



# The Degree Of Applicability Of Quality Standards In Special Education Teacher Preparation Of Students With Intellectual Disabilities In Saudi Universities

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent of application of quality standards in special education teacher preparation programs in Saudi universities. The study sample consisted of 89 participants in the form of faculty members in special education programs in Saudi universities who teach in the field of intellectual disability. The study used the quantitative descriptive method. The results indicated that the implementation of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education programs in Saudi universities existed to a moderate extent, with an average of 3.65, and with averages ranging between 4.22 and 3.33 on with regard to the sub-standards. The highest extent of the application of quality standards and program accreditation came in terms of "mission and goals" with an average of (4.22), followed by "program management and quality assurance" with an average of (3.77). The faculty members standards was in third place, with an average of (3.64). The students standard were ranked fourth, with an average of (3.63), while the "teaching and learning" standard was ranked fifth, with an average of (3.56). Finally, the standard of "learning resources, facilities and equipment", had an average of (3.33). The study did not find statistically significant differences in the application of quality standards in special education teacher preparation programs in terms of the gender variable.

**Keywords:** Quality standard, special education teacher preparation programs, Intellectual disabilities.

## Introduction:

The subject of educational development and institutional reform has occupied the center stage among researchers and educators to the extent that it has become a major priority. Because educational reform necessitates the development and reform of educational reality in all its aspects, the teacher is seen as one of the primary gateways to the educational process. Whatever, the issue of educational development should focus more on teacher education and improve all aspects of how special education teachers are prepared (Hamadneh & Al Qahtani, 2020; Kanan, 2007).

Undoubtedly, educational systems and related institutions play an important role in preparing the teacher in accordance with the developments and changes taking place in educational fields, whether in regular education or in special education (Merghany, 2020). Many reviews of the special education literature has linked the relationship between teacher preparation programs and the achievement of students with disabilities, and indicate that appropriate training and preparation leads to achieving desirable outcomes with regard to these students (Al-Khatib and Al-Hadidi, 2010; Adams, 2004). Because of the importance of this issue and its consequences, the No Child Left Behind Act-NCLBA recommended that all pupils, including those with disabilities, are taught by well-qualified teachers. This prompted the issue of teacher quality and the quality of preparation programs to remain in the spotlight (Fall, 2008).

## Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs

The issue of programs preparing qualified specialists and teachers to work with children and adolescents with disabilities has focused on best evidence practice (Al Masri, 2018). It is one of the most pressing issues in

education systems in the twenty-first century. It has become a significant issue among educators and researchers as a result of the changes and developments taking place in the field of education and with regard to the training of individuals with disabilities. Consequently, current endeavors have responded to this change (Al-Zaboun, 2013).

The preparation programs offered in colleges and universities have an important and fundamental role to play in developing the competencies and knowledge of student teachers in special education to allow them to work with individuals and students with disabilities. However, many experts in special education suggest that there are a number of challenges associated with these programs (Al-Khatib and Al-Hadidi, 2007).

Many special education teachers believe that when they finish university they are not well prepared for the requirements with regard to teaching students with disabilities (Al Zahrani & Brigham, 2017). In addition, they think that there is a gap between what they acquire in their undergraduate courses and what is actually done in the field (Bouck, 2005; Mastropieri, 2001). In fact, many pre-service preparation programs do not meet the standards associated with highly qualified teacher status (HQT) (Banks, 2012). These programs are unable to play their role in meeting the needs of special education teachers and the needs of educational institutions (Mazin, 2011). In addition, such teacher preparation often includes educational thought with regard to approaches that according to different circumstances and developments. Therefore they may not keep pace with those developments that make differences in the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families (Billingsely & Cross, 1992).

### **The development of the special education teacher preparation program movement**

The efforts of specialists in the field of special education such as Thomas Galudate (1787-1851), Samuel How (1801-1876), Edward Seguin (1812-1880), and Alexander Bell (1847-1922) have played a role in the development of the field of special education and teacher education. They developed specialized training programs for teachers who work in institutions serving these individuals (Mekhlafi, 2020; Osgood, 1999).

In general, the special education literature indicates that there are three types of programs of special education teacher: First, the categorical classification, which focuses on preparing teachers and qualifying them to work with a specific category of disability. Second, the non-categorical classification, which focuses on the nature of the behavioral characteristics of children with special needs and not on the groups to which they belong. Third, integrative preparation, which focuses on preparing teachers who meet the conditions of the ordinary teacher and the special education teacher, who must cooperate in order to complete the process of successful inclusion (Al Masri, 2018; Hamadneh & Al Qahtani, 2020; Khasawneh et al., 2010).

Recently, many efforts have been made in a number of countries to unify the programs for preparing teachers of special education and regular education, so that they are designed in an expanded or unified way (Merghany, 2010). This initiative is seen as an improvement, and includes adding new courses or field experiences, reviewing the content and requirements of such courses and the experiences offered in each special education and regular education teacher preparation program. This work helps to meet the guidelines and standards for both special and general education (Banks, 2012; Al Zboun, 2013).

In the Arab world in general, the movement with regard to programs for preparing special education teachers has developed in a number of countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Emirates, Bahrain (Mekhlafi, 2020; Al Masri, 2018; Al Shareef, 2026; Al-Qaryouti, Al-Sartawi & Al-Smadi, 1995). It has subsequently witnessed an expansion and spread in a number of other countries. In Saudi Arabia, the movement with regard to programs for preparing special education teachers began in the nineteen eighties and has continued and increased in the past few years. Currently, its programs are offered in public colleges and universities at bachelor, masters, doctoral, and higher diploma levels. After completing such programs, the student teacher obtains a specialized certificate that enables and qualifies him to work with individuals with disabilities, either in general in terms of different categories of disabilities, or in particular with regard to a specific category.

### **Quality standards in teacher preparation programs**

The issue of quality in educational systems has become of clear interest on the part of researchers and educators. It represents an area of great concern among decision makers. Educational systems have come under great pressure in terms of using quality as a standard for the educational product, and for educational institutions in the twenty-first century (Al Zahrani & Brigham, 2017). This challenge imposes the need to improve the quality of education in educational institutions in the light of technological and economic challenges on the one hand, and the need for the optimal use of resources on the other (Al-Khatib, 2003).

In the nineteen seventies, industrialized countries such as Japan, China and Germany made many major invested heavily with the aim of improving the quality of the education they provided and implementing various programs such as the school-to-work program. Other countries such as those in the European Union

paid a great deal of attention to teacher preparation programs in order to achieve high quality teaching practices (Al-Hayek & Al Kilani, 2007).

The movement to develop standards began at the level of large and prestigious educational councils, institutions and organizations. Through time many standards and quality indicators were developed to guide the performance of special education institutions, in addition to special education teacher preparation programs, and standards for educational content and curriculum (Hamadneh & Al Qahtani, 2020; Al Masri, 2018). The United States of America was one of the first countries to be clearly concerned with the increase of standards in education, and has continued to develop the American educational system, teacher preparation programs, curriculum development, and the performance of educational institutions (Saskatchewan Education Indicators Program, 2010).

In special education, the issue of educational development was a late arrival in that it began at the end of the twentieth century. From the early years of the twenty-first century, there has been a clear expansion of the issue of educational development and quality in education, including special education (Al Zboun, 2013). There has been a great deal of interest with regard to two issues: firstly, the standards-based educational development movement which includes standards-based education and standards-development research to assess the performance of educational institutions and secondly, school choice (Al Masri, 2018).

There are a number of justifications for the development of standards with regard to teacher preparation programs in the light of the call for improved quality standards, including: First, change and transformation in educational systems and teacher preparation programs. Second, shortcomings when it comes to linking education curricula to teacher preparation colleges and institutes with the culture of contemporary society. Third, shortcomings in achieving the performance system. Fourth, a lack of scientific research in faculties of teacher preparation institutions. Fifth, the existence of a gap between theory and practice in teacher preparation programs. Sixth, the diagnosis and development of weaknesses. Seventh, the formation of positive trends with regard to the teaching profession (Al-Matrafi, 2009). Finally, the upgrading of institutional professional practices to ensure high quality outputs (Al-Hassan, 2009).

### **Standards with regard to preparing special education teachers**

In line with the international interest in the development of the standards movement, and based on the growing need to improve the quality of work of special education institutions and services, a number of researchers, institutions, and councils in a number of countries have tried to develop standards. This has been especially the case with regard to the institutional performance of special education programs in terms of the level of standards for special education in early childhood. This has led to the development of standards with regard to preparing special education teachers at the university level, such as those developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (Mekhlafi, 2020; Al Masri, 2018; Al Shareef, 2016; Al Zubun, 2013). The following is a summary of the most prominent standards developed, especially in teacher preparation programs in special education:

- First: CEC standards. These include: a. Initial special education professional preparation standards b. Advanced Special Professional Preparation Standards (CEC, 2013; CEC, 2012).
- Second: The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium – INTASC (CCSSO). (CCSSO, 2001).
- Third: Standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (NCATE, 2001).
- Fourth: Illinois State Standards for Certification in Special Education.
- Fifth: Standards of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). (CCTC, 1996)
- Sixth: Standards of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education in the Arab Republic of Egypt (National Authority for Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAEQAA). (NAEQAA, 2010).

Al Zboun (2013) indicated that the process of developing standards and indicators usually includes a set of steps and procedures to be followed by institutions, committees and individuals. These are as follows: First, a meeting of a working group of 10-25 experts with experience and diverse viewpoints. Second, determine the goal and purpose of its development. Third, identify the group's values and visions. Fourth, review the available data on the indicators by reviewing the previous literature, and writing a draft of the indicators based on the reviewed data. Fifthly, achieve community participation in the development of the indicators. Sixth, involve experts in the review and revision of the indicators. Seventh, publish and develop indicators and make them publicly available. Eighth, review the indicators, update them transparently, and finally verify the indicators according to changing circumstances.

### Literature Review

L-Mekhlafi (2020) conducted a study aimed at establishing the extent of quality standards implementation in graduate programs at the College of Education in Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University in the light of the NCAAA requirements. A random sample of 86 graduate students was used to collect data. The participants were asked to complete a five-point scale questionnaire consisting of 69 items connected to eight quality standards. Overall, the result revealed an average level of implementation. The findings demonstrated a higher average when it came to applying quality standards related to teaching staff and quality learning. The results found that lower averages with regard to implementation were found for the quality standards associated with scientific research, facilities, learning resources, learning outcomes, mission and goals, and graduate qualities.

Al Masri (2018) investigated the extent of applicability of quality standards to the program for preparing special education teachers at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. The study population consisted of 97 students who were expected to graduate in the academic year 1438. They were selected from the Special Education Department in the College of Education for Girls in Al-Kharj. The study population also included 11 female members from the women's department. The researcher developed a scale consisting of 87 items distributed over eight sub-scales. The findings of the study indicated that the degree of applicability of quality standards to the program for preparing special education teachers at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University scored highly. On the other hand, the availability of utilities and equipment ranked last, with the lowest average and a medium degree of applicability. The findings of the study also indicated that there were statistically significant differences in all domains of the scale due to the variable of the specialization branch, and in favor of the intellectual disability branch. It also indicated that there were differences due to the cumulative average variable.

In a study by Al-Zoubi and Abdel-Rahman (2013), the authors evaluated the special education teacher preparation programs in 17 universities in order to identify the level of achievement of NCAAA standards in these programs. The authors pointed out that their sample consisted of 17 chairs of special education departments who answered the survey. They found that only four standards were seen as the most important targets in the special education programs surveyed. These were learner affairs, assistance services, employment procedures, and learning and teaching, while five standards were viewed as the second most important targets, in the form of relationships with the community, research, management of programs, quality of programs, and facilities and equipment. Learning resources and planning and financial management standards were, however, considered to be at a low level of importance.

Alzahrani & Brigham (2017) conducted a study to gather data on the efficiency of Saudi universities' autism spectrum disorders (ASD) preparation programs, based on the opinions of pre-service teachers already enrolled in the program. It also aimed to deliver information on the number of universities in Saudi Arabia that have teacher preparation programs for teachers who want to work with people with autism. The level of gratification in five domains throughout all the universities' preparation programs was compared using an ANOVA test. According to the findings, students were generally satisfied with the quality of the special educators preparation programs provided by numerous universities in the Kingdom. Only a few issues were discovered in relation to ASD teacher preparation programs. There have been widespread appeals for Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions to adopt international standards.

Hamadneh & Al Qahtani (2020) evaluated the quality of special educator preparation programs at Najran University in the light of CAEP. The study sample consisted of 75 participants in the form of the faculty of the College of Education in this university. The findings showed that the assessment level of the features of special educator preparation programs based on CAEP indicated sufficient provision, while the program's impact was first-rate, followed by its quality assurance and continuous development, while the field-experience standard and professional performances were ranked lowest. The outcomes also specified statistically significant differences based on the participants' gender.

Al-Shareef (2016) attempted to estimate the level of achievement in terms of total quality standards in the preparation program of special education teacher at Umm Al-Qura University. The study sample consisted of 39 faculty members. A questionnaire was prepared to investigate the study objectives. The findings showed that the degree of achievement in terms of total quality standards in the program for preparing a special education teacher at Umm Al-Qura University was large. The practical education standard was deemed to be in the first rank, followed by the evaluation of students in the second. The program objectives took third place, methods fourth, then the curriculum fifth. Facilities and equipment were ranked last. The findings also indicated that there were significant differences in the faculty members' estimates of the degree to which the



comprehensive quality standards are achieved in the special education teacher preparation program in terms of gender in favor of female faculty members.

In similar study, Qatnani (2005) conducted a study with the intention of evaluating the feasibility and merits of the Bachelor of Special Education program at the University of Jordan from the point of view of the participants in the program. The sample of study consisted of 213 candidate students, faculty members, field supervisors, and principals of regular schools and special education centers in the Capital Governorate. The researcher used questionnaires and interviews to achieve the purpose of the study. The results indicated that the students have positive attitudes towards students with disabilities, but the participants felt the need to address important topics such as autism, the use and employment of technology, teaching methods, and advanced issues in special education.

### **Statement of the Study:**

It is noted that there has been an increase in the demand for preparation programs in special education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the past two decades. Consequently, many public universities sought to establish departments in special education based on the preparation of special education teachers and specialists with competence at the cognitive and practical levels. Colleges of education in Saudi universities have become more required than previous years to work to ensure the quality of education and the quality of programs with regard to student-teacher candidates who will practice their work with individuals with disabilities, especially in an era in which continuous change has become a feature.

There is a requirement for researchers to identify the differences upon which teacher preparation programs are based, whether in special education or regular education, by identifying the knowledge and practices that are used to achieve the quality standards as they apply to qualified teachers, since in special education there are no studies that have examined the specific elements of those programs that are beneficial to in terms of the outputs of special education teachers, and thus are clearly reflected in the performance outcomes and the education of individuals with disabilities in the future. Consequently, researchers should conduct research that examines and measures these important elements (Banks, 2012). Linked to this, the problem addressed by the current study appears in the following main questions:

- To what extent are quality principles and program accreditation applied in the special education departments in Saudi universities?
- Are there statistically significant differences at the  $\alpha = 0.05$  level of significance with regard to the degree of application of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education departments in Saudi universities in terms of the gender variable?

### **Objectives of the study:**

- Identify the extent to which quality principles and programmatic accreditation are applied in special education departments in Saudi universities
- Determine the effect of gender on the degree of implementation of quality and accreditation standards in special education departments in Saudi Arabia.

### **The importance of the study:**

The theoretical importance is as follows:

- 1- It will provide accurate information as it will be based on the foundations of scientific research.
- 2- It deals with an important issue that focuses on defining the best practices and standards agreed upon with regard to the quality and adoption of programs for preparing special education teachers in Saudi universities. Therefore, the findings can be used as implementation guidelines for those programs.
- 3- It will help decision-makers, especially faculty members and supervisors in special education departments, to determine the effectiveness of preparation programs, to identify strengths and weaknesses in them, and to make the necessary decisions in the teaching process.

The practical importance:

- 1- It will build a tool that will help the process of evaluating the effectiveness and performance of preparation programs in special education.
- 2- It will help researchers in special education in other countries to conduct similar research and studies aimed at evaluating programs for preparing special education teachers.

### **Limitations of the study:**

- This study is limited to programs for preparing special education teachers of students with intellectual disabilities offered in Saudi universities.
- The study was limited to evaluating programs from the perspectives of faculty members in these programs who teach coursework in the field of intellectual disability.
- The study instrument was limited to only 32 criteria of the NCAAA- Version 2018.

### Participants:

The sample of study was in the form of 89 participants in the form of staff members of special education programs who were randomly selected from Saudi universities (47 male and 42 female). Table 1 shows the characteristics of the study sample:

**Table 1. The study sample according to gender and academic status**

Variables	Level of variable	No.	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	47	51.7
	Female	42	47.2%
<b>Academic status</b>	Instructor	2	2.2
	Lecturer	3	3.4
	Assistant Professor	36	40.4
	Associate Professor	32	36.0
	Professor	16	18.0
Total		<b>89</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Instrument:

The author used the standards of the NCAAA- Version 2018 (NCAAA, 2018), which included, mission and objectives, program management and quality warrant, program members, students, training and learning, learning resources, facilities and equipment. The standards consisted 32 criteria.

### Study methodology and statistical analysis:

The current study used a quantitative descriptive research approach to identify the extent of applicability of quality standards for special education teacher preparation programs in Saudi universities. A number of statistical methods were used to answer the study questions. The means and standard deviations were used to answer question number one, while a T-test was used to answer question number two.

### Results and discussion:

#### The first question asks: "To what degree are quality standards and program accreditation applied in the special education departments in Saudi universities?"

To measure the extent to which quality standards and program accreditation are applied in the special education departments in Saudi universities; means and standard deviations were used for the participants' answers in terms of the total score for all Standards and sub-Standards of the study scale. They were arranged in descending order as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the responses of the study sample to the total score with regard to the Standards and sub-Standards of the study scale arranged in descending order**

Rank	Standard	Means	Standard deviations	Extent of application
1	Mission and objectives	4.22	.53	High
2	Program management and quality assurance	3.77	.71	High
3	Program members	3.64	.85	Medium
5	Students	3.63	.69	Medium
4	Teaching and learning	3.56	.70	Medium
6	Learning resources, facilities and equipment	3.33	.86	Medium
Mean of standards		<b>3.65</b>	<b>.56</b>	<b>Medium</b>

The previous table indicates that the extent of implantation of quality standards and program accreditation in the departments of special education in these universities was medium, with a mean of 3.65, and a standard deviation of .56. The means ranged from 4.22- to 3.33, on the sub-Standards. The highest degree of implementation of quality standards and program accreditation came in the Standard with regard to "Mission and objectives" with a mean of 4.22 and a standard deviation of .53, followed by the principle of "program management and quality assurance" with a mean of 3.77 and a standard deviation of .71. The faculty members ranked third, with a mean of 3.64 and a standard deviation .85, while the "students"

Standard was fourth, with a mean of 3.63 and a standard deviation of .69. The “teaching and learning” Standard was ranked fifth, with a mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation .70. Finally, the “learning resources, facilities and equipment” Standard was ranked last, with a mean of 3.33 and a standard deviation of .86.

The foregoing means that special education programs in Saudi universities have achieved good quality and accreditation in terms of their various standards. It is noted that the standard of learning resources, facilities and equipment were graded lowest in terms of quality in those programs. The researcher attributes this finding to the fact that many of special education programs in Saudi universities are programs affiliated with old faculties. Therefore these colleges and programs have not been updated.

In general, this finding is consistent with the findings of Hamadn and Al-Qahtani (2020), which found that the quality standards at Najran University were judged to be at a medium level, as was the case in the study by Al-Makhlafi (2020) who found that the quality of learning resources was low, as was the case in Al-Masry's study (2018) which showed that the field of facilities and equipment were ranked last. It also agreed with the findings of the studies of both Zoubi and Abdel-Rahman (2013) and Al-Sharif (2016).

To identify the degree of applicability of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education departments in Saudi universities for each of the six Standards, means, standard deviations, and applicability levels for each Standard were used, with the total mean for each Standard being arranged in descending order. Tables 3 to 8 illustrate this:

### First Standard: Mission and Objectives:

**Table 3. Means and standard deviations of the responses of the study sample with regard to the sub-standards and the total score arranged in descending order**

Rank	Criterion	Mean	Standard deviations	Degree of application
1	The program has a clear, applicable, approved and announced mission, consistent with the mission of the university and the college.	4.40	.756	High
3	Work is done to achieve the objectives of the program through the preparation and implementation of operational plans consistent with the strategic plans of the faculty and the university	4.21	.790	High
2	The program's mission is characterized by clarity and applicability, in addition to its consistency with the objectives of the program itself.	4.20	.697	High
4	The mission and objectives are periodically evaluated to ensure that they are compatible with the needs and orientations of society	4.11	.836	High
Mean of Standard		<b>4.22</b>	<b>.534</b>	<b>High</b>

It can be seen from Table 3 that the degree of applicability of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education departments in Saudi universities in terms of the standard of "mission and objectives" was high, with means ranging from 4.11 to 4.40, with an average mean of 4.22. The table shows that all the standards were achieved to a high degree. Specifically, the criterion “The program has a clear, applicable, approved and announced mission, consistent with the mission of the university and collage” ranked first and with the highest ratings, with mean of 4.40, followed by the criterion “Work is being done to achieve the objectives of the program through preparing and implementing operational plans consistent with the strategic plans of the faculty and university” with mean of 4.21. This was followed by the criterion “The program's mission is distinguished by clarity and applicability in addition to its consistency with the objectives of the program itself”, with a mean of 4.20, and finally, in the last rank, the criterion "Work is being done to evaluate the mission and objectives on a regular basis to ensure their compatibility with the needs and orientations of society”, had a mean of 4.11.

In general, it is clear that all the criteria for the standard of mission and goals were achieved at a high level. The researcher suggests that the criterion “The program has a clear, applicable, approved and announced mission, consistent with the mission of the university and collage” achieved the highest degrees because programs usually consider that the presence of a message is an important element on which all program operations are based. It is also an important requirement for programs by the university and accreditation committees. In general, this outcome is consistent with the results of the study of Al-Masry (2018) and that of Al-Zoubi and Abdel-Rahman (2013), who found that the quality standards and specifications with regard to the criterion of mission and goals were achieved to a high degree.

**The second standard: program management and quality assurance:****Table 4. Means and standard deviations of the responses of the study sample with regard to the sub-standard and the total score for the criterion arranged in descending order**

Rank	Criterion	Mean	Standard deviations	Degree of application
1	The program is managed through specialized councils and committees with specific tasks and powers.	4.05	.801	High
2	The program has an administrative leadership and administrative and technical cadres with specific tasks and powers	3.89	1.033	High
4	The program management uses the systems, controls, and processes approved by the university, including evaluating the performance of faculty staff, as well as that of administrative and technical staff.	3.86	.973	High
3	The program management follows up on its commitment to implement its responsibility in the scientific research plan and society's partnership based on particular indicators.	3.86	.899	High
6	Program management ensures an applicable quality warrant and management procedure, consistent with the institutional quality procedure.	3.66	.981	Medium
5	The program involves a review committee that includes specialists in the field of the program, to assist its evaluation and performance growth.	3.64	.985	Medium
7	The program provides a comprehensive periodic assessment of its performance to identify strengths and weaknesses, develop plans for improvement, and follow up on their implementation.	3.45	1.01	Medium
Mean of Standard		<b>3.77</b>	<b>.711</b>	<b>High</b>

The results of Table 4 indicate that the degree of applicability of quality standards and program accreditation in the departments of special education in Saudi universities with regard to the standard of "program management and quality assurance" was high, with means ranging from 3.45 to 4.05, with a total mean of 3.77. Table 4 shows that the criterion "The program is managed through specialized councils and committees with specific tasks and powers" achieved a high score and ranked first, with a mean of 4.05, followed by the criterion "The program has an administrative leadership and administrative and technical cadres with specific tasks and powers" which also achieved a high score, with a mean of 3.89. This was followed by the criterion "the program management uses the systems, controls, and processes approved by the university, including evaluating the performance of faculty staff, as well as that of administrative and technical staff" and "The program management follows up on its commitment to implement its responsibility in the scientific research plan and society's partnership, based on particular indicators", which also achieved a high score with a mean of 3.86. The criteria "The program provides a comprehensive periodic assessment of its performance to identify strengths and weaknesses, develop plans for improvement, and follow up on their implementation", "the program involves a review committee that includes specialists in the field of the program, to assist its evaluation and performance growth" and "Program management ensures an applicable quality warrant and management procedure, consistent with the institutional quality procedure", with means of 3.45, 3.64, and 3.66, respectively.

From the foregoing, the researcher suggests that the criterion of "The program is managed through specialized councils and committees with specific tasks and powers" was ranked highest, perhaps because the nature of the work of the programs necessarily requires the existence of specialized committees with specific powers and tasks to ensure their quality. As for the criterion "The program provides a comprehensive periodic assessment of its performance to identify strengths and weaknesses, develop plans for improvement, and follow up on their implementation", it achieved the lowest average score. The researcher might attribute this to the fact that many special education programs have not started work on obtaining programmatic



accreditation, which requires conducting this type of periodic assessment. Evaluation is important and necessary to improve the quality of such a program. In general, this general result agrees with the study of Hamadan and Al-Qahtani (2020) who found that the standard of quality assurance and management came in the second rank, albeit with a high rank.

### Third standard: Teaching and learning:

**Table 5. Means and standard deviations of the responses of the study sample on the sub-standards and the total score arranged in descending order**

Rank	Criterion	Mean	Standard deviations	Degree of application
4	The study plan achieves a balance in terms of the general requirements and specialization requirements, and among theoretical and practical features.	3.82	.781	High
3	The program adheres to official procedures and standards in terms of the design, improvement and adjustment of the plan of study.	3.66	.856	Medium
1	The program identifies the characteristics of its graduates and the intended learning products in line with its mission and the characteristics of graduates at the university level.	3.57	.894	Medium
6	At the beginning of teaching each aspect of coursework, the student receives the necessary information with regard to learning consequences, teaching and learning policies, assessment methods.	3.55	1.060	Medium
2	The program applies appropriate mechanisms and tools to measure the characteristics of its graduates and the learning outcomes, and to verify that they are met.	3.50	1.017	Medium
5	The program monitors the teaching staff's commitment to the teaching and learning approaches and assessment tools contained in the program.	3.50	1.083	Medium
Mean of Standard		<b>3.56</b>	<b>.700</b>	Medium

The results of Table 5 show that the degree of applicability of quality standards and program accreditation in the departments of special education in Saudi universities in terms of the standard of "teaching and learning" achieved a medium degree of application. Its means ranged from 3.50 to 3.82, with an overall mean of 3.56. The results indicate that the criterion "The study plan achieves a balance in terms of general requirements and specialization requirements, and among theoretical and practical features" achieved a high degree of agreement and the highest degree of application, with a mean of 3.82, while the criteria "the program monitors the teaching staff's commitment to the teaching and learning approaches and assessment tools contained in the program" and "the program applies appropriate mechanisms and tools to measure the characteristics of its graduates and the learning outcomes, and verify that they are met according to specific performance levels and evaluation plans" achieved the lowest application score, and with a mean of 3.50 for each of the two criteria.

Although the standard of learning and teaching is considered one of the most important standards of quality and accreditation with regard to programs in general, it is noted that it achieved only a moderate degree of agreement. This may be due to the fact that the nature of this type of standard requires that it includes many procedures and requirements that may be difficult to achieve totally, and may require good experience in terms of quality and accreditation procedures. In general, the findings with regard to this question disagreed with the findings of Al-Zoubi and Abdul-Rahman (2013), who found that the standard of learning and teaching was one of the most significant criteria in special education teacher preparation programs.

**Fourth standard: students****Table 6. Means and standard deviations of the study sample's responses to the sub-standard and the total score arranged in descending order**

Rank	Criterion	Mean	Standard deviations	Degree of application
1	The program has approved and announced standards and conditions for students transferring to it as well as for accepting and registering students, which are commensurate with the nature of the program and are implemented equally.	4.00	.858	High
3	The program provides academic, psychological and social counseling and assistance to students, through well-trained cadres.	3.68	.929	Medium
2	The program explains to students their rights and duties during their learning experience.	3.61	.836	Medium
4	There is adequate representation of students on relevant boards and committees.	3.32	1.150	Medium
5	The program provides extracurricular activities for students in various fields to develop their abilities and skills	3.32	1.089	Medium
Mean of Standard		<b>3.63</b>	<b>.699</b>	Medium

The results shown in Table 6 indicate that the degree of applicability of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education departments in Saudi universities in terms of the "students" standard achieved a medium degree of application. Means ranged from 3.32 to 4.00, with an overall mean of 3.63. Table 6 shows that the criterion "The program has approved and announced standards and conditions for transferring to it as well as for accepting and registering students, which are commensurate with the nature of the program and are implemented equally" came with a high score and was ranked first with a mean of 4.00, while the criteria "The program provides extracurricular activities for students in various areas to foster their capacities" and "There is adequate representation of students on relevant boards and committees", achieved the lowest application scores, with a mean of 3.32 for each of the two criteria.

It is clear from the foregoing that the criterion of "The program has approved and announced standards and conditions for transferring to it as well as for accepting and registering students, which are commensurate with the nature of the program and are implemented equally" was ranked the highest criteria with regard to the students. The researcher explains this as being because the existence of accredited conditions for accepting and registering students is a major requirement and on which most programs are based. As for the criterion of "The program provides extracurricular activities for students in various areas to foster their capacities", which was ranked lowest, the researcher suggests that the nature of special education programs in general does not require many of them to provide extracurricular activities such as programs affiliated with scientific colleges.

**Fifth standard: Program members****Table 7. The means and standard deviations of the responses of the study sample on the sub-standard and the total score arranged in descending order**

Rank	Criterion	Mean	Standard deviations	Degree of application
3	Program members participate efficiently in research, scientific production and community service activities, and their involvement is one of the principles for their assessment.	3.73	1.142	High
1	The program has applicable policies and processes that are applied to select program members in the program and to retain distinguished colleagues among them.	3.73	1.201	High
4	Program members receive programs in professional and academic development, according to a plan that meets their needs and develops their performance.	3.57	1.081	Medium
2	The program has a sufficient number of faculty members with the necessary competence to teach students	3.52	1.061	Medium
Mean of Standard		<b>3.64</b>	<b>.855</b>	<b>Medium</b>

It is noted from Table 7 that the degree of applicability of quality standards and programmatic accreditation in the departments of special education in Saudi universities with regard to the standard of "program members" was ranked at a medium level, with means ranging from 3.52 to 3.73, with an overall mean of 3.64. Table 7 shows that "program members participate efficiently in research, scientific production and community service activities, and their involvement is one of the principles for their assessment" and "The program has appropriate policies and procedures that are applied to select program members in the program and to retain distinguished colleagues among them" with a mean of 3.73 for each of the two criteria. On the other hand, the criterion "The program has a sufficient number of program members with the necessary competence to teach students" and the criterion "Program members receive programs in professional and academic development, according to a plan that meets their needs and develop their performance" came with the lowest degrees of application, with a medium score, and with means of 3.52 and 3.57, respectively.

It is clear that the criterion "program members participate efficiently in research, scientific production and community service activities, and their involvement is one of the principles for their assessment" received the highest score. This may be due to the fact that these activities are considered one of the main and basic activities carried out by faculty members in all programs in Saudi universities, particularly in special education programs. It is also clear that the criterion "The program has a sufficient number of faculty members with the necessary competence to teach students" achieved the lowest score, perhaps due to the poor budget of programs and universities in providing and attracting a sufficient number of qualified staff. In general, the result of this question differed from the results of Al-Makhlafi's study (2020), who found that the average application of quality standards related to faculty members was high.

#### **The sixth standard: learning resources, facilities and equipment:**

**Table 8. Means and standard deviations of the responses of the study sample on the sub-standard and the total score arranged in descending order**

Rank	Criterion	Mean	Standard deviations	Degree of application
1	The program applies effective procedures and policies to manage the resources and materials to assist the training and learning process.	3.68	.977	Medium
4	The program has facilities and equipment appropriate for learners and other staff who have disabilities.	3.34	1.154	Medium
2	The library has a sufficient number of various sources commensurate with the type and requirements of the program and the needs of the learners.	3.32	1.045	Medium
3	The program has appropriate classrooms, labs and other facilities.	3.27	1.036	Medium
5	The program has appropriate tools, aids and settings for coursework that are offered remotely	3.25	1.031	Medium
6	The program assesses the efficiency of education resources, services and equipment and they are on account in its improvement plan.	3.09	1.319	Medium
	Mean of Standard	<b>3.33</b>	<b>.860</b>	<b>Medium</b>

The results of Table (8) show that the degree of applicability of quality standards and program accreditation in the departments of special education in Saudi universities with regard to the standard of "learning resources, facilities and equipment" came with a medium degree of application, with means ranging between 3.09 and 3.68, with an overall mean of 3.33. The results of the table also show that the criterion of "The program applies effective procedures and policies to manage the resources and materials to assist in the training and learning process" came with a medium degree of application and the highest degree of application, with mean of 3.68, while the criteria "The program assesses the efficiency of education resources, services and equipment and is on account in its improvement plan", "the program has the appropriate tools, aids and setting for coursework that is offered remotely", and "The program has the appropriate classrooms, labs and other facilities", came with the lowest degrees of application - medium - and with means of 3.09, 3.25, and 3.27 respectively.

The previous results indicate that all the criteria for the standard of learning resources, facilities, and equipment came with medium scores. The criterion "the program assesses the efficiency of education resources, services and equipment and is on account in its improvement plan is among the least acceptable criteria. This may be due to the lack of specialized committees involved in managing learning resources at the program level or at the college level to which these programs are affiliated. In general, this result is consistent

with the findings of many previous studies noted in the literature review, which indicates that the standard of learning resources, facilities, and equipment achieved the lowest standard in terms of quality and accreditation (Hamadna and Al-Qahtani, 2020; Al-Makhlafi, 2020; Al-Masry, 2018; Al-Zoubi and Abdel-Rahman, 2013; Al-Sharif, 2016).

**The second question asks: "Are there statistically significant differences at the level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in the degree of implementation of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education departments in Saudi universities in terms of the gender variable?"**

To answer this question, means and standard deviations of the degree of application of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education departments in Saudi universities were used in terms of the respondents' gender variable (male and female). To show the statistical differences between means, a "t" test was used for independent samples. The results are shown in Table 9.

**Table 9. Means, standard deviations, and t-tests for the significance of differences between means in the degree of implementation of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education departments in Saudi universities according to the respondent's gender variable**

Standard	Gender	Means	Standard deviations	't'	Freedom of degree	Sig.
<b>Mission and objectives</b>	Male	4.1522	.61797	-1.391-	86	.06
	Female	4.3095	.41249			
<b>Program management and quality assurance</b>	Male	3.5142	.64781	-3.750-	85	.96
	Female	4.0476	.67867			
<b>Program members</b>	Male	3.2246	.52729	-6.295-	86	.26
	Female	4.0079	.63859			
<b>Teaching and learning</b>	Male	3.3043	.61930	-4.343-	86	.59
	Female	3.8952	.65703			
<b>Students</b>	Male	3.3043	.78866	-4.153-	86	.35
	Female	4.0000	.78087			
<b>Learning resources, facilities and equipment</b>	Male	2.9629	.71676	-4.622-	85	.14
	Female	3.7301	.83045			
<b>Mean of standards</b>	Male	<b>3.3652</b>	<b>.44034</b>	<b>-3.200-</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>.06</b>
	Female	<b>3.7343</b>	<b>.62552</b>			

Table 9 indicates that there are no statistically significant differences ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in the degree of implementation of quality standards and program accreditation in the special education departments in Saudi universities with regard to the respondents' gender variable in terms of all main standards, and in the total score of the scale.

The foregoing means that the degree of implementation of quality and accreditation standards in special education programs does not differ according to gender, which means that the degree of implementation is equal between males and females. This may be due to the fact that most programs follow the same work procedures, whether in male programs or female programs. However, the results of this study differed from the results of Al-Sharif's study (2016) which showed that there were statistically significant differences in the faculty members' estimates of the degree of achieving comprehensive quality standards in special education teacher preparation programs according to the gender variable in favor of females. It also disagreed with the results of Hamadan and Al-Qahtani's study (2020), which found statistically significant differences in the average total scores attributed to gender, in favor of males.

### Conclusion:

Whether in general education or special education, educational systems and associated institutions are crucial in educating teachers in terms of the improvements and changes occurring in the educational area. Many special education teachers believe that they are not sufficiently well prepared for teaching students with disabilities when they graduate. The issue of quality in educational systems has become of clear interest on the part of researchers and educators and is a major concern among school administrators and decision makers.

It is noted that there has been an increase in demand for special education preparation programs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over the past 20 years. As a consequence, many public universities have sought to establish special education departments specializing in the preparation of special education teachers and specialists with competence at cognitive and practical levels. Therefore, it is necessary for researchers to determine the distinctions between special education and regular education teacher preparation programs by identifying the knowledge and practices that meet the standards of qualified teachers in each of these fields.

As no studies have specifically examined the components of special education programs that prepare their graduates and are therefore clearly reflected in the future performance and education of individuals with disabilities in Saudi Arabia, researchers in special education should carry out research that looks at, and measures, these crucial components.

This study examined the extent to which Saudi university special education departments adhere to accrediting standards in term of quality principles and programs. According to the findings, the special education departments at these universities display a medium level of program accreditation and the implementation of quality standards, with a mean score of 3.65 and a standard deviation of 0.56. With regard to the sub-standards, the means varied from 3.33 to 4.22. The "Mission and objectives" standard had the highest degree of program accreditation and quality standard implementation, with a mean of 4.22 and a standard deviation of 0.53. This indicates that Saudi institutions' special education programs have achieved good quality and accreditation across a range of criteria. It can be observed that the programs' standards in terms of learning resources, facilities, and equipment only achieved the lowest quality requirements. This result is explained by the researcher's observation that a large number of Saudi university special education programs based on the work of former faculty members. As a result, the curricula are outdated. In line with the National Center for Program Accreditation and Evaluation's requirements, the study recommends that special education programs offered by Saudi institutions be continuously assessed.

The study recommends the following:

- Continuous evaluation of special education programs in Saudi universities in accordance with the standards of the National Center for Program Accreditation and Evaluation.
- A focus on improving the quality of special education programs in terms of the standard of learning resources and equipment, with a further focus on the creation of committees to encourage adherence to this standard.
- The provision of advisory services for special education programs in order to achieve the requirements of quality and program accreditation, especially in terms of the standards of learning resources, facilities and equipment, teaching and learning, students, and faculty members.
- The conducting of several studies that focus on evaluating the quality and accreditation of special education programs, addressing important variables such as the years of program experience since it was found and program level.

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