



Inclusion for Students with Hearing Impairments in Elementary Schools: Teachers' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of students in inclusive schools has been a concern in many countries as they move towards inclusive education. This study aimed to explore teachers perspectives of current state of inclusion of elementary students (6-12 years) who are deaf or hard of hearing and gained insights into the nature of challenges to full participation. A quantitative approach, encompassing questionnaires was utilised to collect data from teachers. The participants included 66 teachers from Riyadh and 82 teachers from Jazan who completed a 31-item questionnaire. A framework analysis of the data identified that the participants did not fully understand inclusive education, inclusive teaching and full participation. The participants referred to inclusion as integration and inclusive teaching as active teaching approaches. Implications and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: inclusive schools, teachers perspectives, deaf, hard of hearing, quantitative.

Introduction

The human rights perspective is to ensure an inclusive education system is a recognised obligation. In this sense, persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of their disability rather, they are accorded rights to access an inclusive, and quality education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live with reasonable adjustments, accommodations and support that maximise their academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion (Broberg & Sano, 2018; Schulze, 2010). Rights-based conceptualisation of full participation does not see inclusive education as part of charity or generosity, but as part of educational efforts to fulfil rights (Abu-Alghayth et al., 2023; Broberg, & Sano, 2017; Gable, 2014; Genova, 2015; Oliver & Barnes, 2010). Although the human rights approach seemed laudable, there has been several criticisms and that the human rights-based approach is not suitable for all types of special education provision and it is not suitable for all types of persons with disabilities; it tends to be more political than practically oriented, and promotes inappropriate service delivery to some students (Broberg, & Sano, 2017; Runswick-Cole & Hodge, 2009).

Despite these criticisms, some inclusive reformers have proposed the adoption of inclusive teaching in schools by focusing on human-rights to enact quality inclusive education (Florian, 2009). These inclusive reformers argue that if implemented properly, inclusive teaching can enable all students with disability full access to the general education curriculum (Florian, 2009). Inclusive teaching is based on the philosophy that every student's capacity to learn is changeable. This means, what teachers choose to do (or not to do) in the present can alter a student's learning capacity for the future (Florian & Spratt, 2013). In this sense, inclusive teaching challenges the notion of using 'bell-curve' measures and replacing it with the concept of 'transformability' (Florian & Spratt, 2013). On the one hand, bell-curve informed practices consider some students as 'normal' and others as 'not normal'. On the other hand, the concept of transformability believes that every student if provided with the required support, can learn and achieve to their fullest potential. This way, the focus is on social justice, full access and equity in education. Applying the concept of transformability to students who are deaf or hard of hearing, which is the focus of this study, implies that every student is seen as an "active meaning-maker, who uses their personal and social resources to make sense of the world as they experience" learning with inclusive teachers and peers (Nind, Flewitt, & Theodorou, 2015, p. 342).

Although the above inclusive education practice reform approach in terms of full participation seems sound, issues surrounding its practicality are yet to be investigated in the Saudi Arabian context (Abu-Alghayth et al., 2022). If inclusive reform efforts toward full participation of students are to be more successful, there is a need for further investigation to understand the ways teachers and parents think about the facilitators and barriers to full participation orchestrated through inclusive teaching.

Despite considerable reform efforts in enabling full access to students who are deaf or hard of hearing in inclusive schools, not much research into full participation appears to have been done, particularly in the Saudi Arabian context. A few studies conducted in Saudi Arabia found negative teacher attitudes related to the degree of disability and inadequate support for students all of which influenced the participation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (Al-Mousa, 2010). Another key issue related to this field of full participation in inclusion is the understanding of the concept of full participation. This means, having deeper insights into student differences and how to deal with differences in schools, in classrooms and in the curriculum in general to enable access, participation and achievement. With full participation in mind, the issue is no longer about what inclusion is and why it is needed rather, the key question is how well-established support systems are helping every student to realise their achievement goals (Florian, 2009).

Research questions

1. What are teachers' perspectives of full participation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in inclusive schools?
2. Are there significant differences in teachers' perspectives based on (a) gender, and (b) region?

Methods

The research questions of this study required quantitative data for the purposes of integration, in-depth understanding and corroboration of the research problem (Bazeley, 2009; Creswell, 2012). This is consistent with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2007) position that quantitative research design can create a clear picture of the problem being studied. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants (Creswell & Clark, 2017, Clark & Creswell, 2010).

Research context and participants

This study was conducted in two cities, Riyadh and Jazan in Saudi Arabia by utilising 15 elementary schools in Riyadh and 12 elementary schools in Jazan who claimed they practice inclusion or enrolled general education students and students who are deaf or hard of hearing. All the teachers in these schools were invited to participate on a volunteer basis. The school teachers had to complete consent forms to be accepted as participants. The teachers in the elementary schools were included due to their willingness to participate in the study. In the selection of participants, neither a random sampling nor a sample-size calculation was utilised to determine the sample sizes in Riyadh and Jazan. Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed to the elementary school teachers, the final sample who returned the questionnaire for this research study was 66 participants (44.6%) from Riyadh and 82 participants (55.4%) from Jazan. Although I sent reminders to the participants in order to obtain more responses, the outstanding questionnaires were not returned. The final response rate was thus 74% (148), which according to Nulty (2008), is good.

Table 1 details of the participants

Participants	No	Location
Teachers	66	Riyadh
Teachers	82	Jazan
Total	148	

Data collection

A questionnaire to collect data from teachers was used in this study. To develop the questionnaire, it was important to carefully consider how the final questionnaire would facilitate the collection of relevant, valid and reliable data to answer the research questions posed in this study (Campanelli, 2008). Several approaches were used to develop the questionnaire for use in this study. The next section outlined these approaches.

Conceptualising the questionnaire

The first stage in the development of the questionnaire was the conceptualisation stage. According to Fowler and Cosenza (2008), the conceptualisation stage of a questionnaire allows me to identify key areas to focus the item writing on. Thus, at the conceptualisation stage, I used the inclusive education and full participation literature, and Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory to identify key areas and variables that the questionnaire should address. Variables such as concerns, attitudes, knowledge of inclusive teaching, practices, facilitators, and barriers were identified as the main focus areas to guide the framing of the questionnaire items. This

careful approach to the constructing of the questionnaire items provided an ultimate lead for the questionnaire to identify concrete, quantifiable concepts (Billiet, 2006) and at the same time, provide indications of how the concept of full participation was enacted in the Saudi inclusive primary schools.

Questionnaire review by expert supervisors

The second stage has involved revision of the initial draft. After the initial items in the questionnaires were developed, I sent the questionnaire to the study supervisors for review and comments. The study supervisors made suggestions for some items to be deleted because they were ambiguous. Some items were found to measure more than one variable so those items were also highlighted for modification. Apart from structural changes, the supervisors also made some grammatical and syntax changes to some of the items so they read better.

Reliability of the questionnaire

Reliability scores of the questionnaire were computed, using SPSS version 24 which yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .811 for the total scale of 31 items, .753 for the attitude subscale of 16 items, and .943 for knowledge subscale of 15 items. According to previous literature by Hays and Revicki (2005), and Revicki (2014), these reliability coefficients showed that the questionnaire and its subscales satisfied the internal consistency requirements and thus, were reliable for use to measure the participants' attitudes, knowledge, practice perspectives and facilitators and barriers to full participation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Data collection procedure

The purpose of the questionnaire was to assess the teachers' attitudes, knowledge, practices and facilitators and barriers to full participation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in inclusive elementary schools. Originally, I planned to personally distribute the questionnaires in hard copy, however, the participants suggested that I send the electronic version of the questionnaire so that they can complete it and return it to me by e-mails. As soon as the questionnaires were returned I input the data into my computer at the University of Exeter, which was password protected and securely locked. Each questionnaire was labelled with a number (U1, U2...for Urban) and R1, R2...for Rural) to enable me to conduct the relevant analysis pertaining to the two contexts where the data were collected. Initial analysis of the questionnaire was conducted to assess how the participants responded to the various items. This first inspection was used to frame some of the interview questions for the second phase of the study.

Data analysis

As Likert-type scale questions were used, information in the questionnaires was coded and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 programme. The questionnaire items included positive or negative statements that were measured on 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree=5 to strongly disagree=1. All negative items were reversed during data entry. The positive statements were scored '1' for 'strongly disagree' and '5' for 'strongly agree.' Negative statements were coded in a reverse manner ('1'= strongly agree; '5'= strongly disagree). Descriptive analyses were performed on the quantitative data to determine the frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations for each question. These means were then used to conduct independent samples t-tests to identify differences in responses to each item between teachers in Jazan and Riyadh as well as between female and male teachers.

Findings and Discussions

Participants' demographic information

Part one of the questionnaire asked questions about the gender of participants, the location they work (Urban or Rural), professional qualification, professional role and age. Location and gender have been used to conduct independent sample t-tests on Part 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the questionnaire.

Table 3 Age of participants

Range	Frequency (%)
20-29	8 (5.4%)
30-39	71(48.0%)
40-49	54(36.5%)
50+	15(10.1%)
Total	148 (100.0%)

The results show that the teachers' ages vary with the majority being below 50 years of age. Considering the retirement age of teachers in Saudi Arabia is 60 years of age, these teachers still have time to support the inclusive practice agenda of the Saudi government.

Questions were asked to determine the role the various participants played in their respective schools. This is important in understanding the support students who are deaf or hard of hearing receive. For example, the

presence of a high number of special education teachers or therapists would mean that there is some specialised skills that other teachers can draw upon to teach these students. This information is represented in Table 4.

Table 4 Professional roles

Roles	Frequency (%)
Administrator/principal	2 (1.4%)
General education teacher	54 (36.5%)
Special education teacher	85 (57.4%)
Teaching assistant	1 (0.7%)
Therapists/special educator	6 (4.1%)
Total	148 (100%)

From the table, the distribution of roles of the participants is concerning because of the small number of teaching assistants and therapists, but promising in terms of the high number of special education teachers available to support students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the inclusive schools. It may be that, the increased number of special education teachers in general education schools is the result of the Saudi government's substantial investment in the last 10 years to train more special education teachers both at home and abroad in order to support inclusive education implementation in Saudi Arabia (Alnahdi, 2014).

Table 5 Years of teaching experience

Age range	Frequency (%)
Less than 5 yrs	13(8.8%)
5-10yrs	47(31.8%)
11-15yrs	26(17.6%)
16-20yrs	31(20.9%)
21+yrs	31(20.9%)
Total	148(100%)

Table 5 represents the distribution of the participants' professional experience in years. This experience distribution shows that the teachers are mainly experienced teacher practitioners in their respective schools.

Table 6 Qualification of participants

Level	Frequency (%)
PhD	1(0.7%)
Master's Degree	17(11.5%)
Bachelor Degree	118(79.7%)
Diploma	10(6.8%)
Certificate	2(1.4%)
Total	148(100%)

Table 6 shows the qualifications of the participants. It provides evidence that a clear majority of the participants are qualified in general or special teacher education to teach in elementary schools and that they are better prepared to deliver teaching programmes that support all students in inclusive schools.

Attitudes towards full participation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing

This section of the questionnaire included 16 items that measured participants' attitudes on a five-point Likert scale. The questions sought to find out how the participants feel toward full participation of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in inclusive programmes. In order to present how participants either responded negatively or positively to each item, (Strongly Disagree/Disagree and (Strongly Agree/Agree), have been combined into single categories to simplify understanding of the data, and the neutral point has been reported in the middle as 'not sure'.

The data in Table 8 indicates strong mixed of positive and negative attitudes towards educating deaf or hard of hearing students full time in inclusive elementary schools. In terms of positive attitudes, the majority of the participants 80.4 % (119) are in favour that students who are deaf or hard of hearing should have all their education in regular schools. This is consistent with an overwhelming majority of the participants 84.4% (119) who considered that all students would benefit from having deaf or hard of hearing students in inclusive classes. The majority of the teachers 73.6%(109) also responded positively that deaf or hard of hearing students who are physically aggressive towards others should be included in regular education classrooms however, in contradiction, 70.9 (105) of the participants responded that students who are deaf or hard of hearing should be in special education classes. Other positive attitude statements relate to confidence to teach deaf or hard of hearing students in inclusive classroom 77.7% (115) and the acceptance of the majority participants 73.0% (108) that, inclusive schools are the appropriate educational placements for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Negative attitudes focus on resource, curriculum, behavioural and practice issues. Slightly more than half 53.4% (79) of the participants felt that regular education teachers should not be responsible for teaching deaf or hard of hearing students and 55.4% (82) responded that including deaf or hard of hearing students in all aspects of the curriculum is not possible in inclusive schools. The results again showed that the majority of the teachers 73.6% (109) were concerned about the behaviour of deaf or hard of hearing students in inclusive classrooms, and 61.5% (91) responded that the lack of adequate support to help them in their practice was the underlying factor for negative sentiments toward inclusive education.

It is concerning to discover that a great majority of the teachers 87.2% (129) believed that including students who are deaf or hard of hearing in inclusive classes would reduce the academic standards of all students, and 68.3% (101) responded that their workload increased because of inclusion. With regard to supporting students' full participation, 76.3% (113) of the participants indicated that it is difficult to give equal attention to all students in an inclusive classroom when deaf or hard of hearing students are included.

Table 8 Attitudes of participants

Questionnaire items	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree % (n)	Not sure % (n)	Strongly Agree/Agree % (n)
1. Students who are deaf/hard of hearing should have all their education in regular schools	7.4(11)	12.2(18)	80.4(119)
2. Students who are deaf/hard of hearing should be in special education classes.	13.5(20)	15.5(23)	70.9(105)
3. All efforts should be made to educate students who are deaf/hard of hearing in the regular education classroom.	24.3(36)	29.1(43)	46.6(69)
4. All students will benefit from having deaf/hearing students in the class.	7.4(11)	12.2(18)	84.4(119)
5. All deaf students should have access to inclusive schools.	40.6(60)	23.6(35)	35.8(53)
6. Regular education teachers should not be responsible for teaching deaf/hard of hearing students.	33.1(49)	13.5(20)	53.4(79)
7. Including deaf/hard of hearing students in all aspects of the curriculum is not possible in inclusive schools.	21.6(32)	23.0(34)	55.4(82)
8. I am confident to teach deaf/hard of hearing students in inclusive classroom.	7.5(11)	14.9(22)	77.7(115)
9. It should be the role of Special education teachers to teach deaf/hard of hearing students.	12.2 (18)	27.0(40)	60.8(90)
10. Deaf/hard of hearing students who are physically aggressive towards others should be included in regular education classrooms	11.5(17)	14.9(22)	73.6(109)
11. I am concerned about the behaviour of deaf/hard of hearing students in inclusive classrooms.	12.9(19)	13.5(20)	73.6(109)
12. The major issue for me is the lack of adequate support to help me include all students in my class.	8.8(13)	29.7(44)	61.5(91)
13. Including deaf/hard of hearing students in inclusive classes will reduce the academic standard for all students.	5.5(7)	7.4(11)	87.2(129)
14. My workload has increased because of inclusion.	10.2(15)	21.6(32)	68.3(101)
15. It is difficult to give equal attention to all students in an inclusive classroom.	11.5(17)	22.2(18)	76.3(113)
16. Inclusive schools are the appropriate educational placements for students who are deaf/hard of hearing.	17.6(26)	9.5(14)	73.0(108)

Comparing differences in attitudes between Urban and Rural teacher participants

Results from an independent samples t-test of the overall attitude score indicated a slight difference between mean scores for Urban participants ($M = 58.02$, $SD = 5.3$, $N = 66$) and Rural participants ($M = 56.74$, $SD = 6.9$, $N = 82$), $t(146)=1.236$, $p=.236$. However, this was not significant at the 95% confidence level. However, a t-test of the individual 16 attitude items found significant differences on six items.

I used an alpha level of .05 for the statistical tests. The data in Tables 9 and 10 show that there were significant differences in the scores obtained from Urban and Rural teachers pertaining to six questionnaire items (2, 10, 11, 13, 14, &16). These are "students who are deaf or hard of hearing should be in special education classes" Urban ($M=3.79$, $SD=.79$) and Rural ($M= 3.49$, $SD=.79$); $t(2.371)$, $p=.019$; and deaf or hard of hearing students who are physically aggressive towards others should be included in regular education classrooms" Urban ($M=3.83$, $SD=.54$) and Rural ($M=3.49$, $SD.84$); $t(2.903)$, $p=.004$. Others are, teachers were "concerned about the behaviour of deaf or hard of hearing students in inclusive classrooms" Urban ($M=3.83$, $SD=.65$) and Rural ($M= 3.55$, $SD=.90$); $t(2.151)$, $p=.033$; "that including deaf or hard of hearing students in inclusive classes will reduce the academic standard for all students" Urban ($M=4.17$, $SD=.54$) and Rural ($M= 3.91$, $SD=.89$); $t(2.014)$, $p=.046$; and "my workload has increased because of inclusion" Urban ($M=3.71$, $SD=.57$) and Rural ($M= 3.48$, $SD=.81$); $t(1.983)$, $p=.049$. The greatest mean difference was on the item, "inclusive schools are the appropriate educational placements for students who are deaf or hard of hearing" Urban ($M=3.42$, $SD=1.16$), Rural ($M=4.11$, $SD=.99$); $t(-3.797)$, $p=.000$.

Differences in male and female teacher attitudes

A computation of t-tests on the overall scale did not show significant differences at the 95% confidence level. However, an independent samples t-test on the individual items showed that differences in attitudes on two

items (8 & 11) were significant. These are “confidence to teach deaf or hard of hearing students in inclusive classroom” Female ($M=3.89$, $SD=.55$) and Male ($M=3.57$, $SD=.78$), $t(2.861)$, $p=.005$ as well as “being concerned about the behaviour of deaf or hard of hearing students in inclusive classrooms” Female ($M=3.85$, $SD=.58$) and Male ($M=3.47$, $SD=.98$), $t(2.911)$, $p=.004$. This shows that the female teachers have slightly more negative attitudes concerning the behaviour challenges of students who are deaf or hard of hearing than their male counterparts were.

Knowledge regarding full participation in inclusive programmes

Part 3 of the questionnaire aims to elicit participants' responses on their preparedness to implement inclusive strategies that accommodate deaf or hard of hearing students full time in inclusive elementary schools in Saudi Arabia. Generally, the results show positive agreement with the 15 items. The majority of participants 71.7% (106) responded that they are well prepared and 67.6% (100) indicated they have knowledge and skills to effectively teach students who are deaf or hard of hearing in inclusive classes. In contradiction 58.1% (86) of the teachers responded that they do not have the knowledge and skills to teach deaf or hard of hearing students. It thus makes sense when 69.2% (103) indicated that they would like to have more training to effectively teach students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The results showed that the teachers have professional development opportunities provided by their school leaders. This is evident in the response to the items on professional learning when a little more than half of the participants 57.4% (85) agreed that they were encouraged by their administrators to attend conferences/workshops/courses on teaching students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Pertaining to full participation and inclusive teaching, 55.4% (82) claimed they have adequate knowledge in inclusive teaching and 64.9% (96) responded that they need more training on inclusive teaching. The majority of the participants 60.1% (89) indicated that they have adequate understanding of the concept of full participation, know how to use an inclusive teaching approach to teach students with deaf or hard of hearing students 60.8%(90), have adequate knowledge of how to develop creative new ways of working with all students according to their needs 51.3%(76), and 54.0%(80) stated they know how to provide each individual student with different modes of instruction based on their needs.

An independent samples t-test was used to compare the responses from Urban and Rural participants pertaining to adequacy of knowledge and preparedness to teach students who are deaf or hard of hearing to ascertain if significant differences exist between their responses. The overall subscale and individual items show no significant differences between the Rural and Urban teachers. Similarly, the responses of female and male participants pertaining to knowledge and preparedness to teach students who are deaf or hard of hearing were compared to ascertain if significant differences exist between their responses but no differences were identified.

Table 13 Percentage distributions on teacher knowledge

Questionnaire items	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Not sure	Strongly Agree/Agree
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
1. My educational background has prepared me to effectively teach students who are deaf/hard of hearing.	18.9(28)	9.5(14)	71.7(106)
2. I have adequate knowledge and skills to teach all deaf/hard of hearing students in inclusive classes.	14.2(21)	18.2(27)	67.6(100)
3. I need more training in order to appropriately teach students who are deaf/hard of hearing.	18.9(28)	11.5(17)	69.2(103)
4. I am encouraged by my administrators to attend conferences/workshops/courses on teaching students who are deaf/hard of hearing.	23.0(34)	19.6(29)	57.4(85)
5. I do not have the knowledge and skills to teach deaf students	25.0(37)	16.9(25)	58.1(86)
6. I have adequate knowledge of inclusive teaching.	24.3(36)	20.3(30)	55.4(82)
7. I need more training on inclusive teaching.	18.9(28)	18.2(24)	64.9(96)
8. My understanding of the concept of full participation is adequate.	20.3(30)	19.6(29)	60.1(89)
9. I need more training on how to implement inclusive teaching.	20.3(30)	16.2(24)	63.5(94)
10. I know how to use an inclusive pedagogical approach to teach students with deaf/hard of hearing students.	29.1(43)	10.1(15)	60.8(90)
11. I believe that I am qualified and capable of teaching all students.	38.6(57)	13.5(20)	47.9(71)
12. I have adequate knowledge to develop creative new ways of working with all students according to their needs.	28.4(42)	20.3(30)	51.3(76)
13. The learning of every student is transformable through inclusive pedagogy.	31.1(46)	23.6(35)	45.2(67)
14. I know how to modify resources to accommodate students with disabilities	33.8(50)	19.6(29)	46.6(69)
15. I know how to provide each individual student with different modes of instruction based on their needs.	37.2(55)	8.8(13)	54.0(80)

Implication, recommendations, and conclusion

This study draws significant implications for school principals. It is often difficult for teachers to progress in their pursuit in inclusive education if a strong leadership with an inclusive orientation does not support them (Agbenyega & Sharma, 2014; Timothy & Agbenyega, 2019). As this study identifies that full participation and inclusive teaching are not yet fully developed in the Saudi elementary schools that participated in this study, it is important that schools' principals assume strong leadership positions and enact policies and visions for their schools. These visions and inclusive programmes would need to adopt an open and consultative approach with parents and the whole school community. Studies have argued that inclusive practices thrive when there is collaboration and collective thinking within the whole school community (Elder, Rood & Damiani, 2018, Flrian, 2014). When inclusive education, inclusive teaching, and full participation practices are situated within

the whole school agenda, there is a greater sense of what is expected with more possibility for supporting the innovation (Sharma, Loreman & Forlin, 2012).

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