A Study of Para-educators in Dubai

دراسة حول المساعدين المهنيين للأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة في دبي

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Rabih Hashim and my mother for always supporting and believing in me. I promise to make you both proud.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank Professor Eman Gaad for being such an enthusiastic advocate in our field. Her knowledge and experience have guided me throughout my academic pursuit. In the memory of Dr. Clifton Chadwick, you were such an inspiration to all of us, always encouraging us to be skeptical and think out of the box. Rest in Peace ....

Abstract

The inclusion rights of children with special needs are governed by international laws and regulations. It is mandatory for children with special needs to be accompanied and aided by paraprofessionals whose rule is to support children with special needs during school.

With a special focus on the United Arab Emirates, this research seeks to understand how para-educators are recruited to aid children with special needs at schools. While the government is focusing on improving the policies for special education and precisely inclusion, the hiring process remains vague and random. This dissertation seeks to put the topic into context as it brings in global experiences of how other countries recruit para-educators in special education, in order to suggest what could be replicated in the UAE. A brief definition of the selection criteria of para-educators can help avoid the serious implications of their random employment in special education.

This research underwent a survey and in depth interviews with para-educators, special educators, and parents to gather data for an analysis of the current recruitment criteria for paras in special education in the UAE, in an attempt to reflect the reality of para-educators in the UAE and contribute slightly to an understanding of what could be a challenge to inclusion if recruitment of para-educators in special education is done randomly.

ملخص

تنص حقوق الأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة، المندرجة ضمن القوانين واللوائح الدولية على أن يرافق الأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة، مساعد مهني خلال دوام المدرسة.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى فهم كيف يتم توظيف المساعد المهني لمساعدة الأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة في الإمارات العربية المتحدة. بينما تركز الحكومة على تحسين القوانين لتعليم الأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة ، ما زالت عملية التوظيف المساعد المهني لمرافقة الأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة عشوائية.تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى عرض هذا الموضوع في سياق التجارب العالمية، من أجل اقتراح ما يمكن اعتماده في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. ايضا، يهدف هذا البحث الى تعريف المعايير المعتمدة في اختيار المساعد المهني.

يتضمن البحث دراسة وإجراء مقابلات متعمقة مع مساعدين مهنيين ومعلمين و أولياء الأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة ، لجمع البيانات و تحليل معايير التوظيف الحالية للمساعدين المهنيين للأطفال ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، في محاولة لوصف واقعهم والاشارة الى نتائج التوظيف العشوائي للمساعدين المهنيين.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0. Introduction

Para-educators in special education, also known as shadow teachers, paraprofessionals, para-pro, educational assistant, teacher assistant, teacher aide or "paras", provide invaluable help in the inclusion process of children with special needs. Paras in special education are often subject to a certain eligibility criteria set by the government. Adequate criteria enable them to assist children with special needs during the inclusion process. Their rights and obligations are often dictated in the inclusive education policy issued by the Ministry of Education of the concerned country.

Governments facilitate inclusive education by provisioning the necessary policies and legislation. Children with special needs have the right to receive education in inclusive settings. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008), World Declaration for Education for All (1990), the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994), and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) govern the right for children with special needs. International regulations and conventions support inclusive education in special needs education.

Article 16, 1973 in the UAE constitution states that minors and those who are unable to take care of their selves because of illness and disability are protected (Alahbabi, 2009). The Cabinet Resolution No. 1, 1977   provides for governmental support to care for people with disabilities (Alahbabi, 2009). Article 356 of the Disablement Benefit Act, 1979, protects the educational right of disabled students and assigns responsibility to the foundation of rehabilitation centers for people with special needs (Alahbabi, 2009). Cabinet Resolution, Article 96, 1981, dictates the establishment of rehabilitation and training centers for persons with special needs. Federal Law No. 2/385 1988 set forth guidelines for special education classes (Alahbabi, 2009) whereas the Cabinet Resolution No. 5 1990 expands the help for those in need, disabled and old age people in society (Alahbabi, 2009).

In 2010, the ministry of education in the UAE collaborated with the UAE ministry of social affairs to release "*School for All or General Rules for the Provision of Special Education Programs and Services*" guidebook. The guidebook focused on the inclusion philosophy to support inclusion and make it effect. Important themes emerged in this guidebook including:

- UAE Ministry of Education is committed to support the complete participation of students with disabilities in mainstream schools.
- Inclusion is a major milestone in the special education program.
- The government and the education sector work hand in hand to achieve inclusion at schools.

Para-educators, in the UAE, are part of the inclusion process and assist children with special needs. However, the eligibility criteria of para-educators are unspecified in UAE's inclusive policy. As a result, paras in the UAE suffer the implications of this broad inclusion policy.

1.1. Research Problem

Qualification and duties guidelines of personnel in inclusive settings have a direct effect on the learner's performance. Despite the provision of the inclusion policy in the UAE, its implementation framework is still very vague. The inclusion policy secures the right of children with special needs to access mainstream education but does not provide an implementation framework or eligibility requirements of staff in special education. Implementation framework includes the inclusion procedures that define placement settings, assessment procedures, referral process, liaison between classroom teacher and parents, duties and profile of personnel involved in supporting the children with SEN etc... Anati (2012) highlights progress in the placement setting and options for children with special needs at schools. Inclusive school offer one-on-one rooms, inclusion in general education settings and special education classroom. There are classrooms that are highly segregated (one-on-one training rooms) and classrooms for integration (special education class and general education classroom).This variety of placement settings support different needs in special need education. In 2007, general education classroom teachers were writing study plans for children with special needs yet without professional supervision due

to the absence of specialists and personnel (Gaad et al, 2007). Further, the inclusion policy doesn't differentiate between disability types and severity. Special needs require different support and resources depending on the child's case and severity of the disability. Anati (2012) highlights that children with special needs including "traumatic brain injury (TBI); multiple disabilities; developmental disabilities; deaf-blindness; and mental retardation" are rarely present in inclusive settings in schools. The absence of guidelines by disability makes inclusion available for children with mild to moderate disabilities such as that of learning disabilities. Defining how to deal with severe disabilities in inclusive setting is not part of the policy and this impact the expectations of parents of children with special needs who expect their children to be placed in an inclusive setting no matter the severity of the case. The policy delegates the role of accepting or rejecting cases to schools, and schools can end up dealing with mild cases because it requires fewer resources. Graham and Jahnukainen (2011) criticized the wide spread of inclusive education adopted in countries without proper framework and conceptual understanding:

 "While some might say that we have seen the 'globalization of inclusion', questions remain as to what has spread" (p. 263).

Para-educator's qualifications vary across countries, and ministries of education often develop the profile and duties of para-educators to support children with SEN in inclusive settings. After six years of releasing the ***General Rules for the Provision of Special Education Programs and Services*** guidebook, there is no substantial development of a written guideline that defines and regulates the job requirements, education background, experience, training and hiring criteria of para-educators in inclusive settings. As a result, the hiring process, supervision and training framework of para-educators becomes unregulated. Random hiring of para-educators hinders the learner's progress in special education. Infrequent training and supervision puts para-educator on slippery track of poor performance and inefficient role. Unfortunately, the likelihood of having inadequate criteria and poor training is high when the government does not address para 'educators' role and eligibility in the inclusion policy guidelines. Anati (2012) highlights the lack of training, equipment's and proper personnel to facilitate inclusion in private schools.

1.2. Rationale & Context of this Study

Policy makers, teachers, special needs professionals are key players in the inclusion process. They can support or hinder the child's progress in an inclusive setting. In order to have an effective inclusion policy it is important to integrate the effort of these key players and support them through policies, teaching procedures and supportive school settings. Leaners' experience in special education is mainly affected by classroom teachers, special educators and para-educators in inclusive setting. Para-educators support children with special needs in different learning settings including: special education classes, heterogeneous general education class and one-on-one separate classroom. Paras are present in most learning settings under the supervision of the teacher, and they have skills that can contribute to the changing needs of today's classrooms and students (Boudreau, 2011). A random hiring criteria of paraprofessionals might just jeopardize the process of inclusion; precisely the progress of children with special needs. While inclusive education in the UAE is still developing, it is important to regulate the hiring of para-educators.

A sequential mixed research methodology was adopted to provide a comprehensive profile of para-educators, the random hiring criteria, poor training and supervision of paras. The study was conducted in Dubai, and therefore reflects the reality of para-educators working in Dubai.

1.3. Research Questions

This research seeks to understand the criteria parents and schools are looking for, the level of supervision and training of para-educators. Most of all, this research sheds the light on the need for a comprehensive criteria for recruitment of paraprofessionals in special education and inclusion that is drafted and approved by the government of UAE to ensure that children with special needs receive the best care and supervision during the inclusion process. In order to address the research problem, the study seeks to address this research problem through the following questions:

a) What are the demographics and work experience of para-educators in Dubai?
b) What learning settings and age groups para-educators deal with? What tasks are they fulfilling?
c) Who's recruiting para-educators in Dubai?

d) How are paras in Dubai selected? What are the criteria?

e) What is the level of supervision and training provided to para-educators in the UAE?

1.4. Aims & Objectives

The aim and general objective of this research is to determine the criteria that paraprofessionals in the UAE are selected upon for recruitment and the level of supervision of paraprofessionals (in special education) in schools.

The research will seek to define and analyze the recruitment criteria of paraprofessionals in special education, level of supervision and highlight the challenges that paraprofessionals deal with in the UAE.

This purpose of this study will be achieved through:

❖ Compiling a list of comprehensive criteria for recruitment of paraprofessionals in special education based on global policies

❖ Explore the criteria for selecting paraprofessionals in special education and the level of supervision of paras in the UAE

❖ Identify how involved decision makers select paraprofessionals to aid children with special needs

1.5. Structure of dissertation

After the introduction, the second chapter will highlight the structure and methodology of the thesis. Chapter three presents a review of literature on paraprofessional qualifications and selection criteria. In this part, previous works and findings are discussed and key references to important policies and global guidelines are. Also this chapter will aim to review current challenges that paraprofessional in special education face globally, not to mention the policies and legal guidelines that governs the rights of paraprofessionals and obligations towards their profession. Chapter three will address the following sub-topics:

- Understand the essential qualifications or tasks that paraprofessionals in special education and inclusion should have for selection.
- Impact of government policies in preserving the effectiveness and professional role of paraprofessionals in special education.
- Challenges paraprofessionals face in special education.

Chapter three will also discuss extensively global case studies and lessons of how paraprofessionals in special education are recruited globally and compare it to the current status of paraprofessionals in the UAE.

Chapter five presents thoroughly the methodology used to address the research problem and analyzes the findings of the conducted sequential explanatory research. The findings are discussed in relation to literature review to derive conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Considering that this research seeks to highlight the hiring criteria for para-educators in Dubai, the section is a benchmark for the hiring criteria (qualifications, job description, and responsibilities) based on international standards. Qualifications of para-educators vary across countries (Balshaw &Farrell, 2002). For this review, United States, Canada, Scandinavia, United Kingdom, Germany and Australia were selected. These parties have played a great role in the provision of inclusive education (conventions, policies etc.). As a result, it is valuable to review what guidelines these countries put for hiring para-educators for children with SEN.

2.0. Para-educators in Special Education: A Global Perspective on Practice Standards

2.0.1.   United States

Known as "paraprofessionals", paras in the United States have their qualifications, rights and obligations governed by jurisdiction. Major accomplishments in this area can be attributed to the nationwide reform that began in 1986 (P. L. 99-457, EHA); all states and eligible jurisdictions, including those in the Pacific and Atlantic, are progressing to fulfill the general goals of this national early intervention and early childhood initiative (Trohanis 2002, p.6).   The accomplishments include states and jurisdictions address challenges to ensure personnel (e.g. paraprofessionals) are qualified to perform their roles (Trohanis 2008). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) state that paraprofessionals in the U.S. education system be highly qualified to work in classrooms; they should be able to provide instructional activities under supervision, assist teachers in classroom activities including: one-to-one tutoring, classroom management, computer instruction, translation, parent involvement activities, educational support (library for example), instructional support services under the direct supervision (Yell, Drasgow & Lowery 2005, p. 134). The US Department of Education (2015) defines - under SEC. 1119, qualifications of teachers and paraprofessionals - that all paraprofessionals hired after the NLCB Act of 2011 to have completed at least two years of study at a higher education institution or have obtained higher degrees, or met formal standard assessment by State or local

academic institution that displays knowledge and ability to assist in mathematics, reading and writing or writing readiness, reading readiness and mathematics readiness.

2.0.2.   Australia

Para-educators in the Australian inclusive education are known as "teachers' aides". In 2002, the Australian Senate identified the increasingly important role of para-educators. The government funds schools to provide the needed resources for supporting children with special needs. Schools hire teachers' aides as part of the staff needed in inclusive education. Para-educators' role in Australia is hindered by several factors, most importantly the unclear hiring criteria and funding model. The government plans to base funding on the consumer power index (CPI) after 2018 (The Senate, 2016). National Disability Services finds that indexing funding reduces the availability of resources for children with special needs and puts pressure on wages of special educators and teachers' aides, as demand increases:

"It is a short sighted cost reduction strategy ... It will cause a considerable pressure on wages for disability teacher aides and specialist disability therapists as the demand for t disability expertise and support workers increases throughout the implementation" (The Senate, 2016, p 47).

The Ministry of education, Department of Education and Training (DET), does not specify the qualifications of teachers' aides or certification required for eligibility. However, the DET (2015) identifies the key responsibilities and tasks required from teachers' aides including: assisting children with special needs in academics and assisting children with special needs in learning of social skills. Teachers' aides should supervise, participate and demonstrate activities that would enhance the child's development physically, socially and intellectually (Department of Education and Training, 2015).

2.0.3.   Canada

The inclusion policy in Canada refers to para-educators as educational assistants or teacher assistants in special needs education (SEN).   Qualification and responsibilities of teacher assistants in special education is mandated by provinces.

Nova Scotia, an eastern province of Canada, specifies in teacher assistant's guidelines produced by Nova Scotia Department of Education, the qualifications and tasks expected from para-educators for children with SEN. When compared to other provinces, Nova Scotia has a detailed guideline for the provision of para-educators in inclusive education. The role of teacher assistant defined by this province focuses on Teacher assistant are required to complete a high school degree or equivalent, have a recognized diploma or certification from a recognized postsecondary institution with a formal placement, have a valid job-related requirements defined by the job posting, have a health-care support training including but not limited to: first-aid certification, cardiopulmonary resuscitation [CPR or CPR-C], Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). Teacher assistants should also complete a Child Abuse Registry Search Form and a Criminal Records Check in compliance with board policies and procedures (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). The teacher assistant is required to have physical ability to perform her role e.g. ability to hold the child, assist during problem behavior etc. (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). Concerning responsibilities and skills, teacher assistants can assist one or more students in a classroom setting but should also foster the child's skills for independence (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). The teacher assistant in special education needs is not expected to be isolated from other students, but give the impression of availability and support for other students in a general classroom setting. She is expected to assist the mobility of the students by lifting, positioning, exercising, and transferring the students to his/her transportation means (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). Safety and a respectful environment are expected to be ensured by the teacher assistant including assisting students with routines including hygiene, feeding, dressing and toileting (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). Carrying medical procedures (e.g. tube feeding) when authorized, administering medication, supervised physical interventions (Non-Violent Crisis Intervention) and encouraging behavioral support from students are among job tasks (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). In terms of program assistance, they are to collect and record data, assist with program monitored by the teacher, facilitating positive interaction

among students, and model respect for self and other (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). However, para-educators must not initiative or learning activities, substitute teaching, evaluate and assess student's progress, select teaching materials or reporting to parents (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009).

The guideline stresses on the written and oral feedback as a form of communication between teachers and para-educators (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). Teacher assistants should receive verbally and in writing the schedules, job tasks, and performance expectations (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). Daily supervision by school principal is required along with training (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). The education department requires teacher assistants to be trained when needed, on personal/ medical or safety/behavior management (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009). Para-educators are evaluated and performance strengths and areas needing improvement are identified (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2009).

Para-educators in Alberta are known as educational assistants. Alberta's governmental learning services define the profile and duties of para-educators different than Nova Scotia. The profile of para-educators in Alberta requires a high school diploma and a related post-secondary education. Certification is not regulated and related experience is viewed as an asset and not mandatory (Alberta Learning Information Center, 2016). Duties of para-educators in Alberta require more engagement in the learning experience than those of Nova Scotia. Para-educators are required to implement lesson and behavioral plans directed by teacher, observe and report behaviors, assist physically children with special needs, participate in learning activities to encourage students, be supportive for all students and not only those with social needs, set up or dismantle play or activities spaces, demonstrate learning activities, prepare learning materials, and use assistive technology (Alberta Learning Information Center, 2016).

Toronto's guidelines are more advanced than from Alberta and Nova Scotia, as they address in-depth the role of para-educators in assisting specifically children/adults with moderate to severe cases of disability and not just special needs in general. First, the official guideline for para-educators identifies three categories for para-educators: educational assistant for intensive support (moderate to severe needs), special needs assistant, individual student support assistant for intensive Support (moderate to severe needs) (Toronto School District Board, 2016).

Educational Assistant, under supervision, supports the child academically and ensures the child's personal and health care needs are met. The educational assistant's personal care and health needs duties towards students with moderate to severe disabilities includes:

- Lifting and transferring, movement and positioning, feeding, toileting, changing and diapering
- Administration of medication/medical procedures (training provided)

Educational Assistant is expected to ensure the physical safety of students with moderate to severe disabilities by implementing the behavior plan that includes behavior shaping, prompting methods and proximity threshold (Toronto School District Board, 2016). Academically, the para-educators, assists the special education teacher, to deliver curriculum, administer assessments, integrate children with SEN in general classroom setting, prepare activities for instructional purpose for students and small groups, adapt general classroom activities or materials to support classroom objective, supervise students with SEN in different environments (playground, field trips, transfer to transportation etc.), attend trainings, meetings and career development learning sessions (e.g. applied behavioral training, problem behavior management, CPR, emergency and first aid procedures etc.), develop IEP, participate in team meetings, communicate with personnel and staff for implementation of IEP, assist in data collection, assistive in technology use, supervise or accompany students off school site (Toronto School District Board, 2016).

Educational Assistants are required to have a two year community college diploma with a three months related experience to intensive support to children or adults with moderate to severe needs or the equivalent in education and experience (Toronto School District Board, 2016).The educational assistant should have the ability to communicate with parents, staff, school personnel and the general public, should be able to follow instructions by special education teacher or general classroom teacher in a timely manner, should respect confidentiality should be committed to the job, and should have a proven ability as a team player (Toronto School District Board, 2016). Prior experience in using assistive technology and computers, emergency and first aid procedures, CPR, ABA training are considered assets and not mandatory (Toronto School District Board, 2016). The guideline stresses on special training of educational assistants working in some classroom that requires such (Toronto School District Board, 2016).

Special needs assistants perform same duties as educational assistants but their role leans more towards assistance and provision of personal and health care rather than academics. Educational assistant and special need assistants should possess the same educational and experience background but different certifications. For the special needs assistant, a first aid and CPR certification is a must and not an asset, whereas familiarity with curriculum is considered an asset.

Students with high needs are supported by individual student support assistant. This category of para-educators works with children/adults with severe disabilities; those representing high needs and a risk of injury due to the challenging developmental, behavioral, health and personal care concerns (Toronto School District Board, 2016). As a result, individual student support assistant is present to provide support in addition to or beyond academic needs, in a setting with moderate to severe exceptional needs are present. Physically, they are required to lift, transfer, move, position the student and assist in daily routines including feeding, toileting, changing and diapering (Toronto School District Board, 2016). The individual student support assistant is expected to administer of medication/medical procedures with training provided. The support of a daily health and personal care are required from the individual support assistant in a frequent and consistent manner (Toronto School District Board, 2016). Individual student support assistant is expected to deliver curriculum as appropriate, administer assessments, integrate children with SEN in general classroom setting, prepare activities for instructional purpose for students and small groups, adapt general classroom activities or materials to support classroom objective, supervise students with SEN in different environments (playground, field trips, transfer to transportation etc.), attend trainings, meetings and career development learning sessions (e.g. applied behavioral training, problem behavior management, CPR, emergency and first aid procedures etc.), develop IEP, participate in team meetings, communicate with personnel and staff for implementation of IEP, assist in data collection, assistive in technology use, supervise or accompany students off school site (Toronto School District Board, 2016).While performing the same supervised duties as special needs assistants and educational assistant, the individual student support assistant is required to deliver alternative curriculum for students with special needs (Toronto School District Board, 2016). Prior experience in using assistive technology and computers, emergency and first aid procedures, CPR, ABA training are considered assets and not mandatory (Toronto School District Board, 2016).

All assistants should promote self-advocacy skills to direct and foster independence for children/adults with special needs (Toronto School District Board, 2016).

2.0.4.   United Kingdom

In 1978, the United Kingdom issued the Warnock Report details the provision of inclusive education for children with SEN. The committee (1978), has based the provision of inclusive education on studying inclusive education findings from countries such as Canada, United States, Scandinavia and Germany:

"Groups of our members have visited other countries to gain different perspectives on inclusive education ... One group visited the United States.. The group's vice president visited Canada to study regulations for special educational provision.. Other groups went to Denmark and Sweden to study the implementation of the inclusive policy of severely disabled children in mainstream schools and the provision made for adults with disabilities ... A third group visited Holland and Germany to see a number of special schools in those countries .Visits were valuable for participants to re-examine specific issues related to inclusive education, and bring in different perspectives" (p.4).

This report provides the basic framework of what inclusive education entails. Moreover, it highlights the need for an inclusive education which protects the rights of children in special education. Most importantly, the report bases the provision on countries which have already been working on its inclusive education earlier than 1978. However, the policy does not have clear guidelines on the qualifications, duties and performance of para-educators. In its attempt to reform the role of para-educators in general education, UK have implemented several reforms in its education policy and introduced different certification programs including : NCFE Initial Training for Classroom Assistants, NVQ Teaching Assistants Level 2 and 3, Open University Specialist Teacher Assistant Certificate and HLTA (Higher Level Teaching Assistant) status. Regarding qualifications and duties of paras in special education, the UK government has not established a regulated guideline for hiring para-educators. The role of paras, qualifications and duties vary across schools and certification or training is not regulated.

2.0.5. Germany

In 2009, Germany became legally binding to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2016). As a result, the German Institute for Human Rights, berlin, monitors the right of children with special needs to inclusion and attendance of mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2016). The UNESCO (2016) reports a significant number of children with special needs (more than 500,000 children in 2009-2010). However, children with SEN in Germany are placed mostly in special schools with a few percentage included in mainstream schools or general education classrooms. Inclusion in Germany is mandated and varies greatly between federal states. Despite the effort of special educational schools to further the development of children with SEN, students do not achieve a secondary modern school qualification (UNESCO, 2016).

However, para-educators in Germany, also commonly known as paraprofessionals, do not have regulated guidelines for qualifications and duties. An increasing number of para-educators, working in inclusive education in Germany, are mostly without any certificate (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007). "16 Ministries of Education in all federal states were surveyed by the 'Lebenshilfe' (Help for Living) organization, to determine regulations and practices of para-educators, however the survey was abandoned due to its difficulty" (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007).

2.1. The Impact of Training and Supervision on Para-educators' role in Special Education

Para-educators are no longer on the periphery of the classroom. Now a significant part of the learning process, they are facilitating one-on-one and small-group instruction among special needs students. They increasingly have been tasked with doing so over the past years to ensure that such students receive adequate academic attention and that schools meet their needs as defined by federal legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act and No Child Left Behind. More recently, para-educators are helping to ensure that students with special needs keep pace with the Common Core State Standards (Finkel, 2014). Paraprofessionals often face challenges with supervising SEN, parents, school policies and legal regulations. Paraprofessionals express their wish for training and feedback on their performance and in

academics, not just experience, especially that their supervisors expect them to perform so well based on their experience (Giangreco & Broer, 2007).

As a result of this broadening of their requirements—and stress levels—para-educators and their advocates say they need more varied training, increased support from administrators in developing effective working relationships with teachers, better pay (Finkel, 2014).

2.2. Supervision & Feedback

Lack of obtaining feedback can cause inconsistency in instruction (Giangreco & Broer, 2007). Planning is important for clarifying paraprofessionals 'roles and monitoring the roles as programs progresses (Giangreco & Broer, 2007). The Oregon Department of Education formed in 2001 a task force which identified eight core competencies that people required for their position; the initial identification of competencies was required for the development and implementation of the system for early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) practitioners (Killoran, Templeman, Peters & Udell,2001). The group evaluated the competencies of paraprofessionals, and identified the areas that paraprofessionals need training in including : "knowledge of etiology and characteristics of common developmental disabilities, assists families in accessing information and resources, knowledge of best practices as defined by professional organizations, ability to create appropriate and stimulate environments to enhance learning, ability to effectively communicate with children, ability to integrate effective therapeutic practices into learning environments, ability to appropriately monitor child progress and to make program changes, ability to use adaptive techniques/equipment ,Knowledge of program vision, goals, guidelines, and operating procedures, participation in continuing education/or in-service training" (Killoran, Templeman, Peters & Udell,2001). Identifying the competencies of paraprofessionals is important for teams in order to approach the challenge of setting standards for paraprofessionals and the development needed to achieve such standards (Killoran, Templeman, Peters & Udell, 2001).

The importance of supervising and developing the skills of paraprofessional relies a lot on the professional interaction with classroom teachers and SEN supervisors in an ethical trustworthy

environment. Sauberan (2015) identifies that as the role of paraprofessional in special education increase, challenges and opportunities rises on how to increase the competency of paraprofessionals as well as school staff to deliver best early childhood practices. Para-educators respond positively to in-services and on-the-job experiences (Sauberan, 2015). Traditional hierarchy replaces sharing of responsibility; whereas purposeful input of paraprofessional happened in a trusting and respectful environment (Sauberan, 2015).Videos allow teachers provide an insightful tool to observe how other teachers' work. In order to lead paraprofessionals, teachers should work with paras in a group to discuss what they see, participate in observing children, select instructional strategies based on experience, and reflect on outcomes continuously (Suaberan,2015).

2.3. Training of Para-educators in inclusive education

Boudreau (2011) highlights that teachers in mainstream education rarely receive training on how to deal with paraprofessionals in the da-to day general classroom and they are not familiar with how to manage or supervise paraprofessionals. As the demand for para-educators in inclusive education increases, the need to train and supervise them becomes inevitable. Having a specific description of job duties, trainings can be more targeted as per para-educators' needs, before working in a classroom environment (Boudreau, 2011).

Well trained para-educators are needed as per the NCLB (2001) Act, to assist teachers and students with SENs in academics (Boudreau, 2011). This entails more training that address the important roles of paras in the classroom, what duties are expected from paraprofessionals and from teachers in the general classroom, the effective collaboration between para-educators and special educators, need for clear strategies to support supervision and training of paraprofessionals by teachers in their classrooms and the need for administrative structures that would support [and develop the relationship] between paraprofessionals and their supervising teachers (Boudreau, 2011).

Training para-educators while they're working in the special education setting is the most accessed type of training, whereas para-educators report their need for training in transitional skills. Para-educators have high frequency task in one-to-one instruction and low tasks in IEP planning (Holbrook, 2011). (McKenzie, 2011) highlights that training sessions with specific content focus (e.g. understanding IEPs) allows paraprofessionals to be active participants in the IEP process. Paraprofessionals report they receive little or low on-the-job training when it comes to planning an IEP, knowledge of rights and responsibilities of families towards the student's learning, signs of abuse and neglect, the shared concerns of families of children with special needs and personal biases related to culture (Holbrook, 2011) Transitional para-educators who are working with adult students with special needs should receive a formal training in areas that affect the adults with disabilities. Because time is of essence when it comes to special education transitional services provided to students before they graduate or age, it is strongly suggested that training transitional para-educators should be task driven (Holbrook, 2011).

Obstacles to an effective SDC team includes disrespectful attitude towards para-educators, lack of substitutes, difficult schedules, high number of students and lack of support from school administration and colleagues (Nakama, 2015 p.97).Whereas factors that facilitate the work of a special education classroom team and enhance its effectiveness includes common vision, effective scheduling and planning, developed trainings, and on-going communication (Nakama, 2015 p.97). Special educators have the responsibility of providing para-educators with leadership skills that affects positively their contribution to the team, in a sense that suck skills are utilized consistently and daily to ensure team effectiveness that eventually has a positive impact on students and the SDC setting (Nakama, 2015 p.97). With the increase of para-educators in the classroom, in addition to new legislative decrees, it is essential that teachers possess appropriate resources and skills to run and manage a successful classroom team (Scott, 2013).

Training paraprofessionals can be effective without being costly and intensive (Da Fonte & Capizzi, 2015). Investing 30-40 for targeted training in core instructional strategies affects positively para-educators instructional interactions with special needs, however; para-educators might not appreciate how valuable these practices are due to previous exposure, overall classroom experience or other practices provided by their supervising teacher (Da Fonte & Capizzi, 2015). Training para-educators can be efficient and cost-effective with positive effect on

their performance, classroom teachers and children with special needs. It is also unfair to expect paraprofessionals to give high-quality instructional support to students without proper training (Da Fonte & Capizzi, 2015).

2.4. Additional Barriers for para-educators in the UAE

In the UAE, special education teachers display a greater positive attitude towards inclusion than general education teachers (Alahbabi, 2009). Kindergarten and high school teachers are less willing than elementary teachers to accommodate children with special needs (Alahbabi, 2009). Early education teachers are less willing because they have lesser grade of training than elementary school teachers (Alahbabi, 2009). The attitude of teachers towards inclusion, affects simultaneously their attitude towards paraprofessionals (Alahbabi, 2009). When exposed to positive experience, teachers are more receptive to inclusion, whereas the higher the grade the lesser the positive attitude towards inclusion except for early childhood teachers who are less open towards inclusion (Alahbabi, 2009). Another factor affecting the attitude towards inclusion, includes the severity and type of disability, where teachers become less open towards inclusion when the disability is more severe and demanding (Alahbabi, 2009).

The attitude of classroom teacher, parents, and caregivers towards inclusion can hinder the inclusion process and challenge it. For para-educators, experiencing negative attitude from teachers is a set-back as the two often interact. As the inclusion policy is still freshly implemented, the attitude of the UAE population is adjusting to support children with special needs in inclusive settings. The learning experience of children with special needs in inclusive settings is still not entirely efficient and optimal. Gaad (2007) identifies the negative attitude of classroom teachers towards children with special needs as they feel overwhelmed to support children with special need and other children, all in one classroom. Teachers in classroom setting are still not equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge related to special needs education. As a result, inclusive schools must focus on training their personnel on how to deal with children with special needs and support them in the inclusive setting. There is a lot to be done on the cultural framing of children with special needs. Not all UAE population is aware that having these children in inclusive setting will enhance their learning experience and the overall social

welfare of the country. Positive attitude of teachers towards children with special needs is a major motivator and supporter in the inclusive setting. Teachers who display positive attitudes are more capable of communicating with special educations, para-educators and parents of children with special needs. The attitudes that teachers display towards children with SEN can help provide their needs; as those teachers would like to provide a positive learning experience for children with special needs. Some teachers in UAE reported that they lack the proper training but are willing to undergo trainings and viewed children with special needs positively (Gaad et al, 2007). Ethically, inclusion is a governed right in special needs education, and teachers are bound to accept it but they can become more positive if they receive proper training on how to deal with children in inclusive settings.

Gaad & Khan (2007) show how classroom teacher's perception of inclusion can affect their attitude. Teachers display their negative attitude towards inclusive education in their comments. A teacher comments:

- "We can have these children in our classroom but these children would only benefit from a special educator and not just by being in our class. I in the mainstream class would go nuts; this child should be with a special educator who could handle him one to one. I am not the right person to teach the retarded child, he should be sent to a person who specializes in these things" *(p.101).*

Children with special needs are viewed by teachers as disruptive in general classroom setting (Gaad et al, 2007). Teachers struggle to support children with special needs and provide the suitable learning experience.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This study aimed to reflect para-educators' situation in the UAE in order to explore, understand and describe the criteria that para-educators are hired upon to work in inclusive settings. Moreover, it aimed to explore the background of para-educators, the methods of supervision and frequency of training given to paraprofessionals in inclusive settings.

This section explains the research methodology, research tools and instruments used to collect data.

3.0. Mixed Method Approach Rationale

Research in special education is considered complex and challenging. Odem (2015) explains that research in special needs education is considered very hard in science due to variability of participants, and the educational context that is different than that of general education. Using the mixed methods in conducting research in special education is even more demanding and rare. Collins, Sutton & Onwuegbuzie (2006) highlight that mixed methods are not very common in special education. Only 10.8% of research published on Journal of Special Education from 2000-2005 applied the mixed methodology (Collins, Sutton, & Onwuegbuzie, 2006). Collins, Sutton & Onwuegbuzie (2006) refers the lack of mixed methodology in the literature of special education to the high effort needed from researcher and the necessary skills in both quantitative and qualitative methods. Researchers tend to adopt the method they have the necessary skills for; qualitative researchers will be inclined to conduct qualitative research and will find it difficult to design a quantitative component (Collins, Sutton, & Onwuegbuzie, 2006). Logistics is considered another barrier in conducting mixed methodology researches in special education (Collins, Sutton, & Onwuegbuzie, 2006). Collins, Sutton & Onwuegbuzie (2006) argue that such barriers partially explain why mixed methodology is not often adopted in special education, and consider that the special education researchers have not explained explicitly the purpose and rationale of using mixed methodology.

Conducting research using mixed methodology to provide complementary information is more effective than the single method to inform practice (Odem, 2015). Odem (2015) highlights that

educational researchers have acknowledged the significance of using mixed methodologies to provide effective information.

Mixed methodology provides better understanding of the research problem than single-method designs (Creswell, 2014). Combining qualitative and quantitative methods has the advantage of bridging the gap that each of the single method has (Creswell & Garret, 2008).

3.1. Sequential Explanatory Method

This study seeks to describe the profile of para-educators in Dubai, hiring decision makers, criteria for hiring, and the level of training and supervision. In the introduction, the researcher discussed the background of the research problem including the absence of clear regulated standards (qualifications and duties) based on which para-educators are hired in Dubai. The essence of this random recruitment of para-educators in special education is due to the lack of a detailed inclusion policy or corresponding policies that regulate and define how assisting personnel are hired in special education in the UAE. As a result, this study was carried out using the study according to the sequential method. Creswell (2014) explains that this method is based on pragmatic grounds, inquisitive and diverse as it requires collection different data collection to better understand the research problem. The sequential mixed method chosen in conducting this study and analyzing data findings is explanatory. Quantitative data collection and analysis provided a general understanding of the background of paraprofessionals in the UAE, level of training and supervision and the decision makers involved in their selection. Then, decision-makers were interviewed to investigate and explain the quantitative findings. The qualitative in-depth interviews allow the researcher to explore the criteria based on which para-educators are selected for the role. The explanatory sequential mixed methods is appropriate for the research problem , knowing there is scarce research on para-educators in the UAE that highlights the qualifications, duties, training and supervision of paras in special needs education. As a result, mixed methods will first provide a general view of the above research questions and will help provide a deeper understanding of key aspects (hiring process, level of supervision and training) that affect the status and role of paraprofessionals in inclusion of children with special needs in the UAE.

The study was shaped by timing, weight, and mixing of data of the selected research method. Weighting, timing, mixing, and theorizing are the factors that shape mixed method procedures (Creswell, 2013).First; data for the quantitative phase was collected over a six months period. Then, the researcher's interest in the hiring decision makers of para-educators in Dubai were investigated by collecting qualitative data from a smaller sample over a period of two months. The weight of the explanatory sequential method (quantitative first) is in the quantitative phase more than the qualitative phase (Creswell, 2013). This study integrates and connects quantitative with qualitative data. The qualitative phase (participants, questions, and objectives) rely on the findings of the first phase (quantitative). A two-phase project begins with a quantitative phase and findings can be used to identify participants for qualitative data collection in a follow-up phase (Creswell, 2013). The quantitative findings have identified parents as decision makers in the hiring process, and the follow-up qualitative phase was to investigate how para-educators are hired (criteria for selection).

Considering the lack of studies on para-educators in Dubai, the sequential explanatory methods allow the research to explore this topic and investigate surprising results. Exploring this topic from scratch, without evident statistics on para-educators in Dubai, requires the usage of a methodology that is simple and clear. Creswell (2013) identifies the strengths of the sequential explanatory method as straightforward, clear, and easy to implement or report. Also, he identifies the extensive time frame for data collection as a drawback.

3.2. Research Environment

This study was conducted in different mediums. The researcher has previous connections with para-educators, parents and special educators. The researcher conducted the research using online platforms and met personally with parents for interviews. The purpose of the research, methodology and ethical implications were fully explained to all participants.

3.3. Research Sample Selection

Different sampling methods were used in selecting research participants. Simple random sampling was used for the quantitative design and purposeful sampling for the qualitative design. Creswell (2013) discusses sampling in sequentially explanatory designs where random sampling

is preferable in collecting quantitative such that each individual has an equal probability of being selected, and thus sample can be generalized to the larger population. Purposeful sampling, for qualitative data collection, is suitable in so that individuals are selected because they have experienced the central phenomenon being investigated or explored (Creswell, 2013).

The quantitative random sampling method fulfills the purpose of the research which is to generalize findings about the demographics, experience, and education, job role of paraprofessionals in the UAE and the frequency of training given to them. Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun (1993) define descriptive research study as a research that attempts to describe conditions without analyzing relationship among variables. As a result, random sampling in the quantitative descriptive phase is considered to gain a general understanding of the research problem and generalize findings and investigate them in the qualitative phase. Purposeful sampling is considered for the qualitative research. The qualitative research is pragmatic and basic; it seeks to understand further the quantitative findings and their implications. For that purpose, 20 parents of children with special needs agreed to participate in this research. Using different sampling methods have the following considerations:

- The unequal sample size between quantitative and qualitative is due to the purpose of data collection; qualitative data is to investigate the data finding gathered in the quantitative phase.
- The two samples are drawn from the same UAE population but individuals of both samples are not the same.
- The purpose of data collection is to first explore and gain a perspective about the profile of paraprofessionals; supervision and training of para-educators from a large sample, then to investigate on which criteria decision-makers hire para-educators.

3.4. Access to Participants

The researcher combined a random list of para-educators and special educators to fill the online survey. These participants were selected for the quantitative design from accessible population (early learning centers, schools or private centers for special needs). The researcher has access to this population due to working experience with children with special needs in private and public institutions in the UAE. The researcher also published the survey online and asked para-

educators in Dubai to take the survey. Out of 80 para-educators, 50 responded, and out of 50 special educators 20 participated in the research. The response rate is as follows:

Participants	Targeted Sample	Response Rate
Para-educators	80	62.5%
Special Educators	50	40%

Secondly, verbal consent was obtained from parents for interviews. The participants in both samples were provided with information on the purpose of the research, the research tool and the privacy and confidentiality of data collected from them. In the quantitative sample, a message containing the above information was given to participants to be aware of their consent regarding taking the online survey. In the qualitative phase, the researcher explained to interviewees that their participation is voluntary. As the research does not require exposing private information about participants or does not include children, the researcher's access to interviews was facilitated (parents not withdrawing from research or holding back on information). The researcher collected data from the online-survey with the identity of respondents becoming anonymous. For the qualitative research, the researcher explained for parents the usage of audio recorder for collecting data.

3.5. Research Tools (QUAN & QUAL)

Quantitative research as a process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data whereas qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and reporting of data (Creswell, 2002).In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire instrument was developed and sent separately for each of the para-educators and special educators. Questionnaire (Appendix 1) developed for the quantitative phase was balanced and reliable. Questions had different measurement types: nominal, scale and ordinal. In the qualitative research, the researcher interviewed participants using open-ended and structured questions (Table 24– Summary of interviews) for data collection.

3.6. Quantitative phase

The aim of the quantitative phase is to identify the qualifications, experience, education, duties, knowledge, training and supervision of para-educators working in inclusive education settings, in

Dubai. This phase aims at describing the profile of para-educators, their training and supervision level. The researcher placed online (Google forms), a self-developed cross-sectional survey to collect quantitative data. The quantitative design is descriptive as this study seeks to explore the profile of para-educators in Dubai, identify the decision makers responsible for the selection process and explore the level of training and supervision that paraprofessionals receive and the criteria used to hire paraprofessionals in the UAE. In order to answer the research questions (how shadow teaches in UAE (Dubai) selected, what are the selection criteria, who are recruiting, what is the level of supervision and training) three main themes were addressed in the questionnaire:

- Demographics, Income, Education
- Experience, Age group of Children with special needs, language in the learning setting
- Knowledge and Tasks
- Supervision, feedback & level of training

Questions are structured, closed ended and symmetrical. They are of different measurements ordinal, nominal and scale. The questionnaire was first tested for reliability and validity, on a small sample of para-educators, before being disseminated to larger sample of para-educators and special educators. The analysis of related literature on country regulations for hiring para-educators and analysis of the case study of Oregon Department of Education in 2001 (Killoran, Templeman, Peters & Udell,2001 have helped the researcher to identify the variables that constitutes the role of para-educators in special education. The case study of the Oregon Department identified eight core competencies that people required for their position; the initial identification of competencies was required for the development and implementation of the system for early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) practitioners (Killoran, Templeman, Peters & Udell,2001). Variable include demographics of para-educators (Gender, Age, Income, Education), previous and current experience, child's age and case, primary language in the learning setting, study of child phycology, education or a related field, direct supervisor, learning setting (one-on-one, general classroom or special education classroom), frequency of feedback, feedback method, how supervisor teaches new skills, person responsible for assessing competencies, hiring decision maker, tasks, knowledge in identified areas, number and type of training attended per year, frequency of on-the-job training, funding of the training, trainings that para-educators wish to attend and whether para-educators seek

training outside school. The reliability and validity of the survey scale was based on pilot and principal administration of the survey and re-testing the survey on special –educators to confirm results from para-educators. Special educators and para-educators work in the same setting and usually special educators are responsible for supervising paras. Participants for the quantitative phase were selected based on the following criteria: work as a fulltime para-educators for a child with SEN and must be living in Dubai. A total of 80 para-educators met these criteria and were targeted to take the online survey. Only 50 responded to the survey constituting 62.5% response rate. Using cross-tabulation and frequency distribution, data was analyzed on SPSS to obtain descriptive information of the variable identified earlier. As for special educator, they should be working in Dubai as special educators and have a certificate (special education).

3.7. Qualitative Phase

The research identified parents as hiring decision makers in the quantitative phase. Decision-makers impact the quantitative results as they are selecting and interviewing para-educators. 20 parents were selected for in-depth interviews. Selected interviewees must have a child with special needs and be responsible for the hiring of the para-educator. Data obtained from interviews were analyzed to generate themes and codes which is then validated to ensure the accuracy of the obtained information (raw data was organized and prepared for content analysis, reading through data will lead to coding of data, coding results in description of obtained data that is interpreted). Questions were open-ended and structured. Turner (2010) identifies that open-endedness allows the participants to contribute more. By nature, open-ended questions allow participant to express their experiences fully, and provides the opportunity for the researcher to follow up with participants (Turner, 2010). Participants provide detailed information and express more when questions are structured and open-ended. This flexibility is needed for the purpose of this research, as it aims to gain better understanding to the hiring criteria of paraprofessional in special education. Interviews allowed the researcher to gather more definitive answers about the hiring criteria of para-educators in the UAE.

 In order to ensure qualitative validity and check the accuracy of findings, the researcher examined evidence from participants (supervision and assessment reports on para-educators from private special educator hired) to justify the findings obtained regarding performance and

communication between parents and para-educators. Using verbatim quotes, the description of what parents reported was written along with a summary of findings. Then, member checking was done after generating the final report or findings by taking the findings back to participants to determine if participants feel that these findings represent accurately what they've reported earlier. To ensure reliability, interviews are recorded and transcribed, codes compared with data to ensure consistency.

3.8. Interview procedures

In order to enhance the external validity of the study, participants were informed before every interview session about the purpose of the research, methodology, benefits or risks and ethical considerations. Parents were notified before every interview and interviews where held in a convenient setting for parents (home or outdoors). The interviews were audio-recorded and the use of recorder was explained to parents before starting with the interviews. The interviews were constructed on pre-determined categories that covered three major themes: hiring process criteria, satisfaction with the para-educators performance, level of supervision and training that para-educators receive. All interviews started with the same questions and the same number of questions was asked to all participants. The researcher seeks definitive answer concerning criteria of hiring so open-ended structured questions helped fulfill the purpose of the qualitative research. To avoid assumptions, the researcher asked parents to re-state or clarify an unclear statement to avoid misunderstanding.

3.9. Data Analysis

Data collected from questionnaires was coded and analyzed using the statistical software SPSS. If the quantitative research is descriptive in nature, the researcher should select from the arsenal of descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2014). The data analysis was descriptive focusing on frequency, central tendencies and variability measures. In the qualitative section,

3.10.   Validity and Reliability of the research

While conducting the research, the researcher identified assumptions based on the working experience in special needs education. Identifying possible biases or assumptions helped the researcher become more focused on gaining a clear understanding of what parents are reporting.

Since the qualitative approach is basic and pragmatic, validity of data collection was ensured through maintain objectivity of the researcher and without adding personal interpretation based on work experience. Further, the reliability of the results was further enhanced through member checking of verbatim quotes of experiences reported by participants.

3.11. Ethical considerations

Throughout this study, research ethics were respected. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, methodology, privacy and confidentiality of their responses. Anonymity of participants' identity in the quantities method is ensured through the online survey which does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address. Initials for verbatim quotes were used instead of real names and interviews deleted after transcription.

Chapter Four: Results & Discussion

4. Summary of Quantitative Findings (Para-educators)

Demographics, Nationality, Education

Data findings show that the majority of respondents are females, with a very low percent of male respondents (2% of the sample, 1 male participant). 80% of respondents are between 25-34 years old, while 7% are 35-44 years. The remaining respondents are between 18-24 years old.
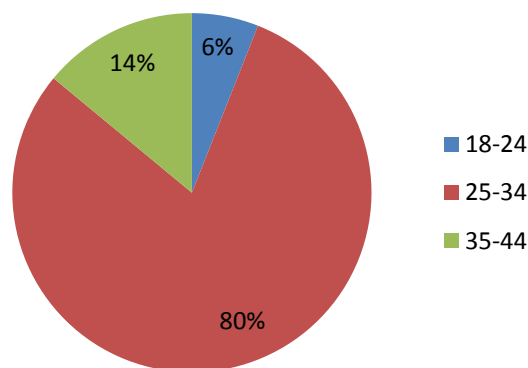
Table 1: Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	*Percent*
Female	*49*	*98.0*
Male	*1*	*2.0*
Total	*50*	*100.0*

Table 2: Age of Respondents

	Frequency	*Percent*
18-24	*3*	*6.0*
25-34	*40*	*80.0*
35-44	*7*	*14.0*
Total	*50*	*100.0*
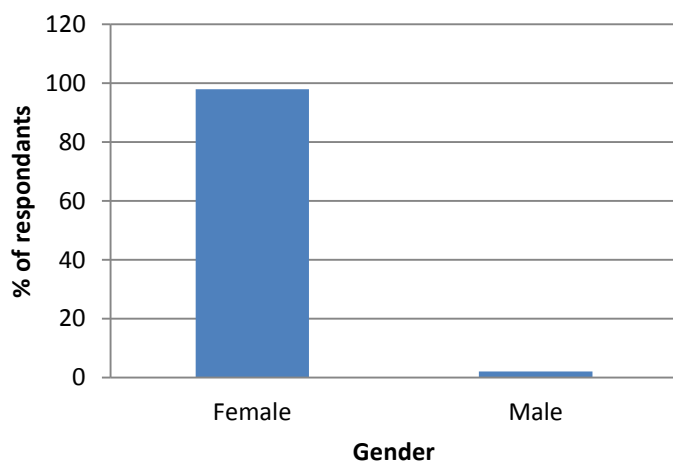
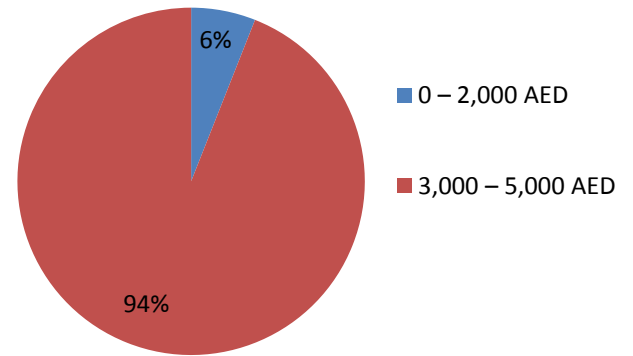
Figure 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondent's Gender

Figure 2: Frequency Distribution of Respondent's Age

Table 3: Income Brackets of Para-educators

	Frequency	Percent
0 – 2,000 AED	3	6
3,000 – 5,000 AED	47	94
Total	50	100.0

Figure 3: Frequency Distribution of Respondent's Income

6% of the population earn less than or equal to 2,000 AED, whereas the rest of the population earns between 3,000 and 5,000 AED. 58% of respondents do not have a bachelor degree, whereas the rest of them have a bachelor degree. 6% of those who earn less than or equal to 2,000 do not have a bachelor degree, whereas 42% of those who earn between 3,000 and 5,000 AED have a bachelor degree and 52% have no bachelor degree within the same income bracket.

Table 4: Cross Tabulation - Frequency distribution of Education relative to Income

Income	Education	N	%
0 – 2,000 AED	No Bachelor Degree	3	6
3,000 – 5,000 AED	Bachelor Degree	21	42
	No Bachelor Degree	26	52
	Total	50	100

Table 5: Bachelor Degree in Child Psychology

	N	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	*21*	*100.0*	*100.0*	*100.0*

Table 6: Bachelor Degree in Education or related field

Bachelor Degree	N	%
Yes	*3*	*6*
No	*47*	*15*

All respondents have not studied child psychology and only 6% of respondents having bachelor degree in education or a related field.
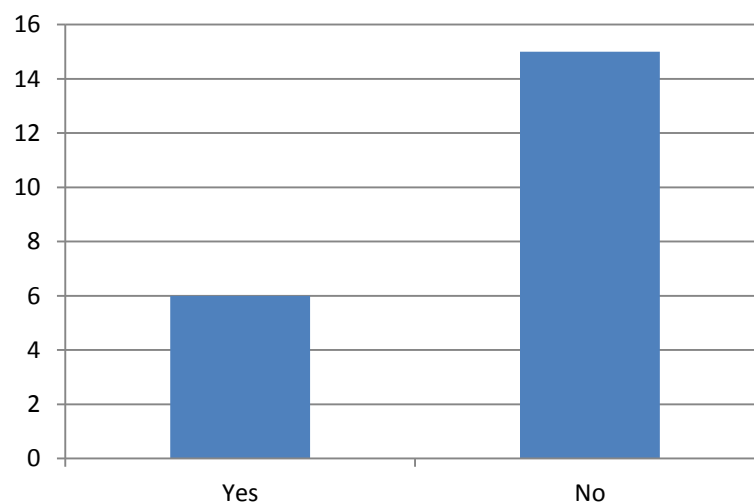
Figure 4: Frequency Distribution of Respondents with Bachelor Degree in Education or Related field

Experience and Work Setting

60% of respondents have experience between 0-2 years whereas a lower percentage of 40% have experience greater than 2 years. 60% work with age group less than 3 years old whereas 40% work with groups greater than 3 years old.

Table 7: Primary Language in the Learning Setting

	Language	Frequency	%
Valid	English	50	100

90% of respondents have previously worked with pre-school/early and elementary age groups and 10% have not had any work experience. All respondents reported English as a dominant language in learning setting for both age groups.

Table 8: Current Age Group

Age	N	%
Less than 3 years old	30	60
Greater than 3 years old	20	40

Table 9: Cross Tabulation: Age Group previously with Experience

Previous Experience	Age Group	N	%
Valid No	N/A	5	10
Valid Yes	Pre-school & Elementary	45	90

Table 10: Years of Experience

	Experience	N	%
Valid	0 - 2 years	30	60
	3-5 years	20	40
	Total	50	100

The majority of respondents report to special educator as a direct supervisor and work mostly with classroom teacher. When asked what learning settings they usually work on, they reported that they work in general classroom setting, special education classroom and one-on-one with learners with special needs.

Table 11: Whom do you work/Interact mostly with

		N	%
Valid	*Classroom teacher*	*50*	*100.0*

Table 12: Learning setting/s para-educators work in

|		N	%
Valid	*all*	*50*	*100.0*

Tasks and Knowledge

Respondents were asked to rate the frequency of tasks they perform, where all of them reported working daily one-on-one with students and preparing teaching materials. 86% of participants report collecting data monthly whereas 14% don't collect data (Not Applicable).64% participants reported revising IEP monthly, whereas a significant 36% reported not revising IEP (Not Applicable).
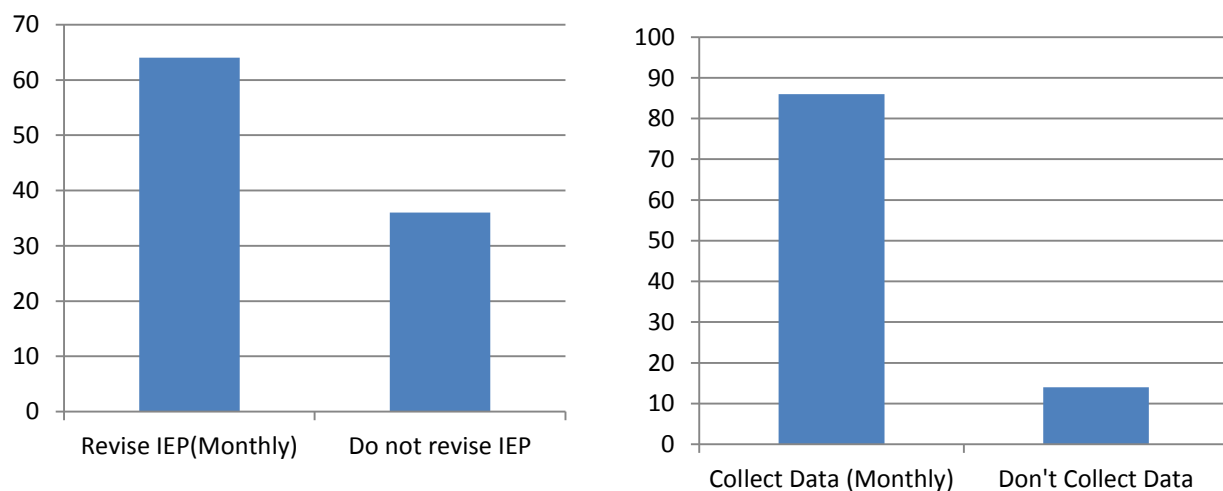

Figure 5: Frequency Distribution of Tasks

Summary of findings on the Level of Knowledge as per frequency percentage (See Appendix 2)

64% of respondents know the basics of conducting an assessment whereas 36% reported they don't know how. 80% have basic knowledge of how to conduct an evaluation and 20% reported they don't know how. 64% have basic knowledge in collecting data about performance whereas 36% report they don't know how to collect performance data. 60% reported an intermediate knowledge in teaching social interaction and 40% reported a basic knowledge in an area, however no participant reported not having knowledge about this area. 76% reported basic knowledge in promoting language whereas 22% reported having intermediate knowledge and 4% didn't know how to promote language. 80% have an intermediate knowledge in modifying the learner's physical environment, whereas 16% have basic knowledge, 4% reported they don't know how to modify the learner's physical environment when needed. 66% have advanced knowledge in adjusting lessons whereas the remaining 34% have intermediate knowledge. 82% report an advanced knowledge in teaching academics whereas 18% have intermediate knowledge n teaching academics. 94% don't know how to prepare an IEP plan and only 6% have basic knowledge in preparing IEP plans.86% reported a basic knowledge in dealing with problem behavior whereas the remaining 4% do not know how to deal with problem behavior.
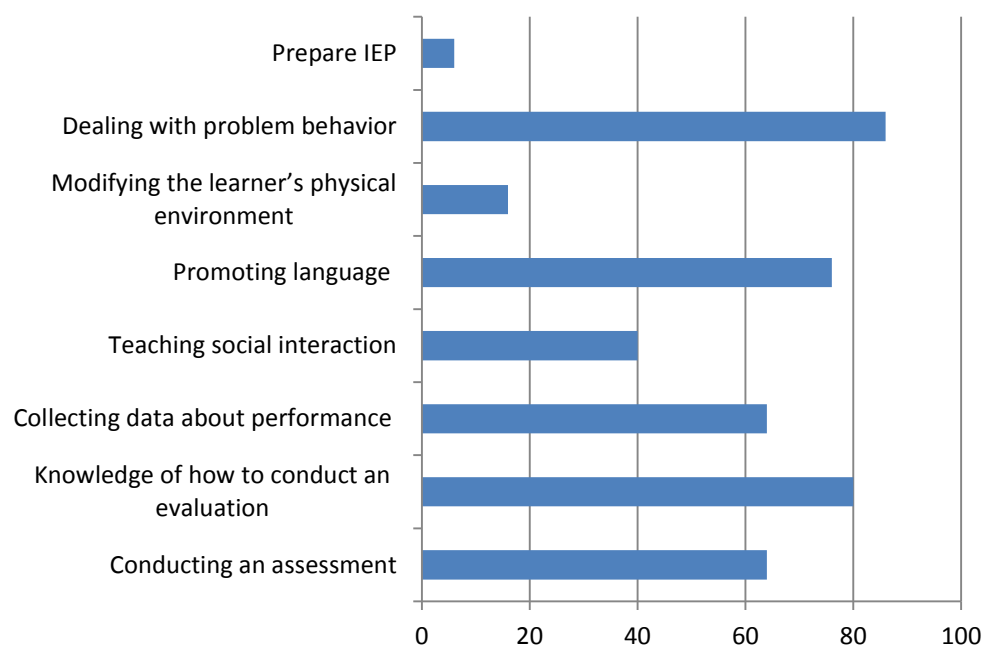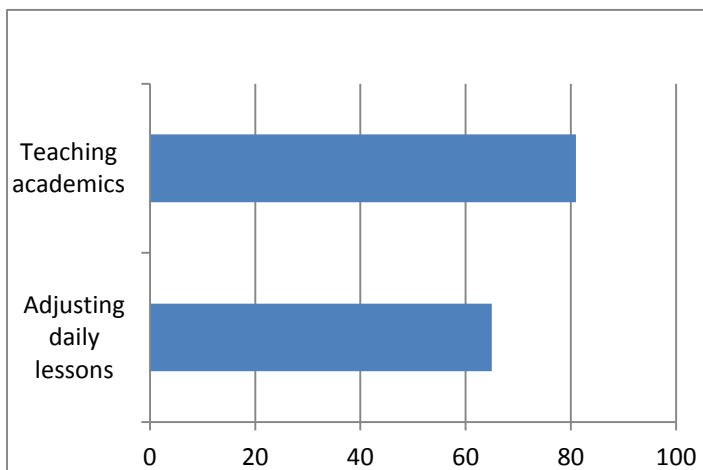

Figure 6 : Basic Knowledge of para-educators
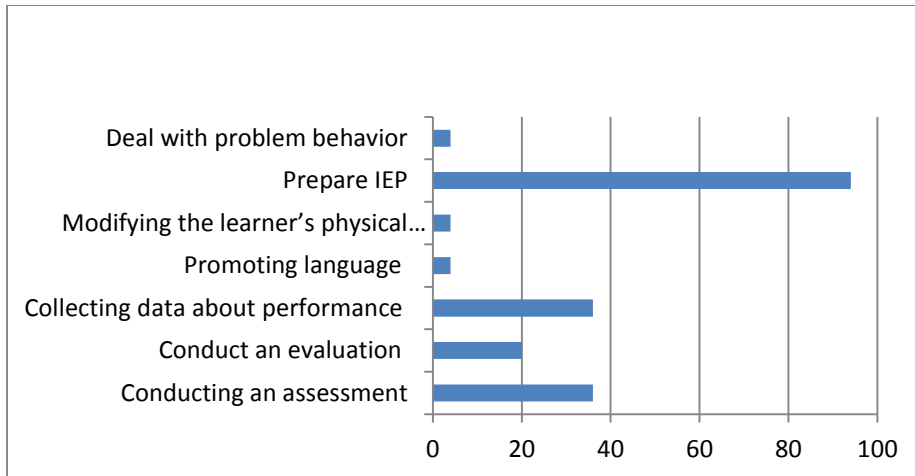
Figure 7 : Lack of Knowledge of para-educators
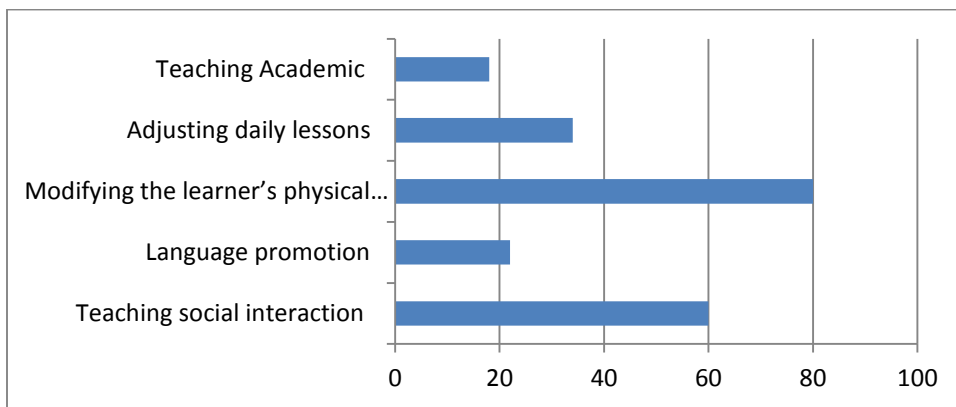
Figure 8 : Intermediate Knowledge of para-educators

Figure 9 : Advanced Knowledge of para-educators

Feedback& Supervision

Most of the respondents receive feedback on a weekly basis, whereas a fewer 26% receive it on a daily basis. When asked how they receive feedback, most respondents reported receiving feedback orally regardless of the frequency of the feedback.

Table 13: Method of receiving feedback

		N	*%*
Valid	*Daily*	*13*	*26.0*
	Weekly	*37*	*74.0*
	Total	*50*	*100.0*

Table 14: Method of receiving feedback

		Frequency	*Percent*
Valid	*Oral*	*50*	*100.0*

Most of the para-educators report being taught new skills orally and by modeling , while 15% reported being taught new skills orally and a fewer 4% reported being taught a new skill through oral, written and modeling instructions.
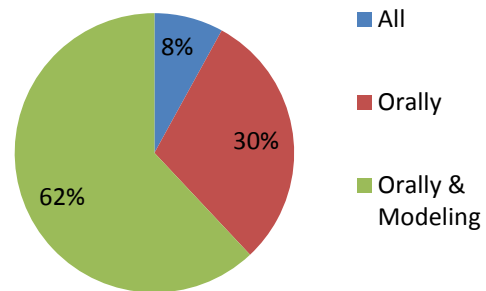
Table 15: How para-educators are taught new skills (Method of communication)

		Frequency	*Percent*
Valid	*All*	*4*	*8.0*
	Orally	*15*	*30.0*
	Orally & Modeling	*31*	*62.0*
	Total	*50*	*100.0*

All Participants also reported that the SEN (special educator) is responsible for assessing their performance. 80% reported being hired by parents or care givers of children of special needs whereas the rest is selected by school.

Table 16: Person in charge for assessment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Special educator	50	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 17: Hiring decision maker

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Parents		80.0	80.0	80.0
	School		20.0	20.0	100.0

Training

46 respondents have received 2 trainings per year in social and academics but not in other areas such as problem behavior, IEP planning or promoting language. Only 1 para-educator has received three training per year yet also in the area of social and academic teaching. Schools and parents have paid for trainings as reported by respondents.

Table 18: Cross Tabulation between type and number of training received

Number of trainings per year			Frequency	Percent
1.00	Valid	social & academics	3	100.0
2.00	Valid	social & academics	46	100.0
3.00	Valid	social & academics	1	100.0

Table 19: Funding of Training

Number of trainings per year			Frequency	Percent
1.00	Valid	school & parents	3	100.0
2.00	Valid	school & parents	46	100.0
3.00	Valid	school & parents	1	100.0

92% of participants have received on-the-job training (OTJ) on monthly basis whereas 8% have not received that at all.

Table 20: Frequency of on-the-job training

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Monthly	46	92.0	92.0	92.0
	N/A	4	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

94% say that they seek training outside schools, whereas 6% says report they don't. When asked what type of trainings they like to receive, the answers were dispersed with three major categories receiving higher frequencies than other categories: 58% reported they'd like to receive training in IEP planning, 22% would like to receive training in the area of problem behavior, and 14% would like to receive training in promoting language.

Table 21: Seek Training outside the school

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Yes	47	94.0	94.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 22: What types of training para-educators would like to receive

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Academics	1	2.0
	Conducting Assessment	1	2.0
	Problem behavior	12	22.0
	IEP	29	58.0
	Language promotion	7	14.0
	Social Interaction	1	2.0
	Total	50	100.0

Summary of Quantitative Findings (Special educators)

Special educators reported similar findings on para-educators demographics, education, knowledge, tasks and barriers. All 18 participants reported that their para- educators are females, between the age of 24 and 30 years old and earn less than 5,000 AED per month. 66% of participants reported hiring para-educators who have completed high school and 34% hiring para-educators with a bachelor degree. Only 10% of special educators reported the decision makers in the hiring process whereas the rest of participants reported that parents are the hiring decision makers. All participants reported that their para-educators have not studied child psychology. Participants reported that paras had less than 4 years of experience, with 30% of

participants reporting para-educators have less than 2 years of experience in a similar role. All participants reported that their para-educators work with classroom teacher, and work in different settings: general classroom, one-on-one sessions and special needs classroom. The language in the work setting is English and 80% of special educators specified that para-educators mostly worked with children who are less than 5 years old. The majority of participants reported that tasks of para-educators included conducting one-on-one training, preparing teaching materials and collect data (accuracy reporting) about learner's performance. Revising IEP was not among tasks (not applicable). Special educators reported that para-educators have intermediate knowledge in teaching social interaction and academics, promoting language, modify learner's physical environment when needed, and adjusting daily lesson. Majority reported that para-educators have basic knowledge in collect data about performance and dealing with problem behaviors. Participants reported that para-educators do not know how to prepare IEP plan conduct assessment and evaluation. All special educators reported that para-educators were supervised by special educator. 60% of participants reported their para-educator received daily feedback on their performance whereas 40% reported para-educators receive feedback weekly. 96% of special educators reported that para-educators received feedback orally. All 20 participants reported that parents have hired the para-educator and not schools. Findings show low frequency of on the job training and written feedback where only 4% of special educators reported giving on-the-job training. 94% of participants reported that para-educators received one training session per year. Same number also reported need for more training. The type of training was eliminated from the questionnaire, as it does not reflect the opinion of para-educator but that of special educator (what type of training you [para-educator] would like to receive).

5. Summary of Qualitative Data Findings

20 parents of children with special needs agreed to be interviewed. Using open-ended questions, were conducted on a course of 10 weeks to understand the hiring criteria, level of communication between parents and para-educators, parent's satisfaction with the para-educators' performance and training. For ethical considerations, verbal consent was obtained from parents before interviews. Parents were informed about the purpose of the research, confidentiality of their identity, and their ability to withdraw their responses if they want. Accordingly data was collected for content analysis.

1) Were you directly involved in hiring your child's paraprofessional? (if no, who selected the paraprofessional)
2) Based on what criteria were the paraprofessionals selected or hired?
3) What was your hiring resource? Why?
4) Did she/he have a previous experience in shadowing?
5) What is the level of education?
6) Who supervises your paraprofessional? (are you satisfied with level of supervision/training)
7) How often do you communicate?
8) How do you rate the paraprofessional's performance? Is it satisfying?

18 out of 20 parents were the decision makers in the hiring process. They have selected and approved the para-educator selected for the role. Parents who were not the decision makers in the hiring process relied on schools to select para-educators on their behalf.
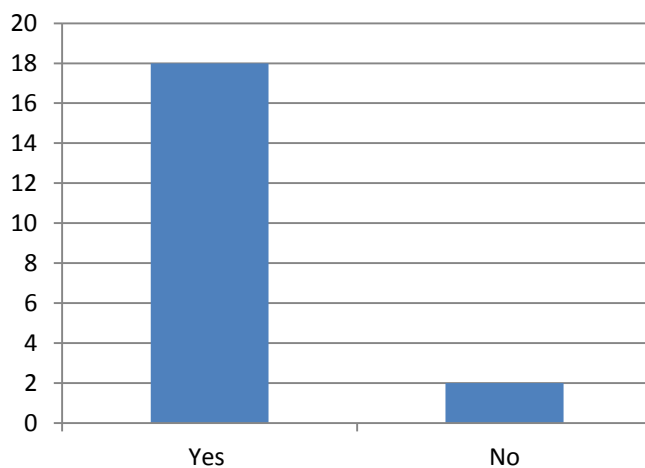

Figure 10:Decision-Maker in the hiring process

Hiring Criteria Theme Categorization and Frequency

The scripts of the interviews were analyzed to determine the hiring criteria based on which parents hire para-educators, the following themes emerged:

SN	Themes	Frequency	%
Theme 1	Language	6	30
Theme 2	Affordability	12	60
Theme 3	UAE Residency Permit	2	10
	Total	20	100

Table 23: Frequency of Themes
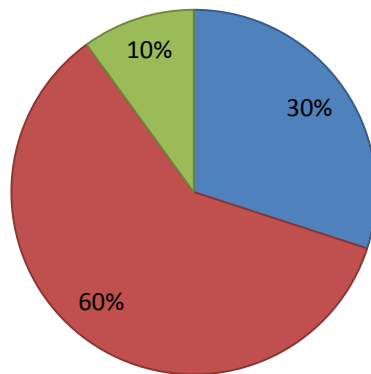
Figure 11: Summary of Frequency and Frequency distribution of Themes

Theme 1- Language

Participants identified language as major criteria for selecting the para-educator or commonly known as shadow teacher. They have a preference for para-educators who speak their native language as it is easier for communication.

D.H. highlighted "It is easier to communicate with native Arabs para-educators; they know and understand our culture and I feel comfortable talking to them".

M.I. said "I want my child to learn two languages: English and Arabic, yet he is exposed to English more than Arabic, and the Para-educator can help my child learn English".

Theme 2 – Affordability

Participants identified cost as a barrier to hiring, and admitted that affordability is a major motivator for hiring a para-educator. Parents reports compromising competency, level of education and experience for the sake of affordability.

R.H. said "We are already paying a lot of money for school and home-based program; we need to hire an affordable para-educator".

J.R highlights "We [family] patiently handle the incompetency that the para-educator shows sometimes, because we are paying less, more experience requires higher pay".

L.H said "Our shadow teacher has only a high school degree, but we prefer to train her rather than hiring someone more educated who wants higher pay"

Theme 3 – UAE Residency Permit

Participants also identified the residency permit as an attractive factor for selection. They prefer para-educators who already live in Dubai with parents or spouse and have their residency, as it cost and time efficient.

L.H said "It's a hassle to have a shadow teacher come from abroad, I prefer someone who already lives here"

G.D highlights "My child's shadow teacher is a young married woman who lives in Dubai with her spouse, she speaks Arabic and English fluent but does not have a background in education"

M.L highlights "I cannot afford to pay the cost of work visa and training of the shadow teacher, it is very risky because typically the shadow teacher would require housing too, so it's very important that the shadow teacher is already working in Dubai and has a work visa permit".

Hiring Resource

90% of participants reported they've hired the para-educator through referrals, by friends, family or special education specialists (supervisor hired for home-based program or center supervising their child's home-based program). Only 10% have relied on schools in selecting their child's shadow teacher. When asked about the reason they trusted referrals for selection, most participants reported that they trust the special educator or supervisor privately they've hired to supervise and train the shadow teacher, they can communicate more

with the shadow teacher if they hire her/him and she can be more involved in the home-based program and be aware of the child's performance and progress. As for participants relying on schools for hiring the shadow teacher, they reported that they had time constraints as they couldn't find a para-educator to hire or had no access to para-educators, so they paid the school to hire a shadow.
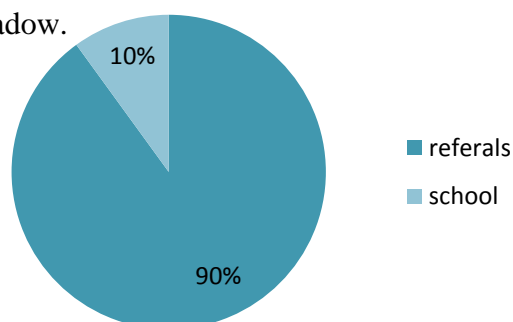

Figure 12: Parent's Hiring Resource

Previous Experience in a similar role

95% of participants report that the selected Para educators have at least 1-2 years as experience working with children with special needs. While the parents do not emphasize experience as an essential factor in their hiring decision, yet they prefer Para educators who worked with children with special needs before. Only 5% have hired
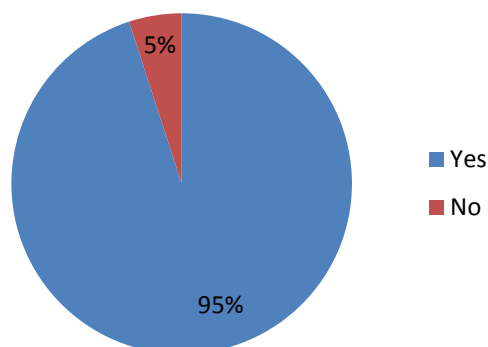

Figure 13: Previous Experience as Para-educator

52

shadow teachers with no previous experience, for reasons such as unavailability of Para-educators to hire, and reliance on training to bridge the experience gap.

Level of Education & Supervision

Participants report that 80% of the hired Para educators have a high school degree and 20% have a bachelor degree in a field not related to education. Parents did not show a negative attitude towards the current level of education of Para-educators. Higher level of education implies higher cost. They rely on training and the private supervisor who's hired to monitor and assess the child's home-based program and performance, to train the shadow teacher. Regarding the level of supervision, 18

participants report that the hired para-educator is supervised by classroom teacher, special educator at school (SEN) and the private supervisor hired by parents. Parents do not personally supervise the para-educator but rely on reports from the private supervisor on the performance of para-educators. 2 of the participants reported that the para-educator is supervised by classroom teacher and SEN. These 2 participants were not the decision makers in the hiring process.
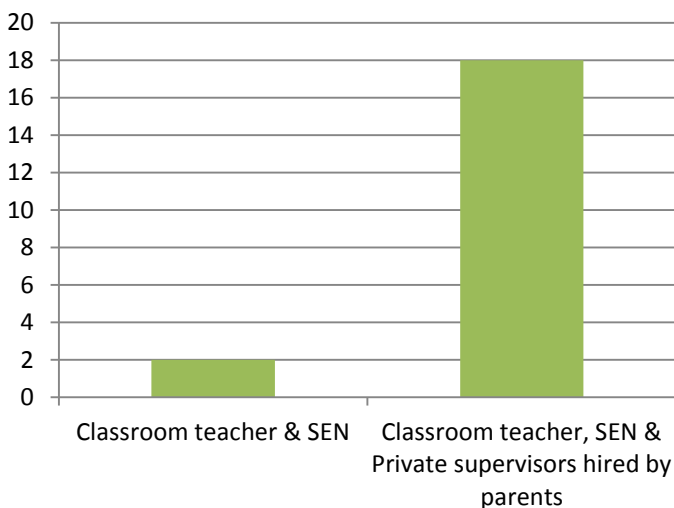
Figure 15: Supervision of para-educators
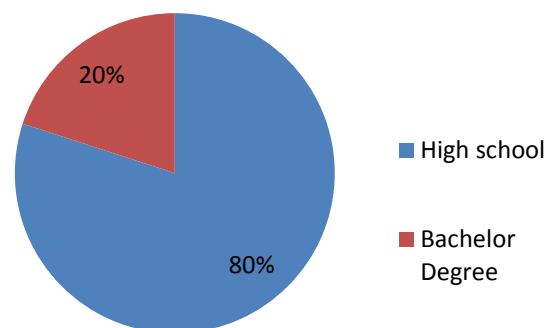
Figure 14: Level of Education of para-educators

Level of Communication

In order to determine the level of communication between parents and para-educators, scripts were analyzed and three themes emerged as following:

SN	Themes	Frequency	%
Theme 1	*Reports related to basic daily events*	*14*	*70*
Theme 2	*Reports Relevant to program targets*	*6*	*30*
	Total	*20*	*100*

Theme 1 – Reports related to basic daily events

70% of parents say that the para-educators report daily events at school including social interaction, child's behavior during classes, learning activities.

Theme 2 – Reports Relevant to program targets

Only 30% of parents report that para-educators provide them with feedback that is related to the learner's progress at school relative to program target including language targets, academic performance and
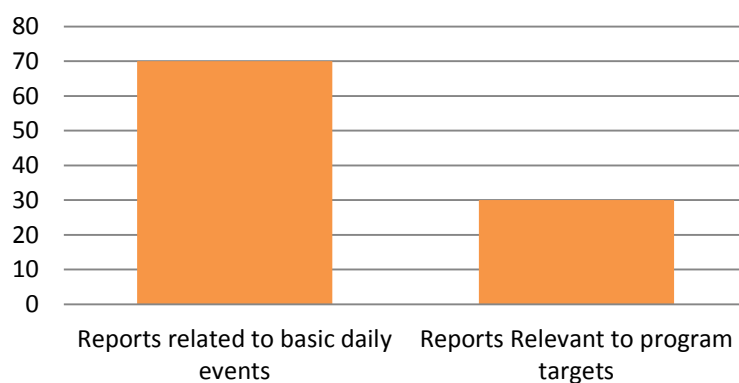
Level of satisfaction with performance

| SN	Themes	Frequency	%
Theme 1	*Need Improvement*	*10*	*50*
Theme 2	*Satisfying*	*7*	*35*
Theme 3	*Dissatisfying*	*3*	*15*
	Total	*20*	*100*

Theme 1 – Need Improvement

Respondents report the para-educators' performance is not entirely up to their expectations. Para-educators sometime fail to follow recommendations set by special educator or private special educator hired by parent. Parents report that para-educators need more training in areas such as language promotion and dealing with problem behavior. Participants reflected on the lack of experience and knowledge that affects the performance of para-educators.

Theme 2 – Dissatisfying

Participants extremely frustrated with the performance of the para-educator. Para-educators skip days and do not attend regularly; paras also inform parents shortly of their inability to attend. Also parents report that their child's progress is slow and that paras do not follow recommendations that affect learner's progress including how to deal with problem behavior and language targets.

Theme 2 – Satisfying

Participants were content with the para-educator's performance. Paras attend regularly, follow instructions and recommendations, and have a positive impact on the learner's progress.
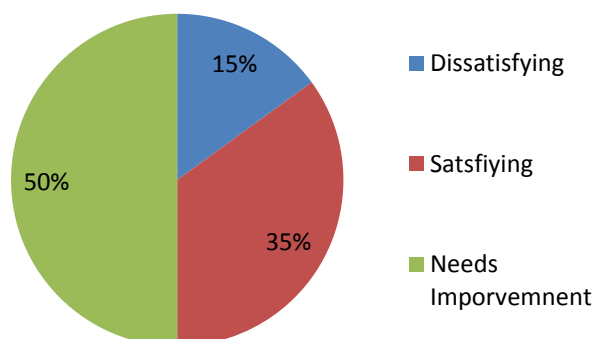
Table 24: Major findings from Parents of Children with special needs

Questions	Comments
Were you directly involved in hiring your child's paraprofessional? (if no, who selected the paraprofessional)	Yes, because no one was able to help find a paraprofessional for my child.
Based on what criteria were the paraprofessionals selected/hired? (language, cost, nationality, age, working hours)	• Language • Ready visa • Affordable
What was your hiring resource?	Referrals from parents or private supervisor hired by parents
Did she/he have a previous experience in shadowing?	Mostly No
What is the level of education?	• High school • Bachelor degree but not in education or a related field (psychology)
Who supervises your paraprofessional? (are you satisfied with level of supervision/training)	• Classroom teacher & SEN • Classroom teacher, SEN & Private supervisors hired by parents
How do you rate the paraprofessional's performance? Is it satisfying?	• Paraprofessional is willing to cooperate and apply recommendations but more training is needed

6. Discussion of Quantitative data

The majorities of para-educators in Dubai are females and belong to the age group of 25-35 years old. The majority of para-educators have a high school education. This contradicts with international standards of more advanced inclusive policies such as that of in the United States and Canada. For instance, the NLCB Act of 2011 states that para-educators should have completed at least two years of study at a higher education institution or have obtained higher degrees, or met formal standard assessment by State or local academic institution. In Canada, it is possible for para-educators to have completed a high school degree and still be able to work in this field. However, para-educators should have a recognized diploma or certification from a recognized postsecondary institution with a formal placement, have valid job-related requirements defined by the job posting, and have health-care support training. In Dubai, findings show an obvious gap in the experience of para-educators, where the majority of the respondents do not have previous experience working with children with special needs. Also, they have no education in child psychology. Most respondents work with pre-school/ early learning age groups, supervised by a special educator and interact mostly with the classroom teacher.

Most respondents earn between 3,000 and 5,000 AED, and those with high school degree are found in two income brackets <2000 AED and 3,000- 5,000 AED, which shows that high school degree doesn't affect the income, whereas those with bachelor degrees are only found within the income bracket 3,000 – 5,000 AED. However, the majority of para-educators earn less than 5,000 AED which is considered problematic as these workers are paid low. Teacher assistants are among workers with the lowest wages in schools and have limited career ladder option (Bernal & Aragon, 2004; Tillery et al., 2003).

Para-educators in this research work in a general classroom setting, special education classroom, and one-on-one sessions with children with special needs. According to provide instructional activities under supervision, assist teachers in classroom activities including: one-to-one tutoring, classroom management, computer instruction, translation, parent involvement activities, educational support (library for example), and instructional support services under the direct supervision (Yell, Drasgow & Lowery 2005, p. 134).

English is the dominant language in the learning setting. While, Spencer (2008) identifies language as a barrier in the inclusion setting as it is only limited to English, he confirms that English is the dominant learning setting in UAE's inclusive education. The dominance of the English language in inclusive settings is due to the fact that the Ministry of Education adopts the British English programs in its schools (national Curriculum of England and Wales).

Para-educators, in Dubai, show advanced and intermediate knowledge in few areas such as adjusting lessons, modifying learner's physical environment,teaching academics and social interaction. This is in accordance with advanced standards as para-educators are required to assist children with special needs in academics and assisting children with special needs in learning of social skills. Teachers' aides should supervise, participate and demonstrate activities that would enhance the child's development physically, socially and intellectually (Department of Education and Training, 2015).Para-educators should be able to deliver curriculum, integrate children with SEN in general classroom setting, prepare activities for instructional purpose for students and small groups, adapt general classroom activities or materials to support classroom objective, supervise students with SEN in different environments (playground, field trips, transfer to transportation etc.) and supervise or accompany students off school site (Toronto School District Board, 2016).

Para-educators in the UAE fall behind international standards concerning conducting an evaluation or assessment, collecting data about learners' performance, developing IEP, promoting language, and dealing with problem behavior. They have a basic or no knowledge in conducting an evaluation or assessment, collecting data about learners' performance, promoting language, and dealing with problem behavior. In these areas there is also a significant percentage that lacks the knowledge. There a great gap in IEP planning where a significant do not know how to prepare an IEP plan. The lack of knowledge in key areas or having a basic knowledge can be attributed to the level of education (high school) and lack of experience where most participants have only up to two years of experience working as a para-educator for children with special needs. According to Toronto standards, academically, the para-educators, assists the special education teacher, to deliver curriculum, administer assessments, integrate children with SEN in general classroom setting, prepare activities for instructional purpose for students and small groups, adapt general classroom activities or materials to support classroom objective, supervise

students with SEN in different environments (playground, field trips, transfer to transportation etc.), attend trainings, meetings and career development learning sessions (e.g. applied behavioral training, problem behavior management, CPR, emergency and first aid procedures etc.), develop IEP, participate in team meetings, communicate with personnel and staff for implementation of IEP, assist in data collection, assistive in technology use, supervise or accompany students off school site (Toronto School District Board, 2016).

However, this lack of knowledge is not addressed by training, feedback or supervision. According to the findings, feedback is received weekly and orally. Factors that facilitate the work of a special education team require on-going communication (Nakama, 2015 p.97). Special educators are responsible for assessing the para-educator's performance; yet the majority of para-educators are hired by parents or caregivers of children with special needs and not the school, which implies the need for an in-depth knowledge of the level of commitment of SEN towards assessing the performance and reporting to parents or superiors. Para-educators often face challenges with supervising special educators, parents, school policies and legal regulations. Paraprofessionals express their wish for training and feedback on their performance and in academics, not just experience, especially that their supervisors expect them to perform so well based on their experience (Giangreco & Broer, 2007). Also Holbrook (2011) highlights that para-educators report just under half of their time was spent with little or no direct supervision from a certified teacher. This is shown in the findings of this study where para-educators receive oral weekly feedback from supervisor (special educator) and minimal on the job training.

Paraprofessionals do not receive proper training as the frequency of training is low (only twice per year) and limited to academics and social interaction. . Well trained para-educators are needed as per the NCLB (2001) Act, to assist teachers and students with SENs in academics (Boudreau, 2011). This entails more training that address the important roles of paras in the classroom, what duties are expected from paraprofessionals and from teachers in the general classroom, the effective collaboration between para-educators and special educators, need for clear strategies to support supervision and training of paraprofessionals by teachers in their classrooms and the need for administrative structures that would support [and develop the relationship] between paraprofessionals and their supervising teachers (Boudreau, 2011). While the qualifications of para-educators vary across countries, most paras have no certification or

college degree and they are selected without having previous training or education in special needs education (Balshaw &Farrell, 2002). Having a clear job description can highlight the areas that need improvement and training (Boudreau, 2011). Findings show a great need for training para-educators in areas such as language promotion, IEP planning and dealing with problem behavior. This is also validated by the findings on the type of trainings that Para-educators wish to receive which complies with the above. Paraprofessionals report they receive little or low on-the-job training when it comes to planning an IEP, knowledge of rights and responsibilities of families towards the student's learning, signs of abuse and neglect, the shared concerns of families of children with special needs and personal biases related to culture (Holbrook, M., 2011). Holbrook (2011) highlights that para-educators list their involvement in planning for the IEP less frequently than other tasks they perform. Para educators who work directly with students do not participate nor are they confident in their levels of knowledge concerning transitional plans, informal assessment, and communication with parents or caregivers (Holbrook, 2011).

While parents and schools pay for trainings, para-educators report seeking training outside schools, which indicates further the insufficient number of trainings that para-educators receive. Also para-educators receive monthly on-the-job training, which is not costly, and it should be more frequent as monthly is considered insufficient. Training paraprofessionals can be effective without being costly and intensive (Da Fonte & Capizzi, 2015). Investing 30-40 for targeted training in core instructional strategies affects positively para-educators instructional interactions with special needs, however; para-educators might not appreciate how valuable these practices are due to previous exposure, overall classroom experience or other practices provided by their supervising teacher (Da Fonte & Capizzi, 2015). Training para-educators can be efficient and cost-effective with positive effect on their performance, classroom teachers and children with special needs. It is also unfair to expect paraprofessionals to give high-quality instructional support to students without proper training (Da Fonte & Capizzi, 2015).

7. Discussion of Qualitative findings

Most paraprofessionals are hired, by parents or caregivers, on affordability basis and parents end up compromising the level education and experience necessary for the child's progress. The financial constraint that parents deal with in the UAE has been highlighted earlier by Gaad (2013).Families has difficulty providing the resources of inclusion such as finances among other resources such as time and commitment. Parents sometimes struggle with finances as they seek to support the needs of their children at home. Parents not only wished technical support in terms of assistive technologies but also have expressed concerns about financial demands on the average family when looking after a child or an adult with disability (Gaad, 2013).

The majority of para-educators hired by parents are not trained and do not have previous experience in a similar role. Basing the hiring criteria on affordability and not qualifications is considered a violation in terms of the qualifications and duties dictated by the regulated hiring process in other countries such as the United States or Canada. Parents hiring para-educators are not aware of the importance of having para-educators report achievements of the targets of the program instead of relaying only insignificant daily events at school. Regulated duties of para-educators include communication between parents and paras; however some regulations forbid this communication (e.g. Nova Scotia). Para-educators having to report for parents might feel overwhelmed or demotivated. Para educators working directly with students are not confident in their communication with parents or caregivers (Holbrook, 2011). This might explain why some parents report dissatisfaction with the performance of para-educators as they do not follow recommended instructions or attend regularly. Special education paraprofessionals consider integrity, leadership and professionalism as essential skills for special educators to be able to work effectively in a special classroom setting (Nakama, 2015 p.96). These qualities are not part of the hiring criteria and might be the underlying reason for the dissatisfaction of parents with paras' performance. Some para-educators might lack integrity, leadership and professionalism which explain their poor performance.

Having to follow up with para-educators can be frustrating for both parents and paras. Families also rearrange their schedules and priorities, because educating children with special needs is time consuming and requires commitment (Gaad, 2013). For example, families constantly need to interact and meet with teachers supervising and delivering inclusion programs to children with

special needs in order to assess the current level of the child and share areas of progress and other areas that needs to be worked on in collaboration with parents (Gaad, 2013).

Chapter Five: Conclusions & Recommendations

The findings of this research highlight the unregulated hiring of para-educators in schools. Para-educators have a significant role in special education and a direct impact on the child's performance. Para-educators are expected to execute recommendations and tasks given and assigned by the program's supervisor. The role of para-educators however is not very effective due to major barriers such policies and regulations, hiring criteria and lack of training. Initially, the government should have in its inclusion policy predetermined requirements set for para-educators. Yet, the UAE government does not specify, in the inclusion policy, paraprofessionals' role in special education, eligibility criteria or the rights and obligations of para-educators. The lack of policy and regulations transferred the responsibility and decision making to schools, centers for children with special needs and caregivers or parents of children with special needs. Findings show a serious problem with the hiring criteria and the eligibility of para-educators. Compared to international standards such as that of the United States, para-educators in the UAE lack the education, proper experience and training to partake their role as paraprofessionals.

Schools also hire para-educators according to the affordability basis rule set by parents, knowing that many para-educators lack experience or higher education. The implications of the random hiring criteria set by parents include nationality bias (preferably Arabs to communicate with parents), poor language promotion, lack of basic knowledge in conducting assessments, evaluation and data collection, inability to prepare individualized IEP plans and inadequacy in dealing with problem behavior. Further, the implications of the inadequate hiring criteria are amplified with the lack of proper training and supervision of paraprofessionals. The supervision of SEN (special educator) and classroom teacher at school is essential to bridge the gap between performance and lack of experience and education. Special educators at schools provide their supervision feedback orally and model instructions for para-educators. However, the frequency of feedback and supervision is low as reported by para-educators. Parents report that the performance of para-educators needs improvement as most para-educators report performance of children with special needs based on daily trivial incidents instead of program-based targets and goals the child should achieve. Lack of on-the-job training and other academic or skill trainings

are evident in this research and para-educators express their need for training in areas such as IEP planning, dealing with problem behavior, language promotion and data collection.

As a result, the research recommends the provision of regulations and policies that will necessary outline clearly the eligibility requirements and job role of para-educators in the UAE. In order to address the current inadequate hiring criteria set by parents, more training and supervision should be provided by schools and parents. Strengths and weaknesses of hired para-educators should be assessed by special educators, classroom teachers or private supervisor hired by parents to determine the proper provisions of training and supervision needed.

8. Study Limitations

The research identifies several limitations including absence of literature on para-educators in the UAE and limited sample size. Research on inclusion of children with special needs in the UAE is still developing and there is a great lack of literature on the role of para-educators in the inclusion process of children of special needs in the UAE. As a result, the research had to rely on international standards as a benchmark for eligibility criteria of para-educators. Due to the limited logistics and funding, the sample size of para-educators, private schools and parents is considered small and only represents the Dubai population. The research sample does not represent para-educators working in other emirates such as Abu Dhabi for example. Also the research does not represent para-educators working in public schools in Dubai and the UAE. Further, the study has limitations including size of sample of special educators (response rate) which doesn't provide a broader perspective for selecting and training paraprofessionals. Moreover, the study does not explore real outcome measures of learners (paraprofessionals) after training to discuss effectiveness of training. Also, data collection does not include observing paraprofessionals on-the-job to assess level of supervision and attitude of teachers towards paraprofessionals in the classroom.

9. Recommendations for Future Research

The current criteria of hiring para-educators in inclusive settings in Dubai are random and insufficient. Research needs to be developed in this area, as the government needs to come up with the regulations and policies that would limit the exclusive role of parents in hiring para-

educators. Special needs professionals need to be more involved in the hiring process and this cannot be established without a minimum of qualifications and eligibility criteria governed by policies and regulations. Further, future research can assess the impact of this random criteria and lack of proper training on learner's performance. Perhaps, this kind of research will assist the development of regulations and policies that would enhance the quality of performance of para-educators in inclusive settings.

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Appendix A – Online Questionnaire

Paraprofessionals Survey - Special Education

The purpose of this research project is to explore the qualifications and level of supervision/training of paraprofessionals in Dubai, UAE. This is a research project being conducted by Yolla Hassanieh for her dissertation at British University Dubai (BuiD). You are invited to participate in this research project because you currently work as a paraprofessional.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately 30 minutes. Your responses will be confidential and we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address. The survey questions will be about your qualifications, tasks required at your work, feedback frequency, training and supervision at work.

To help protect your confidentiality, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact yolla.hassanieh@gmail.com

* Required

1. **What is your gender?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Female

   ◯ Male

2. **What is your age?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ 18 to 24

   ◯ 25 to 34

   ◯ 35 to 44

   ◯ 45 to 54

3. **What is your income?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ 0 – 2,000 AED

   ◯ 3,000 – 5,000 AED

   ◯ 6,000 – 8,000 AED

   ◯ 9000 – 11,000 AED

5. **What is your highest level of education?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ High School Diploma
- ◯ Certification
- ◯ Bachelor's Degree
- ◯ Master's Degree or more
- ◯ Other: _____

6. **How long have you worked as a paraprofessional?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 0 - 2 years
- ◯ 3-5 years
- ◯ 6-8 years
- ◯ 8-10 years
- ◯ Other: _____

7. **What age group do you currently work with?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Preschool/Early learning
- ◯ Elementary
- ◯ High School
- ◯ Other: _____

8. **What is the primary language used in the current learning environment?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ English
- ◯ Arabic
- ◯ Other: _____

9. **Have you worked with children with special needs before?** *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

10. **What age group did you previously work with?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   - ⬭ 3 - 5
   - ⬭ 6 - 8
   - ⬭ 9 - 11
   - ⬭ 12 - 14
   - ⬭ 15 - 17
   - ⬭ Other: _____

11. **Select the case you've previously worked with :** *
   Check all that apply.

   - ☐ Autism
   - ☐ Learning disability
   - ☐ Physical disability
   - ☐ Speech and Language disorders
   - ☐ None
   - ☐ Other: _____

12. **Have you studied child psychology?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   - ⬭ Yes
   - ⬭ No

13. **Who is your direct supervisor?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   - ⬭ Classroom Teacher
   - ⬭ Special Educator
   - ⬭ School Coordinator
   - ⬭ Private program supervisor hired by parents
   - ⬭ None
   - ⬭ Other: _____

14. **Whom do you work mostly with?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   - ⬭ Special Education Teacher (SEN)
   - ⬭ Classroom Teacher (General Education)
   - ⬭ Speech therapist
   - ⬭ Behavioral Analyst
   - ⬭ Not Applicable
   - ⬭ Other: _____

15. **What learning setting/s do you work in?** *
    Check all that apply.

    ☐ General Education Classroom
    ☐ Special Education Classroom
    ☐ One-On-One
    ☐ All of the above
    ☐ Other: _____

16. **How often do you receive feedback about your work?** *
    Mark only one oval.

    ⬭ Daily
    ⬭ Weekly
    ⬭ Monthly
    ⬭ Not Applicable

17. **How does the supervisor give you the feedback ?** *
    Check all that apply.

    ☐ Oral
    ☐ Written
    ☐ Oral and written
    ☐ Competency Check
    ☐ Not Applicable

18. **How does the supervisor teach you new skills?** *
    Check all that apply.

    ☐ Orally
    ☐ Modelling
    ☐ Written Explanation
    ☐ All of the above
    ☐ Not Applicable
    ☐ Other: _____

19. **Who is responsible for assessing your competencies, if any?** *
    Check all that apply.

    ☐ Special Educator (SEN)
    ☐ Classroom Teacher
    ☐ Private Supervisor hired by caregiver
    ☐ School Coordinator
    ☐ Not Applicable
    ☐ Other: _____

20. **Who hired you for this role?** *
Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ School
- ⬭ Special Needs Center
- ⬭ Parents
- ⬭ Other: _____

21. **How often do you perform the below tasks?** *
Mark only one oval per row.

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	N/A
Conduct One-on-one training	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Prepare teaching materials	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Collect data about learner	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Revise the IEP	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

22. **Please select your level of knowledge in the below areas, I know how to:** *
Mark only one oval per row.

	Don't know	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
conduct an assessment	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
conduct an evaluation	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
collect data about performance	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
teach social interaction	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
promote language	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
modify learner's physical environment when needed	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
adjust daily lessons	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
prepare an Individualised Educational Plan	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
teach academics	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
deal with problem behaviours	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

23. **How many professional development training/s have you attended this year?** *
Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ 0
- ⬭ 1
- ⬭ 2
- ⬭ 3
- ⬭ 4
- ⬭ 5
- ⬭ Other: _____

24. **What kind of training have you taken ,if any?** *
   Check all that apply.

   ☐ Language Training
   ☐ Dealing with problem Behaviour
   ☐ Dealing with food disorder
   ☐ Promoting Social Interaction
   ☐ Teaching Academics
   ☐ Not Applicable
   ☐ Other: _____

25. **Who pays for your training?** *
   Check all that apply.

   ☐ School
   ☐ Learner's Parents
   ☐ Special needs Center
   ☐ Yourself
   ☐ Not Applicable
   ☐ Other: _____

26. **How often do you receive on-the-job training?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Daily
   ◯ Weekly
   ◯ Monthly
   ◯ Every other month
   ◯ Not Applicable
   ◯ Other: _____

27. **Do you seek training outside your school/work?** *
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

28. **What are the professional development training that would you like to attend? (please specify)** *

   _____

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