Students with Special Educational Needs: Explaining Their Social Integration and Self-Concept

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Abstract

Social integration of special need students is viewed as a necessary phenomenon for the skills' development which adds quality to their lives and provides them with satisfaction. This study explores the perception and attitude of the teachers towards social integration as a general school policy. A total of 150 individuals were selected from the integrated primary schools in KSA. Survey approach was employed to collect data using a close-ended questionnaire which was then statistically analysed. The results revealed that there is a positive impact of the social integration upon the special needs students. A statistically significant difference was found among participants based on their experience, education, and age. Moreover, there was significant difference in the attitudes of participants with Diploma in Education qualifications and Bachelor in Education qualifications towards integration. The study concluded that the implementation of the integrated school as general policy should be considered and an effective teacher training curriculum with special needs courses should be introduced.

Keywords: integrated education, Saudi Arabia, social integration, special need students, teachers

1. Introduction

Education is the fundamental right of every individual irrespective of the capabilities or disabilities. The fundamental right is based on developing the necessary skills in the individuals, essential to overcome the obstacles faced in life (Tukur & Kiyuba, 2014). Education is also symbolized as a powerful instrument for making necessary social changes to improve the quality of life (Limaye, 2016). This necessitates the equal dispersion of education among the children. Across the world, various initiatives are taken to integrate special need students in mainstream educational institutions. Most of these initiatives are in the form of education policies in the country (Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013). These efforts are being carried out due to the increased population of the special need children, which accounts for a population of about 93 million i.e., 1 in every 20 individuals (UNICEF, 2013). Ferguson (2008) highlighted that the parents of the special need students have shown an increased inclination towards the enrolment of their children in the regular education institutes. This has substantially increased the number of special need students in regular education institutes as compared to previous times. Due to this, the self-concept of the students is significantly considered as students with special needs formulate a negative perception of themselves, as a result of teasing and bullying (Pijl & Frostad, 2010).

The term self-concept is defined as the personal identification of the individual himself. It comprises of three aspects such as self-image i.e., what the person is in actual, ideal self (such as what he aspires to be), and self-esteem i.e., the confidence one induces (Koller et al., 2018). Lindsay and McPherson (2012) added that the formation of peer integrated network can assist in the inducement of the confidence among the population of special need students. Experience of at school with regard to the teacher's attitude and behaviour, plays a critical role in the development of the necessary social and education skills essential for their independent functioning in life to provide satisfaction.

Social integration of these students is viewed as a necessary phenomenon for the development of the skills, which adds quality to their lives and provides them with satisfaction. Bossaert et al. (2012) exhibited that there is increased association between social integration, social inclusion, and social participation. Earlier studies also endorsed that the self-concept of the special need students is significantly impacted by social integration, as the students with special needs feel less socially integrated as compared to their peers (Pijl & Frostad, 2010; Koster

et al., 2010).

The environment at the school also impacts the social concept of the individual. In this regard, Symonds and Galton (2014) stated that the changes in the school, staff, and the relationship among peer influence the social integration of the special need students. Moreover, Koller et al. (2018) provided that the psychical space, interaction with the teacher, and self-competence perception affects the social integration among the students and their motivation. Szumski and Karwowski (2015) compared the academic students' special needs and self-concept both of the mainstream institutions and in the integrated school, which showed that the higher self-concept of the special needs student in the integrated school, as compared to the mainstream institution. Similarly, Ruijs et al. (2010) highlighted that the students with no learning disabilities did not get affected by the inclusive classes in terms of their academic performance. Schwab et al. (2015) added that the self-concept of the special needs students positively gets developed as the result of integration.

With the positive outcomes revealed by the earlier mentioned studies, the present study aims to explore the social integration and self-concept in the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). KSA is selected due to its increasing population such that approximately 135,000 individuals are suffering from some sort of disability or special need among total population of 29 million (Al-Jadid, 2013). The paucity of information or efforts is observed for the improvement of social participation of the special need students; however, there have been various efforts made by the country in the education sector. Alothman (2014) stated that the social integration of the students remains a challenge, despite the country being home to a large number of special need students because of the lack of school staff as well as parents' awareness and absence of trained professionals. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the concept of social integration and self-concept by understanding the perception of the teachers' part of the integrated school. Moreover, the study also highlights the emerging issues and problems related to integrated schools.

2. Literature Review

There is a need to evaluate the degree of social integration and impact of self-concept of students with special educational needs in schools by considering different definitions and studies of numerous authors. This section has reviewed previous literature conducted by many researchers on the relationship between social integration and student's self-concept and explored conclusions found from their research. This study emphasizes on previous frameworks, which are discussed under the elements of problems faced by academic sectors because integration of technology is flooding in all departments including schools and educational institutes. The literature will also provide the dimensions of self-concept and achievements being gauged by both teachers and schools.

2.1 Special Educational Needs

There is an extensive argument among professionals, parents, and individuals in defining the term "Special Educational Needs and describe people directly involved in needing particular types of education". The term "Special," is recognized as powerlessness of the children instead of providing them open-handed dignity. Prior to the proposal of the term, it had been renowned as disabled. In such cases, children are diagnosed with mental, emotional, or social needs that require special care by qualified specialists. There is always a special effort required in the successful implementation of diversity to respond to the educational needs of a student with special needs. Schools rarely make provisions to foster socio-affective development on the acquisition of academic knowledge for these students (Cambra & Silvestre, 2003).

There are many types of disabilities in children and different needs allocated with a particular disability. For instance, handicapped refers to the performance disability, developmental disability refers to the physical or mental disability of a child in major life activities. On the other hand, learning disabilities in students are assumed to have inadequate self-concept than normal students, who achieve quick learning (Stevens et al., 2017). Specific difficulties of a student in writing, learning, reading, written, and facial expressions are followed with disability definition in understanding conditions of special needs.

2.2 Self-Concept and Social Integration of Students with Special Education Needs

Academic self-concept is a diversified attribute that undertakes an individual assessment of personal cognitive competencies in academic accomplishment contexts. Age is considered to have a major contribution in the development of academic self-concept with the period until middle adolescence being specifically susceptible to reductions. During this period, two core influencing attributes include shifts in educational contexts and transition from elementary to secondary schools (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Wigfield et al., 2015). Academic self-concept has become stabilized and less vulnerable to changes between middle and late adolescence. The

importance of social environment is emphasized within the theoretical framework of academic self-concept. In this regard, the focus of current study is toward social contexts including big-fish little pond effect that show a fundamental role in development of academic self-concept (Hoferichter et al., 2018; Trautwein et al., 2016; Stäbler et al., 2017). On the contrary, few studies have examined the role of learning environment, in spite of some significant outcomes of specific intervention programs that target academic self-concept (O'Mara et al., 2006).

The perception of an individual's attitude, feelings, skills, appearance, abilities, and knowledge reflects the self-concept and social integration of a person in society (Ashman & Conway, 2017). It is a psychological approach to understand how a person observes himself as an individual. Self-concept widely holds and involved in the learning process of a student to produce important outcomes in a career. There is an important consequence of developmental and psychological well-being of a student in the early stages of life. However, school plays one of the most critical roles in the development of self-esteem of a child, beside the family. The term self-concept refers to the feelings and perception about self-representation.

In an analytic review presented by Stevens et al. (2017) the past three decades research on self-concept demonstrated that it is far from a paradigm of unitary. Their findings on self-concept revealed that students with special needs rate them expressively lower in comparison to normal students in class in both academic and global circumstances. The findings of the study concluded that there is a bad effect on overall self-evaluation in the educational sector by acquiring negative self-concept. There is a significant relationship between self-concept and social integration of a student in his academic achievements. Most researchers stated that this is a two-way relationship, where a positive self-concept in the study is evident to be significantly high in relation to approaches and demands associated with future achievements. They proposed that strong support in terms of mental and physical health could play an important role in booming positive self-concept in a student with special educational needs.

Another study by Hussain and Maarof (2017) indicated that self-development, social interaction, and social comparison are the chief elements of building a child's positive self-concept. Mostly, children spend half of their time in schools and are exposed to numerous challenges; it is easy for institutors to emphasize on social comparisons of normal students vs. special students. Research on this perspective by Espelage et al. (2015) emphasized on influences of social comparison of students with learning disabilities. They found that the majority of the special students instinctively compared their performance with normal achievers, where the influence of social comparison remains strong. There are particularly three dimensions covered in a self- concept test:

- Social—consist of a bunch of ideas of a person's role and position in the social environment. It involves a perception of how one is admired by others.
- Personal—divided into two parts one is emotional and other is physical. Emotional self-concept states whether a person is kind, reliable etc. while physical self-concept states whether a person is strong or weak, self-representation, health, beauty etc.
- Academic—This part includes an aspect of competence against different people's achievement in society or institution. The person compares his own skills with others in different fields.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Study Design

A pedagogical research design was followed to explain the social integration and self-concept of the integrated primary schools in Saudi Arabia. The study was conducted during 2016 and 2017. This approach is selected as it allows gathering the data in an unbiased way.

3.2 Study Sample

Survey was conducted on 150 individuals. The sample constitutes of the teachers associated with the integrated primary schools in KSA. The teachers, who had been assigned the responsibility to handle the special needs children in the primary integrated school, were included.

3.3 Data Collection

The data were collected using a close-ended questionnaire. The items included in the questionnaire were divided into two parts. The first part of the questionnaire collected the demographic details; whereas, the second part studied the various aspects which impact the social integration and social concept among the population of special need students in the primary integrated school. The questionnaire was based on a five-point Likert scale.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected by the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). Further, the data was assessed using the chi-square and ANOVA technique.

4. Results

The results of the present study have shown responses from the staff (school head teachers, the classroom teachers, and the special needs teachers) of the integrated primary schools in Saudi Arabia involved with the special needs children. A total of 120 classroom teachers were included, among which 90 were special needs teachers and 30 were head teachers working in the integrated primary schools (Figure 1).
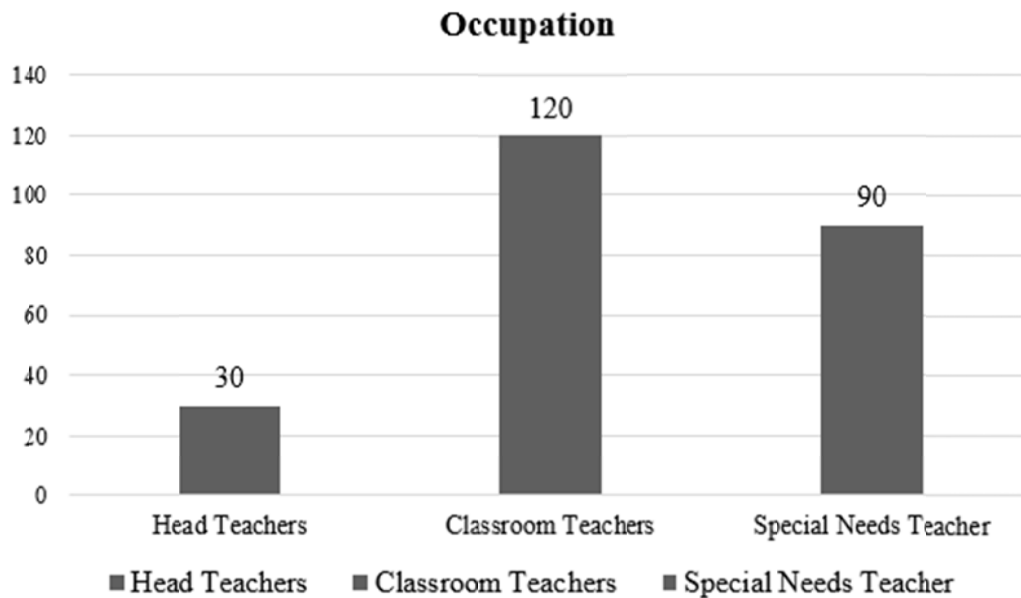

Figure 1. Occupation of respondents

Figure 2 has shown that 40% of the respondents were between ages 41−50 years followed by 29.2% between 31−40 years old, 28.3% between 20−30 years old, and 2.5% belong to 51 years and above group.

Age Group

- 20-30 years   = 31-40 years   = 41-50 years   = 51 and above
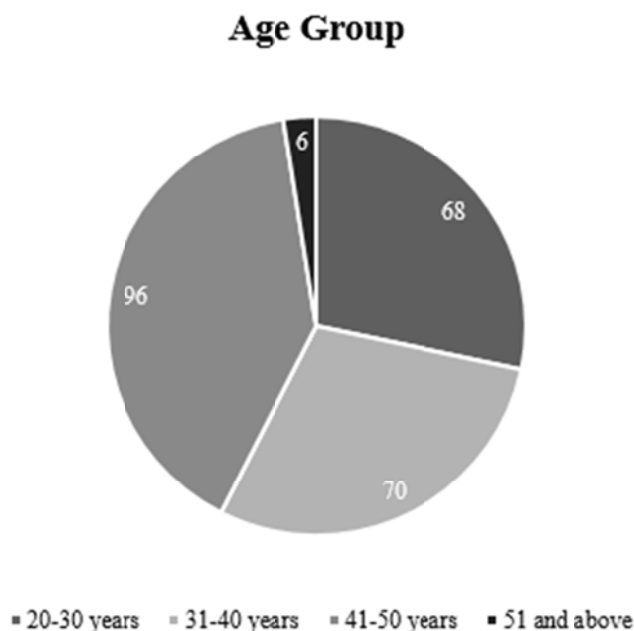
Figure 2. Age group of respondents

Table 1 illustrates demographic characteristics of the teachers, including their qualification and job experiences of the respondents. It has been shown that 45.8% of the participants had more than 10 years' experience, 28.3% had less than 5 years' experience, and 25.8% had 5−10 years' experience. Table 1 has also indicated that the majority of the participants 68.8% had a Bachelor in Education qualification and 31.3 % had a Diploma in Education qualification.

Table 1. Qualification and job experience of respondents

Measures	Frequency	Percentage
Qualification		
Diploma in Education	75	31.3 %
Bachelor in Education	165	68.8 %
Job Experience		
Less than 5 years	68	28.3 %
Between 5-10 years	62	25.8 %
More than 10 years	110	45.8 %

Table 2 has reveals statistically significant differences among the head teachers, the classroom teachers and the special needs teachers towards "Integration as a general policy" in all ten items ($P < 0.001$). This indicated that the rows and columns of the contingency are dependent. Moreover, there are statistically significant differences among the age group of 20−30 years, 31−40 years, 41−50 years, and 51 years and above towards integration for mildly handicapped in all six items ($P < 0.001$). The chi-Square test for items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 indicated that $P = 0.000$ is significant, ($P < 0.001$). Chi-Square Test for item 8 shows that $P = 0.012$ is significant ($P < 0.05$) indicating that the elements of the contingency were dependent. Table 2 also shows statistical differences among the attitudes of participants with Diploma in Education qualifications and Bachelor in Education qualifications towards integration as a general idea in all ten items.

Table 2. Chi-square test

Item	Occupation Chi-Square	D.F.	P	Age Chi-Square	D.F.	P	Experience Chi-Square	D.F.	P	Qualifications Chi-Square	D.F.	P
Special needs consume teacher's time	39.641	8	0.000	98.518	12	0.000	86.467	8	0.000	36.269	4	0.000
Integration increases special needs confusion	85.300	8	0.000	204.259	12	0.000	184.274	8	0.000	53.588	4	0.000
Integration separates special needs pupils	60.726	8	0.000	93.084	12	0.000	78.925	8	0.000	33.565	4	0.000
Integration develops special needs pupils' attitudes positively	93.334	8	0.000	70.602	12	0.000	50.366	8	0.000	69.997	4	0.000
Integration enhances the special needs experience socially	122.917	8	0.000	125.098	12	0.000	124.328	8	0.000	58.426	4	0.000
Integration promotes the acceptance of differences among all pupils	42.438	8	0.000	83.650	12	0.000	71.412	8	0.000	64.325	4	0.000
Integration develops special needs pupils academically	58.252	8	0.000	57.041	12	0.000	39.372	8	0.000	68.487	4	0.000
Special needs pupils' right to integration	38.699	8	0.000	27.131	12	0.000	19.506	8	0.012	13.686	4	0.008
Classroom activities are suitable for all pupils	78.170	8	0.000	79.221	12	0.000	64.366	8	0.000	93.852	4	0.000
Integration is a desirable approach	126.816	8	0.000	83.790	12	0.000	95.397	8	0.000	0.876	4	0.928

The results of ANOVA in Table 3 indicates that there are significant differences in the level of the mean of integration as a general policy among the head teachers, classroom teachers, and special needs teachers in the integrated primary schools ($P < 0.01$).

Table 3. Results of ANOVA integration as a general policy and the respondents' occupations

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	D.F	Mean Square	F. Ratio	Significant
Between Groups	3.153	2	1.577	7.733	0.001*
Within Groups	48.326	237	0.204		
Total	51.480	239			

Note. *$P < 0.01$.

The multiple-comparison Scheffe Test was used to test the difference between the means to determine the source of differences and where the level of integration as a general policy is more significant (Table 4).

Table 4. Scheffe Test on integration as a general policy and the respondents' occupations

	Head Teacher (2.2467)	Classroom Teacher (2.5825)	Special Needs Teacher (2.6044)
Head Teacher (2.2467)			
Classroom Teacher (2.5825)	0.002*		
Special Needs Teacher (2.6044)	0.001*	0.941	

Note. * $P < 0.01$.

The results of ANOVA test in Table 5 indicate significant differences in the level of the mean of integration as a general policy among the participants of four age groups in the integrated primary schools ($P < 0.001$). Whereas, Table 6 show the multiple-comparison Scheffe Test used to test the difference between the means. The results of the multiple-comparisons indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the means of integration as a general policy.

Table 5. Results of ANOVA integration as a general policy and the respondents' ages

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F. Ratio	Significant
Between Groups	5.665	3	1.888	9.728	0.000*
Within Groups	45.814	236	0.194		
Total	51.480	239			

Note. *$P < 0.001$.

Table 6. Scheffe Test on integration as a general policy and the respondents' ages

	20–30 Year (2.5544)	31–40 Year (2.3571)	41–50 Year (2.6469)	51 and above (3.1500)
20–30 Year (2.5544)				
31–40 Year (2.3571)	0.078			
41–50 Year (2.6469)	0.626	0.001**		
51 and above (3.1500)	0.020*	0.001**	0.064	

Note. *$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$.

Table 7 shows significant differences in integration as a general policy among the participants in three experience groups in the integrated primary schools ($P < 0.001$). The multiple-comparison Scheffe Test used to test the difference between the means (Table 8). The results of the multiple comparisons indicated a significant difference between the means of integration as a general policy in two experience groups in the integrated primary schools.

Table 7. Results of ANOVA integration as a general policy and the respondents' experiences

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F. Ratio	Significant
Between Groups	4.060	2	2.030	10.147	0.000*
Within Groups	47.419	237	0.200		
Total	51.480	239			

Note. *$P < 0.001$.

Table 8. Scheffe Test on integration as a general policy and the respondents' experiences

	Less than 5 Years (2.5544)	Between 5-10 Years (2.3419)	More than 10 Years (2.6618)
Less than 5 Years (2.5544)			
Between 5-10 Years (2.3419)	0.027*		
More than 10 Years (2.6618)	0.300	0.000**	

Table 9 indicates significant differences in perceptions of integration as a general policy among the respondents ($P < 0.001$). The highest level of mean in integration as a general policy among the staff was found to have a Diploma in Education qualification (2.8716) compared to the lowest level of mean among the staff with Bachelor in Education (2.4048). However, there is no need to use the multi-comparison Scheffe Test in this case because of the difference in the mean of integration as a general policy lies between two groups "Diploma in Education" and "Bachelor in Education".

Table 9. Results of ANOVA integration as a general policy and the respondents' qualifications

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F. Ratio	Significant
Between Groups	11.153	1	11.153	65.823	0.000*
Within Groups	40.327	238	0.169		
Total	51.480	239			

Note. *$P < 0.001$.

5. Discussion

The present study has showed the general policy of integration for the school differs among the three groups based on their experience, age, and education. It revealed positive impact on the special needs student as they

feel part of society. This has been endorsed by various studies stressing towards their inclusion (Sherab et al., 2015; Bressoud et al., 2018). Consideration needs to be given to various aspects before integration of the general policy as various factors may serve as a hindering block in its successful integration. Considering the responses, the present study highlights that the attitude of the participants differs based on the education they withhold. The same findings were observed by Pittman and Gaines (2015). Such as teachers who lack training for teaching special needs students may fear they will be unable to meet the academic needs of the special needs' students.

The present study also highlights that occupation affects implementation of the integration as a general policy. The restriction to practice innovation without the achievement of the permission from the Educational Directorate Office serves as an impending block. These findings align with the study of Sharma and Dunay (2018) that exhibited the difference of attitude based on the participant's occupation. The classroom activities may also be impacted by the integration of the students as they are aware of the consequence, which may emerge as a result of integration, in terms of curriculum, class size as well as its arrangement. Talley and Brintnell (2016) pinpointed that this integration may also impact the learning of normal students.

The present study showed that age also has significant impact on the views regarding the integration of the students in the general policy of the schools. The impact of age on the students' integration has also been endorsed by Engelbrecht et al. (2015) by assessing the attitude of the teacher. These findings also align with the study of Rajendran and Elavarasi (2016) that supplemented existence of difference as the younger aged teachers generally do not possess additional responsibility of marriage or that of a child, which have a positive impact on their work. Along with it, positive output towards integration is promoted, since they are new in the professional field and their experience is also new. Contrary to them, the old teachers often oppose the integration of the school general policy as they are unwilling to practice innovative teaching techniques and eliminate their traditional working practices (Ismail et al., 2016).

In the current study, the integration as a general policy differed based on the teacher's experience (Wanjala & Matula, 2018). The experience as hindering block has also been corroborated by the research of Pantić and Florian (2015) as the study stated that fewer experienced teachers are unaware of the difficulties which may arrive while the mid-level support integration as they want to experience the change which comes with it. Dapudong (2014) revealed that greater experience is associated with certain skills and prolong practicing of certain techniques, which teachers may resist to change in the coming years.

5.1 Recommendations

The results of the study stress towards more attention to the integration of the educational institutions as well as the policymakers in the Arab countries (Fadel & Elyas, 2015). The findings of the study highlight that various needs such as experience, age, and occupation need to be thoroughly studied before introducing integration as the general policy for the school. The training of the teachers at all levels should be ensured as well as their competence concerning the facilitation of the special student's needs (Miller-Kuhaneck & Watling, 2018).

5.2 Limitations

However, the results of the study lack generalizability based on its recruitment of participants from a particular region i.e., Saudi Arabia. Other regions may also be explored based on the difference that prevails in terms of the socio-cultural dynamics to comprehensively analyse the problem. The study also directs the future researches to explore the perspective of the normal as well as special needs students individually. This research can help in highlighting new insights and areas, which can be developed further and supplement the successful integration of the schools.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that the individuals possess in-depth understanding pertaining to the integration of the students in the primary schools. It is found that the attitudes of the teacher vary based on the teacher's experience, age, and occupation. According to the general policy, teachers are the primary factor in the integration considering their inadequate level of training, and attitude towards it. It reveals that integration cannot be achieved through the execution of the general policy as it required collaboration among various agents such as teachers, as they are the primary entity in promotion integrated education. The results also directed towards the need to introduce reform in curriculum especially concerning the training of the teachers. The teachers need to be aware of the general and specific strategies, which can be molded as per the students' needs in various circumstances. It further suggests that the curriculum of the teacher training must permanently assimilate the components of the special needs courses for enhancing their teaching competence.

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