learn and deliver results of inclusion (Alquraini, 2011). Therefore, the Saudi Arabia government should provide assistive technology instruments, assessments models, and evaluation models for a school district. Then, it should provide appropriate training for teachers to improve their skills in this area. Also another side, institutes lack support services such as physiotherapy services, occupational therapy, and speech and language services, which would help be successful. Alquraini (2014b) stated that these services are not aware of their rights and proper place for them is public schools.

Al-Ajmi (2006) noted the importance of the utilization of the transition plan for the students with disabilities while Alquraini (2013) pointed out that the RSEPI should be determined the procedures of transition services. Alnahdi (2013) examined 350 teachers in how special education teachers perceive their preparation for transition services in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The findings showed that there was 50%(n=177) of teachers did not prepare in the university in a transition plan. So, Special education teachers should receive adequate training on the transition plan for students with disabilities and prepare them for in universities.

On the other hand, the importance of self-determination skills within the curriculum provided for students with intellectual disabilities must be considered.

Wehmeyer and Metzler (1995) stated that it is imperative for all individuals to have an opportunity to express preferences, indicate choices, and in turn, make decisions. These opportunities have to come first before any experiences that bring about a realistic self-awareness, self-confidence, and constructive self-concept. The promotion of self-determination brings about a valuable result for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and at the same time acts as a means to attain inclusion in the general curriculum (Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, & Agran, 2004). Self-determination might also be a determining factor impacting the magnitude to which youth accomplish significant post-school results.

Likewise, improving the capability of youth with disabilities to participate in self-determined behavior has taken a more noticeable role in the considerations of transition services for youth with disabilities (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Stang, 2008). Consequently, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia should implement the concept of self-determination among teachers through training courses and encourage them to include self-determination skills into the individual educational plan.

SPECIALIZED TEACHERS

Transition services are essential for students with disabilities to move, live independently, and interact with the environment. To provide the best services to the student, teachers need the provision of appropriate expertise in the transition plans. The majority of special education teachers in Saudi Arabia earned a bachelor's degree in special education so that they can work in special education programs or institutes (Alnahdi, 2014b). Alnahdi (2014b) indicated that because teachers in special education classrooms have not received any training to transition services, teachers have a negative view towards the transition programs.

Therefore, teachers need preparation and training in transition programs, from universities and colleges that offer special education programs. Also, Specialized teachers who work in special education programs in the public schools suffer from isolation, and there is no interaction between them and the general teachers (Alnahdi, 2014b). Special education teachers have an increase in the salary of 30%, and because of that the general teacher's belief that the every special education services are responsibility on specialized teachers (Alnahdi, 2014b).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In spite of the financial support available in the Ministry of Education, special education services are still not achieving real desired results because of the weaknesses in the delivery of services. The Ministry of Education should consider the results of research and studies to further develop special education programs in Saudi Arabia. It must focus on the most important points in special education services such as teacher training, curriculum, assessment, provide programs in all regions, and parent involvement. In conclusion, the recommendations in this paper may contribute significantly to the solution of many issues related to intellectual disability programs so as to achieving justice and equality among the society members to receive the best high-quality of educational services.

REVIEW OF POLICIES AND LAWS

It is also recommended that the Ministry of Education reconsider its policies and laws about special education programs. They should: (a) establish clear and detailed rules for each subject; (b) clarify the role of the teacher in detail in the preparation of plans with teacher support models; (c) illuminate the role of a general education teacher toward of Special Education Programs; (d) reconsider of the 30% so as to be linked to specialists only and require specific of training courses or conferences during the school year the number and associating with continued to obtain 30%; and (e) preparing a specialized committee in the measurement and diagnosis, the goal of this committee to prepare measurement and evaluation tools that fit with the cultural environment to Saudi Arabia and to ensure eligibility for the student to enter special education programs.

ESTABLISH PROGRAMS

Due to the weakness of special education services in most areas of the northern border region of Saudi Arabia, the researcher from this region and had ten years' experience in special education, some of the parents became to educate their children in neighboring countries such as Jordan and live there with financial support from the Saudi government. Also, some parents went to neighboring countries to receive assessment services. To resolve this issue and based on RESEPI rules for providing a free and appropriate education for individuals with disabilities, the Saudi government should establish the specialized assessment centers and educational programs in the areas that are needed. Consequently, families are returning to the country in addition to achieving justice and equality between individuals, and the Saudi government achieves psychological and economic stability for families.

PREPARATION STANDARDS

There are two of standards employed in the United States that are CEC Initial and Advanced Preparation Standards (CEC) and Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). These standards establish particular skills and practices for professional teacher preparation programs that prepare teachers in working with schools. It is recommended that departments of special education in the Saudi universities should incorporate these standards and others standards in the preparation of curricula, training courses, workshops, to ensure that the teacher linked between what he or she has learned in teacher preparation courses and employment in reality. On the other hand, departments of special education in Saudi universities should create programs that focus on occupational therapy, and speech and language services so that they will work in the special education programs.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The Ministry of Education and the school district should give parents a clear guide that includes the procedures and their rights about assessments, diagnosis, evaluation, participation, and their rights to object to proceedings. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and school districts should work effectively on parents actively participating in making the final decision about the future of their child through the participation of parents in the individual educational plan, transition plan, determination the eligibility of a child with a disability to access and special education programs.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The establishment of centers for Assistive technology in all areas is critical. These centers are concerned with providing assistance to all categories of disability. As well as the objective of these centers is to work on the training teachers how the use of measuring instruments, use instrumentation and evaluate the student. Zabala (2005) provided a systematic method "SETT Framework" to making decisions regarding the requirement of assistive technology devices and services for students with disabilities. SETT refers to Student, Environments, Tasks, and Tools.

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