

Principals and Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion in Israel

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Abstract

The main goal of this study was to determine whether, in schools that practice inclusion, there is a correlation between the attitudes of school principals and teachers in their schools, towards inclusion of student with special needs. For this purpose, 38 schools were sampled in each of which the school principal and five teachers who work with students from the school's inclusion program – were to respond to questionnaires about their attitudes towards inclusion. A total of 38 school principals and 195 teachers participated in this study. In addition, the principals were asked to describe their management styles concerning the inclusion of students with special needs. The teachers also completed questionnaires about the school climate. The main findings indicated that principals' positive attitudes towards inclusion were associated with teachers' positive attitudes. In addition, a correlation was found between styles of management that support inclusion (such as support for changes to adapt the school for inclusion) and teachers' perceptions of a positive school climate.

Principals and Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion in Israel

Educational researchers from the 1980s examined three inter-related issues that were of concern to educators at that time: adaptation of the organizational climate approach to the realm of education; shifting the school principal's role from administrator to educational leader; and the gradual inclusion of students with special needs in the general school classrooms. One of the premises of the current study is that the current state of affairs is largely an outcome of educational policy that emerged in light of those three issues and how they were interrelated by one another.

The inclusion of students with special needs in regular schools

Since their establishment, special schools and special classes have made a highly significant contribution to the education of children with special educational needs. Teachers in special schools have gained considerable experience and have often developed a high level of expertise in meeting the special educational needs of their students. However, one consequence of the formation of a system of special schools and special classes was the emergence of a special education system that operated largely, at both the primary and the post-primary level, in segregation from the ordinary school structure. Conventional primary and post-primary schools were not regarded as realistic or practical scenery for these children.

In Israel, the inclusion of students with special needs in preschool programs, as well as elementary schools, high schools and universities was dramatically changed since by the Special Education Act (2003) which emphasizes the importance of the efforts that professionals and principals should commit to in order to promote successful inclusion (Dorner, 2009). Yet, there have not been many studies that investigated empirically and systematically the principals' attitudes toward the inclusion and their effect on the staff (Timor & Avisar, 2011).

School Climate & management approach towards inclusion

The term School Climate developed from an ecological approach that analyzed and described a particular social environment (workplace, organization, or institute) and its influence on the behavior and functioning of the people within this environment (Anderson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2009; Moos, 1974; Tagiuri, 1968). The underlying assumption is that every social environment has particular characteristics that can be identified and measured (Creemers, & Reezigt, 1999; Halpin & Croft, 1963; Purkey & Smith, 1983; see also: The definition of School Climate by the National School Climate Council, 2007). Many studies on school climate identify and measure the elements that have impact on teachers' perceptions of experiences in school life (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Beets et al., 2008; Collinson & Cook, 2007; Freiberg, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994; Hess & Reiter, 2010; Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Other studies identify factors related to students' psychological, social, and academic adjustment, from kindergarten (Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999; Payton, et al., 2008) through high school (Battistich, Schaps & Wilson, 2004; Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002; Jia et al., 2009; Hess, 2010; Rutter, 1983; Ruus et al., 2007).

In Israel, Zack and Horowitz (1985) found that teachers' perceptions of the school climate is related to their perception of principal's functioning, in terms of the degree of emphasis on scholastic achievement, adherence to regulations, consideration for teachers' personal needs, and the ability to serve as a role model, (ibid, pp 20-36). Similar findings were found eighteen years later (Avisar, Reiter, & Leyser, 2003) in a survey that investigated the role of elementary school principals in successful inclusion of students with special needs in the general schools. The researchers concluded that the principal is in fact the dominant influence in forming the school climate.

Additional studies indicated that principals' roles began to undergo a change from a centrist and administrative function to that of collaborator (Beattie, Jordan & Algozzine, 2006; Blase & Blase, 1996; Boscardin, 2005; Edgemon, Jablonski & Lloyd, 2006; Goor, Farling, Addison, 2007; Oluwole, 2009; Simmons, 2007). These studies demonstrated that principals who share decision-making processes with colleagues (Boscardin, 2005; Edgemon et al., 2006), grant educators the autonomy they require (Goor et al., 2007), allocate responsibilities (Brotherson et al., 2001), and in fact, act as an educational leader providing formative leadership (Blase & Blase, 1996; Begley, 2008; Bredeson, 1989; Fiedler & House, 1988). According to the professional literature, such leadership is a style of management characterized as cultivating an educational vision and defining goals, demonstrating consideration towards teachers and students (Avisar et al., 2003), and offering personal support to employees (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Bredeson, 1989; House & Podsakoff, 1988; Lumby & Tomlinson, 2000; Locke & Latham, 1990; Simmons, 2007; Yammarino & Naughton, 1992). Nevertheless, it appears that the two components of formative leadership that are commonly mentioned in the literature on educational inclusion are embracing change and educational enterprise (Brotherson,

2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Goor et al., 2007; Williams, 2001). According to the amendment in the Israel law of Special Education (2002), professionals who support students with special needs should make an effort to enhance the inclusion of these students in the general educational system. In this study, we use the term "Inclusion" to mean the integration of students with special needs into the regular classrooms, (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Reiter, 2008)

Much of the empirical evidence demonstrates that the theory underlying the advancement of educational inclusion is associated with an educational management style that promotes a climate in which organizational change and educational initiatives are encouraged (Brotherson, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Somech, 2006; Rouse & Florian, 1996; Timor & Avisar, 2011; Wasburn-Moses, 2005; Williams, 2001).

The fact that literature dealing with the description of principals' initiatives during the last decades in many cases, also dealing with inclusion, is not coincidental.

The inclusion of students with special needs in the general schools is one of the dramatic changes that has occurred in the field of education in recent decades (Ainscow, 1999; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Brotherson, 2001; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Reiter, 2008) as well as the inclusion of students from minorities into the mainstream schools (Abbott, 2006) and universities (Morrison, 2010) and into the wider community (Abbott, Dunn & Morgan, 1999).

The correlation between the principal's educational approach and image on the one hand, and the school climate and the teachers' approach to and belief in inclusion on the other hand has also been identified in the literature of the last three decades (Beattie et al., 2006; Mamlin, 1999; ; Dror & Weisel, 2003; Fritz & Miller, 1995). Blackman (1989) found a correlation between a principal's management style that encourages cooperation among employees, and the academic success of the student population. Parker & Day (1997) concluded that for inclusion to be successful, the principal should continually encourage teachers and embrace their successes in this area. This will lead to a positive school climate. Avissar et al. (2003) claim that it is necessary to overcome the attitudinal barriers of the teachers that can negatively impact the success of inclusion (Avissar et al. 2003). These conclusions are well accepted within other studies dealing with principals' roles and perceptions and the success in the inclusion of students with special needs into general schools (Ainscow, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Wood, 1998).

Method

The current study presents an analysis of the reports of principals and teachers regarding the inclusion of students with special needs in general, mainstream schools.

The aim of the current study was to consider a correlation between the attitudes of school principals and those of their teachers towards inclusion of students with special needs, as well as between principals' style of management related to the issues of inclusion and the teachers' perceptions of the school climate.

Study Hypotheses

The central hypothesis was that positive correlation would be found between the attitudes of principals and those of their teachers, towards the inclusion of students with special needs, in

such a manner that the more supportive the principals' attitudes towards inclusion were, the more highly supportive the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion would be.

A second hypothesis suggests that a correlation would be found between management styles and the teachers' perceptions of school climate in such a manner that the management style which supports inclusion would be positively correlated with teachers' perceptions of a positive school climate.

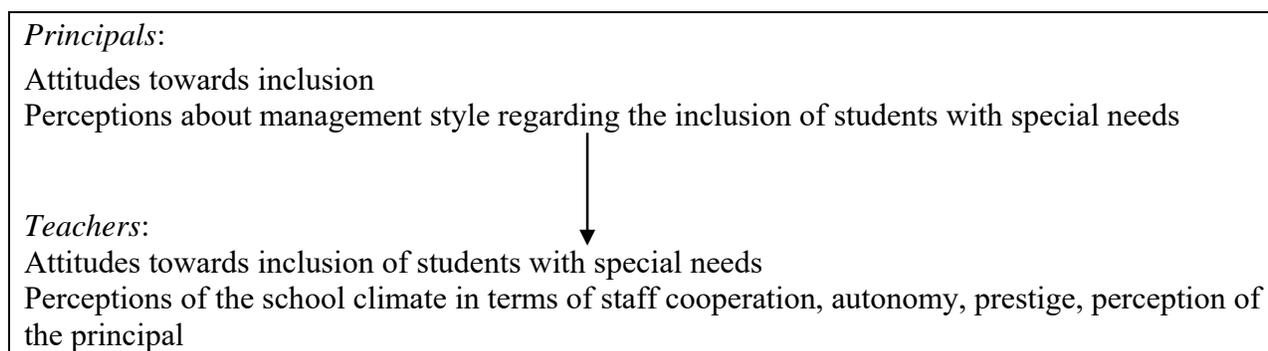


Figure 1 Research Model as a diagram of a correlation between principals' attitudes toward inclusion plus their perceptions about management style and the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion plus their perception of the school climate.

Note: Arrow shows the expected direction of the correlation

The Sampling

The sampling frame consisted of a list of 1100 schools that included one or more students with special needs.

This list included high schools, in which the students were between the ages of 12 and 18. All of the schools were in the Jewish sector – State and State Religious schools. The list was lacking information regarding the number of teachers in each school.

The research design followed the budget opportunities, allowing for data gathering from 40 schools, situated in various districts in Israel. Of those 40 schools, 38 obtained the principals' consent to participate in the research based on stratified sample procedure. The final sample included 38 schools as follows: 9 schools in the southern district, 5 schools in the Jerusalem district, 7 schools in the Tel Aviv district, 6 in the center (excluding Tel Aviv), 6 in Haifa and 5 in the northern district (excluding Haifa). The orthodox sector was not included in this study due to the lack of information regarding inclusion of children with special needs in this sector and as a result, the lack of data regarding practical inclusion of these students in the schools.

We preferred to avoid studying inclusion of children with special needs in elementary schools, due to sensitivity on the part of the officials who approve studies in elementary schools, especially as pertaining to the topic of inclusion.

The Arab sector was not included in the study in order to avoid the need of factoring language and culture variables into the study model. Including these variables such as these in this study

model, would have placed the clarity and validity of the study at risk of pressure, the resolution of which would have exceeded the scope of this study.

The sampling of principals consisted of 38 principals of schools selected from the aforementioned list.

The teachers' sampling included a total of 195 staff members, i.e., five from each of the 38 schools: All five of the sampled staff members worked directly with students in the school's inclusion program.

The teachers, who participated in the sampling in each school, were volunteers. Care was taken to find one volunteer who was a homeroom teacher, and an additional volunteer who was a school counselor. Of the total sampling of teachers, the number of teachers who asserted they had an academic background in special education was low - 28, so this variable was not included in the analysis of the findings. Nor was information regarding the teachers' personal backgrounds, age and socioeconomic status factored into the analysis of the findings.

Research Tools

The tools for examining the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of students with special needs: a questionnaire which was based on that devised by Shechtman, Reiter & Schenin (1993). The latter was also used by Dror & Weisel (2003), and both they and the author of this study, found a single consolidating dimension: general attitudes towards inclusion. As in previous studies, *Cronbach's alpha* for the current study was .95.

The questionnaire consisted of 28 statements for and against inclusion of students with special needs in the school. The teacher was asked assess each statement with a score between 1 and 5. Statements that were formulated as arguments against inclusion, had been inverted. Finally, an overall aggregate for the questionnaire was calculated, between 1 – against inclusion and 5 – in favor of inclusion.

An example of a statement: “Inclusion improves the self-image of students in the inclusion program”

The tool for examining the teachers' perception of their School Climate - a questionnaire based on Halpin & Croft's (1963) questionnaire on The Organizational Climate of Schools, which was then translated into Hebrew and further developed by Zack & Horowitz (1985). The original Hebrew version was validated in order to provide a comprehensive view of the School Climate. The following eight dimensions were found: the principal's supportive leadership; school services; adoption of innovations; collaboration and cooperation among the teaching staff; teaching load; autonomy; and prestige. A high validity rate was reported for these dimensions, with *Cronbach's alpha* ranging between .70 and .90 (Dror & Weisel, 2003). A high measure of *Cronbach's alpha* was reported also in the current study, ranging between .85 and .9.

There were a total of 47 statements comprised of the eight climate dimensions. With regards to each statement, the teacher had to decide between 1 – I disagree and 5–I agree fully. Each teacher was given an average score for the statements of each dimension of the questionnaire,

from 1-to 5. The higher the score was, the higher the value of the dimension. In addition, each teacher was given an overall score for climate perception. This score was based on statements from each of the eight dimensions that were entered under one factor in the analysis of the imposed factor. The general score is also an average of 1-to 5, so that the higher the score, the more positive the teacher's perception of the climate. An example of an item under the dimension of the principal's supportive leadership: "The principal of the school drives innovation". An example of an item under the dimension of the sense of autonomy at the school: "I decide the pace of the work and how much of the curriculum can be completed".

The Principal's questionnaire: The questionnaire based on a scale for examination of the principals' attitude towards inclusion- included a questionnaire developed by the author, based on a scale suggested by Oluwole (2009) in order to examine principals' attitudes to inclusion. The Index consists of 7 items. For each item, the principal must mark the measure of his concurrence – from 1 – I disagree to 3 – I agree. The total score of support for inclusion was based on the average score of the 7 items. The higher the score, the stronger the principal's support of inclusion. *Cronbach's alpha* for the 7 items was .73. An example of an item: "To what degree to you see inclusion as positive for students who do not have special needs?".

The questionnaire also includes 15 items that support three different styles of management. The questionnaire was drafted to Hebrew by the author and its content was validated by 2 other specialists from the field. The score per item is between 1 and 3. The score for each style of management was the average score given to its five items. The higher the score, that is, the closer it is to 3, the more the principal is considered supportive of this style of management. The management styles that were presented:

The importance attributed by the principal to centralized management (*Cronbach's alpha* = .7). An example: "To what degree does inclusion require more supervision of the teachers' work?" The principal's support for change (*Cronbach's alpha* = .77). An example: "Is it your opinion that inclusion of students requires a great deal of change in the school curriculum and/or in the school plans"?

The principal who is motivated to drive the prestige of the school (*Cronbach's alpha* =.62). An example: "In your opinion, are the school's resources sufficient for the achievement of the goals of inclusion?"

Research Procedure

Subsequent to the Ministry of Education's approval of the research plan and procedure, individual meetings were held with the principals, at which time they were asked to fill out the pertinent questionnaires.

At the beginning of the meeting, the researcher shared the concept and goals of the study with the principal. After clarifications were made in answer to the principal's queries, the principal was given the questionnaire to fill in. The researcher was present during the principal's completion of the questionnaire, amongst other reasons, in order to reply to any queries on the spot. The principal obtained anonymity and exclusion of all identifying details. The meeting with the principals usually lasted about half an hour.

Following the interviews with the principals, the next stage was locating and finding teachers for the study. The assistant researcher selected the teachers (five at each school) by visiting the teacher's lounge and by chance conversations around the school. The first five teachers found suitable for the study, that is, who were associated with at least one child with special needs, and who agreed to participate in the study, were given the questionnaire regarding their approach to inclusion and the questionnaire regarding their perception of the School Climate. The teachers were instructed on how to fill in the questionnaires. They were ensured anonymity and exclusion of personal details. The teachers were requested to submit the questionnaires only to the research assistant on the agreed date. In fact, sometimes the assistant researcher visited the school a number of times before he was given the questionnaires.

When the study had 38 principals from 38 different schools, and all the questionnaires were handed in by the teachers of those schools, it was decided to discontinue data collection and begin analysis of the findings.

Results

A multiple regression analysis was conducted in order to test the study hypothesis, which claimed that there would be a correlation between principals' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs and related management issues and the attitudes of the educational staff towards inclusion and their perceptions of the school climate. The multiple regression equation was intended to predict the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion based on the principal's management patterns. The first stage tested the correlation between the explained variables, i.e., the management patterns. For this purpose, the method which was used in order to reveal significant correlation, was Enter. The prediction equation was calculated as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Multiple Regression Model with management patterns as predictors for teachers' positive assessment of inclusion program (N=38)

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t(p)</i>	<i>Eta</i> ²
The importance attributed by the principal to centralized management	.12	.04	.37	3.40**	.063
The principal's support for change	.13	.08	.19	1.71	.012
School prestige related patterns and satisfaction with school's economic status	.14	.03	.49	4.70**	.071

Note: The results of the regression indicated that the predictors explained 40.1% of the variance ($R^2=.4$, $F_{(3,56)}=12.50$, $p<.01$).

** $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$*

Findings presented in Table 1 indicate that the variables that most significantly contribute to a prediction of teachers' positive attitudes to inclusion are as follows: the degree of importance that the principal attributes to centralized management ($t=3.4$, $p<.01$), and the principal's who is motivated to drive prestige ($t=4.7$, $p<.01$). It should be noted that on the whole, the model

explains 40% ($F_{(3, 56)}=12.5$; $p<.01$) of the variance in the dependent variable (i.e., teachers' positive assessment of the inclusion program).

To examine the hypothesis that principal's attitudes towards inclusion are correlated to the educational staff's perception of the school climate, we tested the correlation between factors from the principal's questionnaire that had reflected the principal's attitudes towards the inclusion and factors that emerged from the school climate questionnaires (which, as noted, reflect the teachers' perceptions of the school's climate). The findings of the correlation analysis, summarized and presented in Table 2, were the outcome obtained following several statistical procedures required for the multi-variant analysis. For a detailed description of these procedures and clarifications regarding the relevant methodological issues, see the article dedicated to this purpose (Hess & Reiter, 2009).

Table 2

Pearson's correlation measures found between variables from principals' attitudes questionnaires and variables from school climate questionnaires (N=38)

	<i>Variables from principals' attitudes questionnaires</i>				
	Perception of principal as supportive and encouraging	Inclusion-related innovativeness	Sense of cooperation among staff	Sense of work autonomy	Sense of prestige at work
<i>Variables from school climate questionnaires</i>					
Principal's sense of own centralized management pattern	.27*	.1 N.S	.12 N.S	.09 N.S	.11 N.S
Support for change	.20 N.S	.30*	.12 N.S	.15 N.S	.13 N.S
Support for inclusion	.17 N.S	.11 N.S	.32*	.18 N.S	.17 N.S
Satisfaction with teachers' work autonomy	.15 N.S	.14 N.S	.14 N.S	.31*	.09 N.S
Sense of prestige due to inclusion	.18 N.S	.2 N.S	.13 N.S	.12 N.S	.25*

Note: N.S= Not Significant

*p

Findings presented in Table 2 indicate that the importance that the school principal attributes to centralized management is related to teachers' perception of the principal as supportive and encouraging ($r=.27$, $p<.05$). The principal's support of change was found to be related to teachers' perceptions that inclusion leads to innovativeness ($r=.30$, $p<.05$). The principal's support of the inclusion of students with special needs was shown as related to teachers' perception of cooperation among the school's staff ($r=.32$, $p<.05$). The principal's satisfaction with teachers' work in an autonomous framework is related to the teacher's sense of having

autonomy in their job ($r=.31, p<.05$). Finally, the principal's sense of increased school prestige due to the inclusion program was found to be related to the teachers' perceptions of the school's prestige ($r=.25, p<.05$).

Discussion and Conclusions

In general, the current study replicated the finding of major tendencies identified in previous studies examining management patterns and school climate at inclusive schools. Results demonstrated the great extent to which principals' perceptions correlate with employees' perceptions about inclusion: correlations were found in attitudes towards inclusion, the importance of teachers' autonomy, belief in processes of change, and the belief that the school's prestige is related to the success of the inclusion program.

However, findings of the current study highlighted one particular tendency that is less prominent in the traditional professional literature on school management research. Thus, the research literature most often presents views that consider the variety of management patterns as located on a continuum between two opposing styles, such as "task-oriented management" vs. "people-oriented management" (Staw & Salancick, 1977), or "takes direct action" vs. "cooperative" (Somech, 2006). In contrast, the current study found that the principals' management pattern is a multi-dimensional construct. Findings indicated that the management style of principals that best correlates with teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion is characterized by attributes that could be considered simultaneously contradictory and complementary. Thus, a principal demonstrating a pattern of centralized management supports teachers' autonomy, cooperates with the staff, and invests time and effort to adapt curricula to the assist students with special needs. A principal who thus supports the inclusion program and its implementation considers the inclusion program prestigious. In addition, were such a principal to favor a centralized management style yet avoid criticism of the staff and instead find satisfaction in the teachers' efforts, such a principle would be said to demonstrate "formative leadership."

The findings of this study have theoretical and practical implications for improving the success of the inclusion of students with special needs in schools. The majority of the Educational system's programs for increasing awareness and increasing their positive attitude towards this containment have so far been carried out by the teaching staff (Battistich et al., 2004; Payton, et al., 2008; Rieter, 2008).

However, the findings of this study indicate the necessity for empowering the principals first and foremost, and only then empowering the teaching staff. Today, there are those who believe that the adaptation and aid needed in order for the institution to increase success of the inclusion programs are the responsibility of the institution itself, and should not depend on the demands made by the students or their parents. (Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2012). Furthermore, adoption of the ecological model into the field of education, has raised the principle, according to which the educational institution is obliged to prepare itself for the challenge of inclusion and the broad range of differences between students (Rose et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2012).

If we accept that the most important of all necessary adaptations is the training of the staffs' attitude towards inclusion, (for example Home, 2009), it may be that the correlation found

between the principals' attitudes and those of their staff, indicate that plans for the school's preparation for inclusion would best be developed by the principals themselves.

Limitations and future research

Two main methodological issues, which constitute possible limitations, were gradual receipt of the lists and lack of clarity regarding the scope of the complete sampling frame. These difficulties imposed a study procedure which might, to some extent, threaten the external validity of the study, since the sampling was, in fact, a volunteer sampling and not a random one (that is, not a probability sampling).

However, it should be noted that the rate of agreement of the schools that were approached to participate in this study, was high, and that the majority of school districts is represented. In addition, theoretically, no reason emerged to suggest that the schools which were sampled were different in any way or had any unusual background characteristics in comparison to most of the other schools in the sampling frame.

As shown, the current research model includes two levels: the principals' perceptions regarding the practice and management of including students with special needs and their teachers' attitudes to inclusion and their perception of the school climate. Nevertheless, according to the Quality of Life paradigm, when dealing with the inclusion of students with special needs we need also to listen to the students' own voices (Reiter, & Schalock, 2008). Therefore, the current study needs to be supplemented by focusing on students' quality of life. While the current report does not address this level in the model, previous studies have examined and described the correlation between students' QoL assessments and both the characteristics of school climate and attitudes towards inclusion (Hess & Reiter, 2009). The main findings from said studies demonstrated that in schools characterized by an open and democratic school climate as well as positive attitudes towards inclusion, there was a high correlation between QoL measures (in emotional, social and academic realms) reported by students and those reported by their teachers. Furthermore, these students felt less stigmatized than did their counterparts who attended schools with a closed climate and/or negative attitudes towards inclusion.

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