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Attitudes toward inclusion of children with special needs in regular schools (A case study from parents' perspective)

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The purpose of this case study was to find out the attitudes of parents towards mainstreaming children with special needs into 2 regular private elementary schools in Sidon-Lebanon. A total of 15 parents were interviewed out of 35 whose children have learning disabilities. Sampling was purposeful where the subjects were chosen to facilitate reaching a range of data related to the targeted theme. Data collected was analyzed within the intention to detect; (a) attitude of parents towards various aspects of inclusion namely, cooperation, academic improvement and social adaptation of special and regular students and modification of teaching methods, (b) attitudes related to information on types of inclusion, types of special needs to be included and level at which inclusion is recommended. Respondents showed a positive attitude towards the various aspects of inclusion, types and levels of inclusion. Results were discussed in terms of relevant research outcome in Lebanon and other countries and in relation to implication for future research and practice. Attitudes towards Inclusion of children with special needs in regular schools (A case study from parents' perspective).

Key words: Inclusion, inclusive education, learning disabled child, special education, educational change, case studies

INTRODUCTION

When the education for all handicapped children act of 1975 (PL 94 - 142) mandated services for children with disabilities and the special law for individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA) of 1990 (PL 101 - 476) enacted that children with disabilities have to be educated with children with no disabilities and join regular schools groups involved in the teaching process started to look at the effectiveness of inclusion and question how inclusion benefits children with disabilities.

This movement to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms and schools has gained support from educators, researchers and parents (Gartner and Lipsky, 1987; Stainback and Stainback, 1992, 1996; Ismail, 2004). It became an interesting event for the researcher to explore the attitudes of one group of the various groups involved in the teaching process, the parents towards the inclusion of their children in regular Lebanese schools. Sidon-Lebanon since inclusion is still in its very early stages in Lebanon with absence of a mandated legislation to the notion of inclusion except for an initiative by a small number of private Lebanese

schools and non-governmental organizations (Ismail, 2004). It raised issues about parents' attitudes concerning various aspects of inclusion, types of inclusion and types of special needs to be included believing that the more positive the attitudes of different groups, the more they would be willing to accept the implementation of inclusion in the educational settings.

This concept of including children with disabilities in regular education environments has been identified using many labeled mainstreaming, integration and most currently, inclusion. Inclusion advocates do not see inclusion and mainstreaming as the same thing. They see it as "Inclusion implies that the student has a right to be in the general education classroom and that the classroom should be modified and made ready for the student" (Fiorello, 2001). In this study, the studied schools embody the definition of inclusion as detailed by Fiorello.

This paper presents a case study of 2 regular private elementary schools in Sidon city, Lebanon that offer inclusion of children with special needs. It explores how 15 parents of special educational needs children reflect

their opinion about the importance of inclusive education in improving academic functioning and social development behavior of their children. It thereby raises issues about effectiveness, applicability, readiness and acceptance by parents of inclusion (Lipsky and Gartner, 1996a; Mather and Roberts, 1995; Antonak and Larrivee, 1995).

The purpose of this study was to survey the attitudes of parents towards inclusion of students with special needs in regular schools. The study addresses the following questions; what is the attitude of parents towards various aspects of inclusion? Cooperation, teaching methods, inclusion legislation, social adaptation and academic improvement of included students? What is the attitude of parents towards the types of inclusion and types of special needs to be included?

The researcher anticipates the results will provide helpful information about the type of inclusion preferred by parents and their attitude towards various aspects of inclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several major initiatives have been taken internationally to support inclusive education. The UNESCO Salamanca statement (1994) calls on the international community to endorse the approach of inclusive schools by implementing practical and strategic changes. The UN Convention on the rights of the child contains several articles which taken together, provides the right to inclusive education. These initiatives have led to a considerable growth in the literature on integration and inclusive education (Jenkinson, 1997). In general, it has developed in 3 main directions, understanding the practice of inclusion as it related to different disabilities and difficulties, understanding the factors which help build inclusive schools which can respond to diverse needs and comparing the efficiency of separate special education and inclusive education (Jenkinson, 1997).

CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

Cross-cultural studies on legislation showed that Great Britain has produced a document of major significance of special education in England, Scotland and Wales (Karagians and Nesebit, 1981). This document is the Warnock Report, published in 1978, and in November 1998 the labour government published a programme of action for greater inclusion of disabled children in mainstreamed schools (DFEE, 1998). The report shares some features with P. L. 94-142 of the United States, such as the principle of mainstreaming, extending the scope of special education to include other services, such as early identification and intervention. In Canada, the amended Schools Act (1987) calls for the placement of all students in the regular class unless such a placement proves detrimental to the needs of the child or other children (CSIE, 2000).

Cross-cultural research has been extended to encompass the Arab world. In collaboration with UNESCO, some of the Arab countries, namely Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates signed an agreement in 1991 to adopt the basic principles of special education for children with special needs. It was meant to recapitulate what was more of a baby step towards special education in the 1960 and 1970. The Arab states started developing programs in 1991, (Yaccoub, 2000) which included methods to ensure the training of educators, making them well equipped in the field of special education.

EFFICIENCY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In studying the efficiency of inclusive education, research found that students with disabilities in inclusive settings have shown improvement in standardized tests, acquired social and communication skills previously undeveloped, shown increased interaction with peers, achieved more and higher-quality IEP goals and are better prepared for post-school experiences (Cooper and McEvoy, 1996; Odom and Brown, 1993; Guralink et al., 1995; Idol, 2006).

There is also evidence that inclusive settings can expand a student's personal interests and knowledge of the world which is excellent preparation for adulthood (Harry, 1992). The positive effects of inclusive education on classmates without disabilities have been well documented (Power-deFur and Orelove, 1998). Both research and anecdotal data have shown that typical learners have demonstrated a greater acceptance and valuing of individual differences, enhanced self-esteem, a genuine capacity for friendship and the acquisition of new skills. Low achieving students also benefited from the review, practice, clarity and feedback provided to students with disabilities (Power-deFur and Orelove, 1998; Manset and Semmel, 1997).

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION

Research has shown that parent's attitudes affect the success of inclusion and their attitudes have been shown to be more favorable when allowed input into the decision making process (Lewis, Chard and Scott, 1994). Cross-cultural studies on parental involvement show that in European countries such as Britain parents are formally involved in decisions such as policy making. Danish schools have a school board elected by parents. The board functions not only in an advisory capacity but approves weekly timetables and instructional materials (Bruce, 1989). In addition, parental involvement played an important role in changing the educational policies set for special needs children. In Spain, parents are targeted to get involved in the normalization project that was started in October 1991 (Marchesi, 1994).

Further, research has found that parents' attitudes dif-

ferred when the inclusion of their own children is in question. Parents are typically quite supportive of including more students with disabilities back into general education for instructional purposes (Green and Shinn, 1994). For example, Mylnek et al. (1982) found that parents endorsed positive general statements about including students from pullout programs to general education classroom (Green and Shinn, 1995). Similarly, Abramson et al. (1982) found that 72% of their sample agreed that educating handicapped and non-handicapped children together would improve the academic ability of the former. However, parents were more reluctant to include their own child into the regular classroom (Green and Shinn, 1995). Only 14% believed their own child's academic performance would improve in such circumstances (Green and Shinn, 1995). Vague understanding of the purpose and the benefits of the inclusion of exceptional children on the part of the parents can be a main reason for holding negative attitudes towards inclusion (Green and Shinn, 1995). Nevertheless, some evidence suggests that parental attitudes towards inclusion can be positively enhanced if adequate information about the benefits of inclusion is given (Green and Shinn, 1995). Furthermore, Yesseldyke et al. (1994) found that parents of students with disabilities seek an educational system that meets their child's educational needs, where there is frequent communication with parents, where their child receives adequate attention, where their child can attend school with siblings and friends.

Generally speaking families of children with and without disabilities enrolled in inclusion settings have positive attitudes toward inclusion (Guralink, 1994; Peck et al., 1992). They often report as a benefit the increased social contact between children with and without disabilities (Peck et al., 1992) and children's increased sensitivity and acceptance of differences. When they express concerns, families focus more on teacher qualifications, adequacy of instruction and fears of social rejection for the children with disabilities (Bang and Lamb, 1996).

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN LEBANON

The lack of documented information about the field of special education in Lebanon obliged the researcher to rely on observation to describe the existing reality of special education practices in Lebanon. In fact, the educational private sector is the main provider of educational services for students with special needs (Ismail, 2004). Some private schools started building their own special unit to teach students with special needs. Some other schools use resource room as a main context for helping students with difficulties in learning. In other contexts, many private schools host children with special needs, referred from one of many non-governmental organizations.

Although the Lebanese educational hierarchy has been modified to meet with recent trends including technology,

the section that has to do with exceptional students remains isolated and neglected. Policy makers have kept the educational titles "regular" and "special" independent of each other (New hierarchy for education in Lebanon, 1995). Arab countries like Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Libya and the United Arab Emirates have already taken the appropriate measures to restructure their educational hierarchy to combine the two educational systems into one by adopting the UNESCO project, Education for All (Yacoub, 1994). Therefore, Lebanon in comparison to other Arab states is not as developed in adopting the principles of special education.

Dirani along with a team of special educators and social workers from Saint Joseph's university human sciences division took the initiative and conducted simultaneously a research study and a field application of mainstreaming in a two steps experiment. Dirani (1996) offered the results of research to advocate the benefits of inclusion for children with special needs. The following sections under the heading of special education in Lebanon are the summary of almost ten years of research and practice.

ACADEMIC INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

With the social awakening concerning children with special needs, the academic integration of these children into regular schools became essential both for the person with a need and as a solution to a problematic situation. Children with mental, physical, sensory or chronic defects were included in regular schools where their psychological state and social skills would be improved. It was the parents of the children with special needs who first knocked at the doors of schools and demanded a proper education for their children. In association with SesoBel (a non-profit organization for handicapped children) and in collaboration with schools in the areas of Metn, Beirut and Kesrouan, an individual academic inclusion initiative of children with special needs started in 1982. Within the periods of 1982 and July 1991, 77 children were integrated, 23 children were mentally retarded, 5 had sensory defects, 34 had chronic maladies, 6 had physical handicaps and 9 children had cerebral palsy. This was a pilot study for further research that could pave the way for more constructive strategies to be adopted in the interest of including children with special needs (Dirani, 1993).

In September (1991), the academic integration of special needs children program was merged into a central program of the SesoBel. Between 1991 and 1992, 45 children followed the special needs' program and there were 39 children in 19 schools and 6 children in 6 kindergartens. The schools were in the regions of Beirut, Kesrouan, Jbeil, Metn and the North (Dirani, 1996). In 1992 and 1993, there were 97 children in 61 schools, 54

54 belonged to the private sector and 7 belonged to the public sector. There was collaboration between parents, teachers and schools which contributed to the success of the program even if it was only on a small scale (Dirani, 1996).

As one of the rare attempts of a full integration trial, Dirani in collaboration with the SesoBel and College de la Sagesse Brazilia attempted a 3 years integration project which started in 1993 but was completely terminated in June 1995. The project was terminated because of several disagreements that hindered its progress during the 3 years period of its implementation.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The case study method was used as a principal research instrument for the following reasons; the two elementary schools in Sidon city adopted the policy of inclusion, the principals of these 2 schools work to align inclusive education practices with school-wide reform efforts. In this context, only the case study method could provide the means for qualitative data-gathering.

A direct examination of parental attitude could accurately reflect their natural outlook about the types of inclusion preferred. Because the disability that children included in these 2 schools differ, this data would be significant in terms of parental attitude and thus the most effective instrument for expressing this attitude was the case study.

This study followed the recommendation of Yin (1994) and has 4 stages; (a) Design the case study, (b) Conduct the case study, (c) Analyze the case study evidence and (d) Develop the conclusions, recommendation and implications.

In the design of the study, the researcher used standard techniques for posing research questions and defining the unit analysis. Because the study focuses on exploratory and description, emphasis was placed on the purpose and aims of the study and not on formulating propositions. Moreover, the rationale for undertaking the study and substantial review and critique of the literature provided support the understanding of parents' attitudes towards inclusion.

Data collection and analysis

The data collection and analysis occurred consecutively. The research questions guiding the case study ask about the attitude and type of inclusion. The researcher's actions included recording, synthesizing and clarifying meanings and understandings. A set of interview questions were created prior to the first interviews. These were used as a script for moving the interview closer to eliciting various aspects of inclusion and types of inclusion and special needs to be included from participants in each succeeding interview. The questions were broad and loosely structured. The techniques used were suggested by Strauss (1987). Journals and logs were kept to track methodological, observational and notes during data collection.

Next the interview questions were accompanied by a list of possible sources of data. A list of potential sources was made. This included the participants, their children and the type of disability, the psychologist that the parents contact and information about the principals of the school concerning the way used in inclusion. These 2 elementary schools, given a letter A and B are comprised of 1250 students (350 in school A and 900 in school B). These 2 schools have 35 exceptional learners (11 in A and 24 in B) with ages between 4 and 13 and with varying forms of disabilities (12 ADHD, 2 epileptic, 5 Down's syndrome, 4 on wheel chair, 3 partial deafness, 3 emotional disturbances, 3 language difficulties and 3

dyslexic).

The researcher sent a letter to the parents of the disabled children through the school asking them whether they would like to participate in the research. 15 parents out of 35 (6 from A and 9 from B) responded positively and were interviewed. The interviewed parents were assured that the information collected is for research project only, that it will be kept confidential and that their identity will remain anonymous. The majority of the participants are referred a number given to them. According to Cohen and Manion (1994), preserving confidence means, "Although researchers know who has provided the information or are able to identify participant from the information given, they will in no way make the connection known publicly".

Finally the literature was revisited between interviews to gain a better understanding of new data. Clear conceptualizations assisted in taking definitions into the study and combined with other sources of data comprising the mass of data available to study the phenomenon of interest. Thinking in metaphors and creating simplistic models and thematic maps were essential activities in data management.

FINDINGS

Based on the responses from the interview questions, the findings can be grouped into the following categories; (a) attitudes towards inclusion, (b) attitudes towards types of inclusion and special needs to be included.

Attitudes towards inclusion

Answers related to the key question (1) concerning attitudes of parents towards inclusion reflect that the respondents showed a positive attitude towards the various aspects of inclusion. Percents ranged between 93 as highest towards cooperation between teachers and 87 as social adaptation. This message stands out in one of the parents' response;

"The pupils must have equal opportunities to face challenges and acquire skills and knowledge. They have to be given equal opportunities to draw their own experiences in the learning environment" (No. 2, October 15, 2008).

Other parents see inclusion in the form of full inclusion in all forms of education with equal rights.

"There should be a policy that says children with special needs must participate equally in the social, academic and cultural community. They must go to general schools and get their education within the ordinary class." (No. 8, October 8, 2008).

Another parent stated that,

"The term inclusion or inclusive education cannot be located in our educational curriculum but when a term like provision for least restrictive environment is mentioned, this term then provides the legal impetus for inclusive education." (No. 3, October 6, 2008) (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes reflected by interviewees about various aspects of inclusion.

Themes	Interviewee number
Cooperation between teachers:	
Teachers have to cooperate with special education teacher.	6, 9, 8, 3, 14, and 11
Prepare teachers to accept individual differences	4, 1, 10, and 12
Train teachers on communication skills	5, 13, and 7
Legislation:	
There should be a policy for inclusion	8, 13, 10 and 2
Government should enact a law	3, 7, and 9
Principals of schools should go ahead to apply inclusion	1, 4, and 5
Exceptional child should go to general schools	12, 15, 6, and 11
Teaching Method:	
Provision of information in varied ways	3, 8, 11, 15, and 1
Change the traditional way of teaching	9, 5, 13, 6, 10, and 12
Space information presentation	2, 4, and 7
Social adaptation and academic improvement:	
Behavioral change towards exceptional children	8, 1, and 12,
Readiness to help exceptional children	13, 15, 1, 14, 10, 7, 5, and 2,
Sociable behavior seen in my child	3, 4, and 6
Development of reading abilities in our exceptional children	15, 4, 13, 2, and 6
Performance in our exceptional children was enhanced	1, 3, 7, 5, 8, 9, 13, 14, 12, and 10

One of the parents questioned the necessity of including children in general;

“Is my child really included as a full member in the school or just the school is trying to make superficial adaptations and by this is leaving the child isolated as in special class or special school?”

In the case of teachers’ cooperation one of the parents went as far as saying that;

“When the school appoints a new staff, it has to be sure that this teacher should have believed that all children have learning potential” (No. 6, October 9, 2008).

Another foresees a problem and sets for a solution;

“Teachers do not have to say that they are less prepared to take students with learning disabilities or the curriculum imposes constraints of having a learning disabled child. He/she can cooperate with other experienced teachers or follow a course in special education” (No. 1, October 11, 2008).

One of the mothers suggests that the student should not be required to do the same thing in the same amount of time as same aged peers;

“Teachers have to be flexible and provide educational experiences in a variety of ways for a diverse student body. A teacher working alone with traditional teaching methods is not accepted. The teacher has to work in a

teaching team to meet the diverse needs of a heterogeneous student body” (No. 5, October 18, 2008).

This indicates that respondents accept the global concept of inclusion. Such an observed positive attitude seems promising and implies that implementing the principle of inclusion in Lebanon is feasible.

Attitudes towards types of inclusion and special needs to be included

When the interviewees were asked about the types of inclusion, 11 out of 15 respondents showed a positive attitude towards different forms of inclusion starting with inclusion should be in a resource room and ending with inclusion should be in academic and vocational schools and institutions.

Part of the response from some parents concerning forms of inclusion was reflected in the manner that;

“Specialized instruction should be available to any child who might want or need it. Nevertheless, it should never be based on a label attached to a child. Schools that embrace the belief that learning occurs in many forms in many different places have no trouble designing ways to cater for the needs of individual students” (No. 13, October 5, 2008).

Seven of the interviewed parents reflected the idea that some children need regular, intensive individualized instruction to acquire specific skills and the best situation is to join a resource room part of the day.

Table 2. Types of Inclusion and Special needs to be included.

Themes	Interviewee number
Types of inclusion	
Resource room within regular school	1, 3, 8, 5, 7, 12, 13, and 15
Academic institutions	9, 4, 11, and 2
Vocational institutions	6, 10, 14
Type of special need to be included	
Motor handicapped	4, 9, 2, and 6
Mild mental retardation	11, 10, and 14
Learning disabled (ADD, ADHD and LBD.)	1, 3, 8, 5, 7, 12, 13, and 15
Grade level to be included	
All levels	9, 4, 11, 2, 10, 13, 7, and 6
All levels except secondary	3, 8, 5, and 15
Elementary level only	1, 12, and 14

"If the diverse needs of children with disabilities have to be met we have to take them out of a general education classroom, and into a resource room for specific skill or functional life skill instruction."

Other reactions were reflected in the form that learning-disabled children have to be moved to vocational schools and institutions that offer specific skills that suit the type of disablements;

"General schools cannot offer all forms of skills needed in the Lebanese program, yet vocational schools are expected to offer focused and intensive instruction as needed. This instruction can occur in such schools in any location in the school that makes sense for the task Nos. 9, 4, 11, 2, and 10, November 8, 9, 14, 5 and 15, 2008) (Table 2).

Regarding the academic level at which inclusion should be implemented; results showed that the respondents indicated no single academic level. 12 of the respondents believed that the inclusion of students with special needs should be in all levels, that is, nursery, elementary and intermediate. "When 5 of the responding parents were asked about the academic level of inclusion, argued that:

"Students with intensive challenge can be part of the educational curriculum regardless of the academic level. This can happen if the curriculum is organized in broad and balanced areas of knowledge and skill rather than subject areas" (No. 9, 4, 11, 2, and 10, November 8, 9, 14, 5 and 15, 2008).

Four of the responses were on the side towards inclusion at all levels except secondary;

"Students may not learn enough the different courses the curriculum presents due to the different skills that are asked by the student. Consequently, students with learning disabilities might be prevented from experiencing the complexity and richness

of information during instruction, and thus inclusion in such level is not suitable".

One of the eight who advocate inclusion asserts that;

"In segregating schooling and deciding on one level only and not all levels, this situation will lead the learning disabled to a lifestyle that remains segregated from the community at large" (No. 13, October 5, 2008).

Concerning the types of special needs to be included, the results showed that more than 11 of respondents reflected a positive attitude when the special needs considered of mild mental retardation and motor handicaps.

When asking the question about whether all special needs children can be included in general schools, 7 of the respondents argued (the disabilities that the children of these respondents have are 3 ADHD, 3 physically handicapped and 1 mild retardation.

"Placement in a general education classroom will not be appropriate for some children. Students who are deaf or hard to hearing differ significantly from students with physical, mental, learning and emotional changes. In addition, our teachers are not specialized to interact with these children and this means that they have to be present in other specialized schools" (No. 5, October 18, 2008).

DISCUSSION

The prevalence of inclusion in the field of education in recent years was the major incentive behind the present study. Knowledge about attitudes of parties involved in the teaching/learning process namely parents towards inclusion of children with special needs into regular schools is a mandatory step in the 21st century. Yet, 2 limitations to the present study pose problems regarding generalization to other parent populations. The first is the

relatively small number of interviewed parents (15) participating in this study. The second limitation is that the subjects were not chosen randomly and therefore caution should be taken in generalizing from the results to other contexts. Further work is needed to examine the generalizability of these findings and to test their validity by using different groups of participants like teachers and principals in the same schools and in other schools.

Results of the present study concerning key question (1) that deals with parents' attitude towards various aspects of inclusion showed a positive attitude towards the various aspects of inclusion. For example, regarding legislation, although literature tackled the legislation aspect of inclusion in the west and even in the middle east. Studies revealed that people are hesitant and showed reluctance towards acceptance of a law that supports inclusion (Rock, et al., 1994; Dyson and Millward, 2000), yet respondents in the present study showed an opposite pattern and responded positively towards the aspect of legislation.

When looking at the aspect of academic improvement, 13 of the respondents in the present study showed a positive attitude towards social and academic improvement because of inclusion. This seems to be congruent with findings on inclusion research in the west that deals with the above mentioned attribute. Such research suggested that both normally developing children as well as students with special need benefit equally in inclusion settings (Salisbury et al., 1995; Ainscow, 1998). The positive attitude as revealed shows that the respondents perceive inclusion as associated with social and academic benefits. Therefore, such a perception might imply that respondents are in favor of inclusion and accept it as a practice in the regular school.

Again the positive attitude of cooperation with teachers coincide with research where cooperative teaching can be defined as an educational approach in which general and special educators work in co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings (Ripley, 1997). Such a positive perception by the respondents might be related to many factors. They believe that teachers lack the knowledge in the field of special education and hence need professional support. They also point to insufficient opportunities for in-service training. Still parents argued that the presence of cooperation between teachers and professionals will help in the academic and social development of their children. Such things concur with Fritz et al, (1995). As for key question (2) that deals with types of inclusion to be implemented most of the respondents (13 out of 15 interviewed) called for the inclusion in a resource room. This might be because the 2 schools in this study implement general class placement with resource room assistance where the resource teacher often provides direct instruction to special education students in a separate place. Hence parents are more familiar with it and know its conditions. Therefore, they have the ten-

dency to accept what they know.

Results moreover showed that most of the parents have positive attitudes towards inclusion aspects and types as well as types of special needs to be included. Parents favored to include students with motor handicaps and mild mental retardation. Although, research conducted in the west such as that done by Green and Shinn (1995), showed that parents are for inclusion of children with special needs, still it did not indicate which type of special needs parents would favor to be included. The present preference of parents might be the result of their assumption that motor disability would be easier to be handled as it would not have an effect on the students' cognitive ability and on learning (Green and Shin, 1995).

In terms of acceptance of children with special needs in the different grade levels, results showed that respondents did not reflect a positive attitude. It seems from these results that inclusion is still theoretically accepted but when it comes to a direct down to earth implementation, a lack of readiness is obvious. This concurs with Green and Shinn (1995) where the vague understanding of the purpose and benefits of inclusion from the side of the parents can be a main reason for the negative attitude. Still, although around 9 of the respondents favored all of pre-secondary levels to include students, the others chose lower grades as best for inclusion. According to the respondents, the age of the students seems to influence the attitudes of respondents towards their willingness to accept certain types of special needs to be included and toward grade level they should be enrolled in. In lower grades, the major concern is more in the process of socialization of the students which might explain the respondent's preference of inclusion in those grade levels. Whereas, higher grade levels are more pressured by the academic requirements of the official exams, thus, inclusion might interfere with the process of teaching and learning. Hence, the general attitude seems to reflect a concern towards providing equal socializing opportunities to students with special needs as well as to their peers. This seems to be congruent with findings on inclusion in Yaccoub (1994) and Ismail (2004) when they tried to analyze the most important level to integrate children with learning disabilities. They noted that expectations of full integration opposed the quest for academic excellence in upper classes, especially with students of severe disability.

Conclusion

Findings of the present study indicated that there is a positive attitude towards inclusion by the parents of children in the 2 schools. Their attitudes towards inclusion legislation, academic improvement and social adaptation as well as cooperation reveal that the parents see providing their children with inclusive education is equivalent to providing high quality education for all. The time has come for schools to communicate on a national level and

to alter the educational system.

In general, respondents showed a positive attitude towards the aspects of inclusion namely academic improvement, social adaptation and cooperation between teachers. As for the type of inclusion, respondents showed a positive attitude toward the resource room as a type of inclusion. Mild mental retardation and motor handicaps are the 2 types of special needs to be included. In terms of acceptance of children with special needs in the different grade levels, respondents reflect a positive attitude towards inclusion in all grade levels with some caution in upper level classes.

The outcome of the study presents certain guidelines regarding the future development of inclusion. The findings supported the importance of the parent's attitude for the success of inclusion programs. Moreover the study highlighted meaningful lessons for the people involved in inclusive education regarding various aspects of inclusion and types of inclusion. In doing so, the study constitutes a source of data for other parties in Lebanon who are interested in inclusion in regular schools. The time has come for school leaders to modify the educational system to become more inclusive.

Since this study was a preliminary one investigating parents' opinion regarding inclusion students with special needs in general schools, the data generated from the 15 interviews cannot yield generalization about the attitude towards inclusion. There might be other different attitudes that might be revealed when other groups are studied, like teachers and administrators. This may indicate that a more extensive research in attitude towards inclusion is appropriate.

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