The Impact of Supporting Parents of Children with Disabilities in the UAE

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Abstract

This paper intends to measure the impact of a training programme on parents/caregivers of children with disabilities. This training programme was designed by academics at the British University in Dubai with support from the Al Jalila Foundation (AJF), a charitable organization located in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This research measures how this programme helps those parents and caregivers to cope with the challenging behaviours of their children with different types of disabilities, with a particular focus on people from Ras Al-Khaimah, an emirate of the seven emirates that form the UAE.

Mixed methods were used to measure such impact. To this end, 31 parents/caregivers were interviewed and completed pre and post questionnaires.

The results suggest that this programme had a positive impact on the quality of life of the participants. The findings also show that there is a pressing need and increasing demand for more training programmes to support parents/caregivers of children with disabilities to better cope with the challenging behaviours. A set of recommendations for further practice is offered to support decision makers in the area of empowerment of people with disabilities and their families/caregivers in the region.

Keywords: Parental Behavioural Support, People with disabilities (PWD), United Arab Emirates (UAE), Challenging behaviours

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1. Introduction

In 2013, the Al Jalila Foundation (AJF) approached the British University in Dubai (BUiD) to conduct a training programme for parents/caregivers who have children with disabilities. Parents and caregivers received the training based on both geographical location, within the UAE and type of disability of their child. In this paper, the researchers focused on data collected from 31 parents/caregivers of children with various types of disabilities from Ras Al Khaimah (RAK), one of the seven UAE emirates.

The UAE was one of the pioneers in the Middle East that "proceeded with the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2010" (Gaad, 2015, p. 58). After signing this optional protocol (The Cultural Division of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2011), the UAE issued many laws and policies, which regulated services provided to people with disabilities (PWD). However, there is yet an apparent need for supportive training courses for parents/caregivers of children with disabilities (Gaad & Thabet, 2016). Therefore, these training programmes were conducted to bridge the apparent lack of knowledge among some parents, and service providers themselves, in terms of the policies and legislations.

The area investigated by this paper is significant because research on promoting wellbeing and caregiving efficacy of caregivers of children with disabilities have long been lacking in the literature, particularly in the UAE context. Additionally, training of parents of students with disabilities is a very important issue that is heavily context specific; the

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effectiveness of practices for parents of individuals with disabilities is especially influenced by multiple sources of factors including policies, legislations, district supports, and research to practice translation, to name a few, which can vary widely from region to region and from country to country.

Since the disabilities of most of the children, whose parents joined this training, fall within three categories i.e. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and Down Syndrome (DS), these three categories are focused on in this research. To categorize the disabilities of the children, the researchers depended on the diagnostic reports brought by parents/guardians when applied to join the course. However, research proves that there is a degree of interconnectivity and similarity of features among the three categories and that it is sometimes difficult to set a borderline among them; for instance, Carr (1995) and Nadel (2003) consider DS a leading cause for the intellectual disability. Similarly, Mefford, Batshaw and Hoffman (2012) claim that many of those with ASD may have ID. People with DS may also show some features of Autism. Warner et.al (2014) estimated that 6-19% of children with DS also have ASD. In the following lines, the three disabilities are defined.

Lord and McGee (2002) define autism as the disorder that is accompanied by some typical behaviours. Children with autism have limited communication skills, which would create other behavioural problems, such as throwing tantrums and self-injury. It is estimated that for every 1000 children, there are six with autism (Elsabbagh et al., 2012). All these

developmental problems would put parents under pressure and psychological distress (John, Bower & McCullough 2016; Singh et al., 2006).

According to Bowman and Plourde (2012), people with intellectual disabilities have problems in both the intellectual functions and adaptive behaviour. These two main features hinder the normal daily activities, such as eating independently and interacting socially.

DS is a disability that is caused by genetic disorder, specifically in chromosome 21. People with DS are easily recognized because of the physical variations in their body, such as the small brain, almond shaped eyes, protuberant tongue and being sociable and friendly to everybody.

In this paper, the training program was researched in terms of: (a) expectations versus outcomes; (b) impact on quality of lives of PWD and their families/caregivers; and (c) future needs of parents/caregivers. Therefore, the main research questions of the study are as follows:

1) Did the training meet the participants' expectations?

2) What is the impact of the training on the quality of lives of PWD and their families/caregivers?

1.1 Background of Support Given to PWD in the UAE

The UAE is an Arab country and its main religion is Islam, whose principles are considered

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the main source of the legislation in the country. As Islam encourages equality among people, the UAE endeavours to promote equal educational opportunities among learners regardless of their disabilities. These endeavours were crowned by the issuance of the "Federal Law 29/2006 regarding the Rights of Individuals with Special Needs" (Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA), 2006). This law was the first law concerned with inclusion of people with special needs in regular classrooms. It stipulates that all leaners should have access to both public and private mainstream schools regardless the type of their special needs. The law was amended by law 14/2009 to substitute the term 'special needs' with the term 'disability' to ensure better services and facilitate access of such services for PWD and their families (Gaad 2011). The ultimate goal of these laws and regulations is to create the least restrictive learning environment for people with disability by including them in regular classrooms "while allowing separate class services as necessary to meet student needs" (McLeskey et. al, 2012, p.131).

1.1.1 Support and Special Education Program in the UAE

The UAE provides the following services for students with disabilities:

• Students are educated in regular classrooms with support from community organization.

• Students are educated with their peers without disabilities and receive support from a (special education needs) SEN teacher.

• Students are educated in a regular classroom, but they receive support outside the regular classroom inside the same school.

• Students are pulled out the regular classroom to receive support for no more than half of their courses.

• Students receive support for the majority of their subjects within the regular school setting.

• Students are not enrolled in regular school, but join some special education centres.

The content of this training program examined by this research has been specifically designed to update parents/caregivers on the services and policies that the country provides to people with disabilities.

1.2 The Components of the Training Program

A mixture of theoretical and practical sessions, delivered through video demonstrations, role-playing, hands-on activities, focus group and power point presentations, were designed and implemented over a period of 6 weeks (Bernard-Opitz & Kok, 1992; Gaad & Thabet, 2016; Stocks & Slater, 2016). Every week, parents, program managers and trainers would meet for 6 hours for a session on a specific topic. The topics are designed pedagogically to support the learning curve of parents. The six topics are:

• Introduction to, and analysis of, a child's behaviour

• Communication strategies

- Individualization of intervention (IEP)

- Effective intervention

- Inclusive Education and behaviour management

- Abuse related behaviour

This six-week training program's overarching goal is to provide parents and caregivers with the necessary skills "to support the development of children with disability at home and at school" (The National, 2014, p. 2 of 7). Nonetheless, parents/caregivers are generally trained on how to cope with the challenging behaviours shown by the child in any place.

The course was held in RAS Al Kaimah (RAK), from March 28, 2015 to May 23, 2015, every Saturday for six weeks. Parents and caregivers were expected to attend all sessions to successfully complete the course. Every participant was also requested to submit a portfolio that included six assignments on the different topics discussed. The program was open for parents/caregivers of children with disabilities.

Various delivery techniques have been presented with practical examples such as Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA). PBS, in particular, gained a lot of popularity recently as an effective prevention tool to reduce the challenging behaviours of PWD (Neitzel, 2010; Grey, Lydon, & Healy, 2016). Prevention is one of the main objectives of the training course, as it attempts to teach parents/caregivers how to

prevent the occurrence of challenging behaviours. Parents/caregivers, in the first session, are taught that for each behaviour, there is an antecedent (i.e. trigger) and consequence and their role is to identify this trigger and manage it.

In a similar program, Bearss et al. (2015) started the training by ensuring that parents know how to differentiate between form and function of behaviour using ABC model where A stands for antecedent (what happens before the problem behaviour occurs), the B which stands for the behaviour itself and the C which stands for consequences or the reactions of parents after the behaviour happens.

This first session on form and function of behaviour is followed by a second session in which parents are taught some intervention technique such as using positive reinforcement to support the repetition of desired behaviour and ignoring the unpleasant one so that it is extinguished. In the third session, parents are introduced to the proper communication strategies that they should adopt to be able to communicate well with their children. The session on communication is followed by a session on the inclusion rules and regulations in the UAE and where and how parents can claim these rights. Parents are not only enlightened on their rights but also on their responsibilities towards their children. In a session on the IEP and individualization of intervention, they are advised to take an active part in the designing of their children's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Finally, sexual harassment is defined and the trainer explains to parents the signs that indicate that sexual harassment occurred. The trainer ends the session on sexual harassment with some tips on

how to protect children with disability from being harassed.

These particular areas of focus were chosen after taking the advice of key authorities on the area of supporting parents of children with disability. Similar training programs from literature were also considered such as Bernard-Optiz and Kok (1992); Barnett et.al (2003); Wright and Williams (2007); Gaad and Thabet (2016); Gaad and Thabet (2017); Ruane, Carr and Moffat (2019).

2. Methodology

2.1 Data collection

Questionnaires and focus group interviews were used to answer the research questions. However, in a similar study conducted by Ruane, Carr and Moffat (2019), the researchers limited the collection of data to the use of semi- structured interview. Ruane, Carr and Moffat claimed that there is abundance of quantitative and this was the the reason behind using only qualitative method.

In the current research, there were three types of questionnaires; pre-course (distributed in the first session), mid-course (distributed before the fourth session) and post-course (distributed at the end of the last session). The questionnaires included seven statements; two statements for the first topic and one statement for each of the remaining five topics.

The seven statements were as follows:

Statement 1: I am able to control my child's behaviour

Statement 2: I am able to modify my child's behaviour

Statement 3: I am able to distinguish between the form and function of behaviour

Statement 4:   I am aware of the inclusion laws and regulations in the UAE

Statement 5:   I am able to solve behavioural problems associated with communication

Statement 6:   I am aware of my role in the IEP (Individual Education Plan)

Statement 7:   I am able to protect my child from sexual harassment

The course participants were requested to show their degree of agreement or disagreement to each statement on a five-point Likert Scale; strongly agree (=5), agree (=4), neutral (=3), disagree (=2) and strongly disagree (=1), and each statement was followed by a space for comments. All responses were transferred from the questionnaires to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The pre-and post-course questionnaires also included spaces for participants to write their expectations and outcomes respectively (Stocks & Slater, 2016).

The trainer, who was one of the researchers, led the focus group. All participants were asked about the lessons and skills that this training helped them to acquire. The trainer's assistant, another author of this paper, voice-recorded the focus group discussion.

The two main questions that study intended to answer are:

1) Did the training meet the participants' expectations?

2) What is the impact of the training on the quality of lives of PWD and their families/caregivers?

2.2 The Trainer

The trainer has considerable expertise in advocating and educating people with disability, which allows for in-depth reflective analysis and adds value and key driving force to the activities of this research.

2.3 The Participants

To recruit the required number of participants, the course description was sent to parents/caregivers of children with disability through the special needs centres/schools where their children were enrolled. Thirty-one participants/caregivers met all the requirements and admitted to the course. The selection criteria were based on the condition that the participants should have a child with disabilities or being involved in providing care to a child with disabilities. Moreover, although the course was open to all nationalities, priority was given to the UAE nationals who represented 71% of all participants. Sudanese participants represented 12%, and the remaining participants varied in nationalities between different Arab countries. Only one participant was a non- Arab national, but raised in the UAE (See table 1 below). Generally, the participants belonged to six nationalities as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Country of origin

Country	Number of parents	Percentage
UAE	24	71%
Sudan	4	12%
Egypt	2	6%
Syria	2	6%
Oman	1	3%
Pakistan	1	3%

As for the relation of course participants to the child with disability, half of the participants (50%, n = 17) were mothers, which is similar to a study done by Trute et.al (2010). The second largest group was from SEN teachers. This group was allowed to join the training to 1) allow them to mingle with parents and listen to their actual life stories and 2) keep them updated on the latest trends in special education field. The caregiver group included both SEN teachers and SEN volunteers. Siblings of PWD (sister and aunt) formed 15% of participants (Table 2).

Table 2: Participants' relation to the PWD

Relation to the child with disabilities	Number of participants	Percentage
Mother	17	50%
SEN teachers	10	29%
Sister	3	9%
Aunt	2	6%
SEN volunteer	2	6%

One of the challenges that that the trainer faced while delivering the sessions /workshops

was the varied levels of participants' education (Table 3). As can be seen in table 3, while two thirds were university graduates, the other participants were either high school holders or with lower level of education.

Table 3: Participants' educational level

Qualification	No of parents	%
Bachelor	20	59%
Post graduate	1	3%
High school	9	26%
Grade 9	2	6%
Not identified	2	6%

This diversity of participants' educational levels, nationalities and relation to the child with disability created a lot of challenges to the trainer who had to attend to the different inquiries raised by parents. For example, some parents who were with low educational level, asked questions which deemed irrelevant or travail by parents with more advanced level of education.

2.4 Types of disabilities

Parents/caregivers who joined this training have children of different types of intellectual disabilities (Table 4). Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was the most prevalent type of disability (82%), followed by Intellectual Disability and Down Syndrome.

Table 4: Types of disabilities

Disabilities	N	%
ASD	18	82%

Intellectual Disability	3	14%
Down Syndrome	1	5%

2.5 Analysis

All responses were transcribed and analysed manually and electronically using NVivo 11 software. The mixture of manual and electronic analysis of text-based data is thought to yield the best results (Welsh, 2002). NVivo helps to identify emerging patterns and most frequent themes. It also enables researchers to discover unexpected data, which is difficult with normal qualitative methods (Wong, 2008). One of the NVivo functions utilised in this study is 'Text Search Query'. This function helps to search for a word or a phrase and find all the contexts in which that word occurs. The result of this search can be presented in many forms; one of them is 'Word Tree' in which the main word is located in the heart of the tree and the branches represent the contexts in which the word occurs. The branches can also represent the recurring themes that go hand in hand with the main word (QSR International.com, 2017).

The manual analysis was done by the well-known method, which is conventional and summative content analysis. In the method, codes or themes are derived from text, counted, compared and finally interpreted intuitively (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings from Questionnaires

The researchers counted how many participants strongly agreed, agreed, were neutral, disagreed and strongly disagreed when they evaluated each statement and added the total in front of each statement. To improve the readability of the numbers, the close responses (i.e. strongly agree and agree; strongly disagree and disagree) were combined (Table 5).

Table 5: Close responses combined

SN	Strongly agree and agree						Neutral						Strongly disagree and disagree					
	Pre		Mid		Post		Pre		Mid		Post		Pre		Mid		Post	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
S1	17	55%	24	77%	30	97%	13	42%	5	16%	1	3%	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%
S2	20	65%	26	84%	30	97%	7	23%	2	6%	1	3%	3	10%	1	3%	0	0%
S3	21	68%	27	87%	30	97%	8	26%	1	3%	1	3%	1	3%	1	3%	0	0%
S4	14	45%	20	65%	29	94%	9	29%	7	23%	2	6%	8	26%	1	3%	0	0%
S5	18	58%	23	74%	30	97%	6	19%	6	19%	1	3%	7	23%	0	0%	0	0%
S6	23	74%	21	68%	31	100%	5	16%	3	10%	0	0%	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%
S7	21	68%	11	35%	30	97%	5	16%	3	10%	1	3%	4	13%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	143		152		210		53		27		7		26		3		0	

In the post-course questionnaire, the standard of deviation for all statements was smaller than the standard of deviation for all statements in the pre-course questionnaire (Table 6). This finding suggests that in the post- course questionnaire, the parents are in agreement with the statements. Additionally, in the post-questionnaire, the means for most of the statements was 5, which equals 'strongly agree' on Likert Scale.

Tables 6: SD of responses

	S1		S2		S3		S4		S5		S6		S7	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post

SD	0.7	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.5	1.0	0.6	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.4	1.0	0.5

Responses to the first statement and the fifth statement were notably harmonious as for both statements, well above half of the participants agreed and strongly agreed in the pre-course questionnaire phase, with the percentage increasing markedly by more than a third for both statements in the post-course questionnaire phase (Figure 2 and Figure 3). This suggests a relation between the parents' ability to control the behaviour of their children and their ability to have better communication with them.
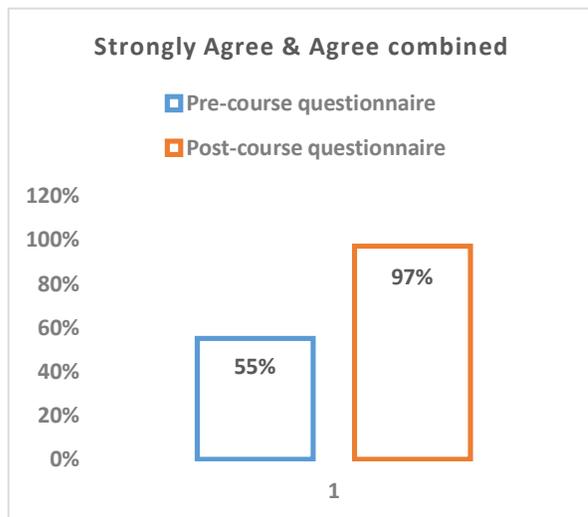

Figure1: Responses to statement 1
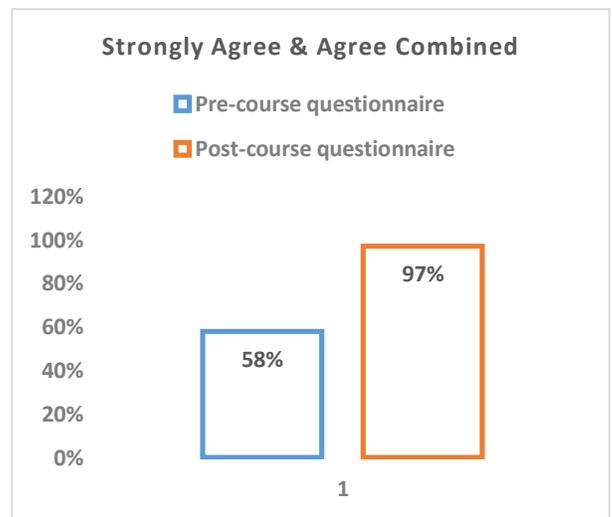
Figure 2: Responses to statement 5

A similar relation was found between the second and third statements, where for both, 97% of the participants agreed and strongly agreed, rising from 65% and 68% in the pre-course phase for the second statement and the third respectively. This result shows that the participants who are able to distinguish between the form and function have also managed to modify their children behaviour, a finding that aligns with the idea that the best method

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to manage a challenging behavior is to determine the function of that behaviour (Petty, Allen, & Oliver, 2009). During the training, participants were informed that any challenging behaviour could serve one of four functions: obtaining something tangible (Richman, Wacker & Winborn, 2001), escaping/avoiding something (Hagopian, Wilson, & Wilder, 2001), requesting attention (Radstaake et.al, 2012) and satisfying automatic/sensory action.

One of the main objectives of the training program is to get participants aware of the inclusive education policy in the UAE and how to get access to the different services available for PWD (Gaad, 2014). According to the result of the pre-course questionnaire, only 45% of the participants were aware of the inclusion laws. However, after attending the session on 'Inclusion', the percentage of people who became aware of the inclusion laws increased to 94.

Although including students in the mainstream schools is an objective for all students and their parents (Scott & Caron 2005), the current training program not only aspired to encourage parents to include their children in mainstream schools, but it also sought to get parents involved in the intervention programme carried out by the centrs or schools that their children are enrolled in. Parents' inclusion is considered one of the factors that makes any intervention program successful (Nguyen, 2013). To help parents to actively participate in their children's education, the training program made it clear to parents that they should

be invited to attend Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings (Dabkowski, 2004). The significance of the IEP topic was evident in the responses to statement number 6 as approximately three quarters of the participants indicated that they were aware of the IEP in the pre-course questionnaire. This percentage rose to 100% after the course.

As sexual abuse has a deleterious effect on children with disabilities and as those children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than those without disabilities (Son et al., 2014), this training course addressed this issue in the last session by educating participants on how to prevent sexual abuse and how to find out if it occurs. More than two thirds showed their agreement with statement 7 in the pre-course questionnaire, whereas all the participants agreed to the statement in the post-course questionnaire phase.

3.2 Focus Group Findings

Word Frequency Query in NVIVO software was applied to the focus group script; it was found that the most frequent word was child/children with 15 occurrences, which represents 7.43-weighted percentage. The word that came in the second place was 'include' with 12 occurrences and with 5.95 as weighted percentage. The word 'learned' and 'decide' also occurred with high frequency, which shows how armed with knowledge and decisive the participants became.

One of the methods used by the researchers to measure the impact of the training is requesting participants to write their expectations in the pre-course questionnaire and the outcomes (lessons learned and skills acquired) in the post-course questionnaire. The

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researchers compared the expectations and outcomes using NVIVO 'Text Search Query' and 'Word Frequency Query'. When the participants' expectations were analyzed, it was found that the word 'learning' was one of the most frequent words that recurred in different contexts (Figure 3). All these were some of the participants' expectations mentioned before the beginning of the course. This finding shows that participants were eager to learn and that they were highly motivated to change their attitudes (Nguyen, 2013).

Fig 3: Text Search Query (Participants' expectations)
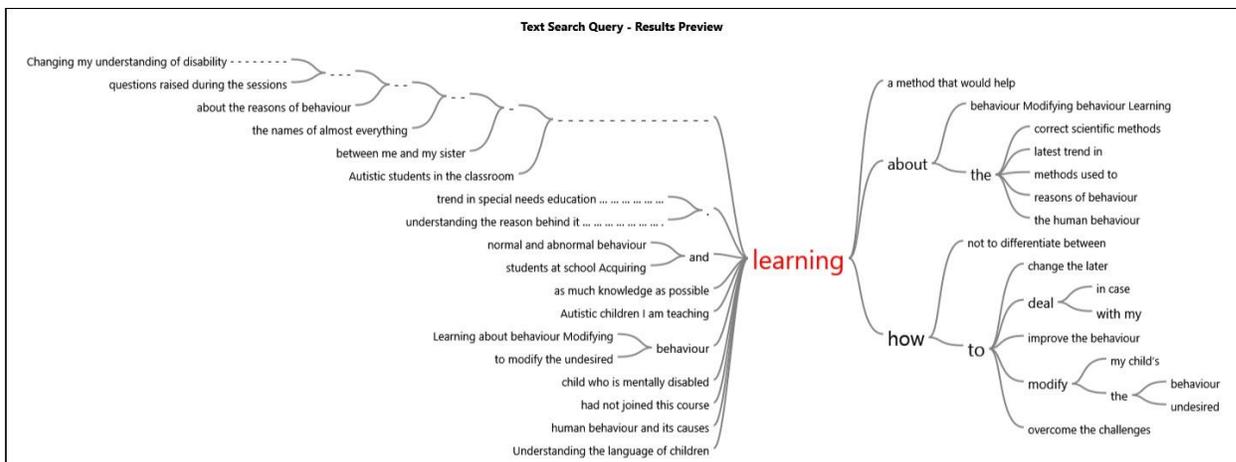
Following the training, the most frequent word was 'learned'. This result suggests that participants acquired a lot of skills and knowledge. As illustrated by figure 4 below, the branches around the headword 'learned' represent the contexts in which this word occurred. Most of these contexts explain the positive impact of the training on participants, for example, "I learned how to change undesirable…"; "I learned how measure and manage behavior"; and "I learned how to analyze behavior". The participants also mentioned that

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there was more tranquility in the house as they felt they became in control of many matters, which were out of control in the past (Gaad & Thabet, 2016).

Fig 4: Text Search Query (Participants' outcomes)
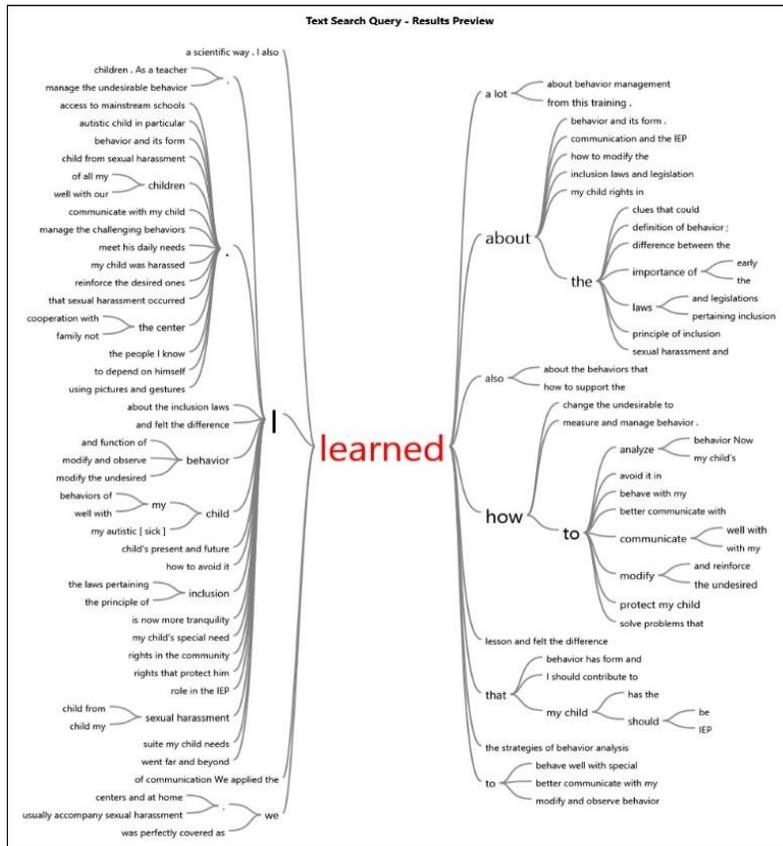
3.3 Comparing Themes in Expectations, Outcomes and Focus Group

In order to assess the value that this training added to its participants and to verify the results reached by the computer-aided method, the researchers analysed the expectations and outcomes manually using content analysis approach. They clustered all the expectations and outcomes that can go under a specific theme together. This cluster yielded 8 expectation themes and 11 outcome themes as shown in table 7 below.

Table 7: Expectations and outcomes

Expectations	Outcomes
Theme 1: Acquiring skills and knowledge	Theme 1: Acquiring skills and knowledge
Theme 2: Modifying behavior	Theme 2: Modifying behavior
Theme 3: Behavior management	Theme 3: Behavior management
Theme 4: Avoiding problems	Theme 4: Avoiding problems
Theme 5: Raising awareness	Theme 5: Raising awareness
Theme 6: Better communication	Theme 6: Better communication
Theme 7: SEN teachers	Theme 7: SEN teachers
Theme 8: Inclusion	Theme 8: Inclusion
	Theme 9: IEP
	Theme 10: Harassment

Apparently, two of the themes in the outcomes were not mentioned by participants when they gave their expectations. These two themes are the IEP and Sexual Harassment. Only one of the SEN teachers touched upon the harassment topic in the expectation section. Other than that, every expectation is met with an outcome. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the training reached its objectives. Each of the eleven themes is detailed below.

Theme 1: Acquiring Skills and Knowledge

The participants expected to be "Gaining as much knowledge as possible" and to "…gain more skills". This aspiration was attained as they confirmed in the outcomes that they are "Now ... armed with knowledge that can help me to analyse my child's behaviour. This acquired skill can help me meet his daily needs".

Theme 2: Modifying Behaviour

Similarly, one of the participants expected to learn how to modify behaviour and this goal was also achieved as one of them commented by saying, "I learned how to modify and observe behaviour".

Theme 3: Behaviour Management

The participants expected to learn how to manage the inappropriate acts by their children; for example, one of them wished to learn "…how to deal in case of throwing tantrum and being stubborn". Someone else hoped to "To become more patient in dealing with the behaviours that are considered socially challenging". They also wanted to learn about the triggers of disruptive behaviours. When the outcomes and the script of the focus group were analysed, it was found that participants' expectation were met. They also highly appreciated the session on behaviour management, using ABC model, in which they also learned how to differentiate between the form and function of behaviour. Here are examples of the lessons learned and their appreciation of skills acquired:

"I learned about the definition of behaviour; the difference between form and function of behaviour…" (outcome)

"Children with autism have many undesired behaviour that may disturb others and us but after attending the session on how manage the undesired behaviour, I learned how change the undesired to desired" (outcome)

"Honestly, I started from scratch, I did not have any idea about what behaviour is or how to deal with it…Now, when I look at my child, I can observe and say that this is a behaviour and I should deal with this behaviour in this way". (focus group)

"I learned that each behaviour has a form and function" (focus group)

Theme 4: Avoiding Problems

Participants confirmed that they could solve many of the problems they used to have when managing the challenging behaviour of their children; for example, parents confirmed that they "…. had many problems in the past, but after attending the training, I can control my child's behaviour (80%)"; "……. learned about the importance of early intervention, which would lead to reducing the behavioural problems and help the child to depend on himself" (outcome).

Theme 5: Raising Awareness

Educating parents and raising their awareness is one of the overarching goals of this course as many of them were clueless about the right way to handle their children's undesired acts. One parent averred, "I can now understand the function of my child's behaviour and how to modify the undesired behaviour" (outcome).

Theme 6: Better Communication

The participants were informed that communication is an essential part of children

development and that all behaviours are a type of communication, even challenging ones. They were also advised that sometimes children respond with challenging behaviours to their parents' message because they did not understand what their parents are saying. The participants' appreciation of the acquired skills can be touched in the following assertions:

"I learned how to communicate with my child in a way other than speech, for example, by using pictures and gestures"

"I learned how to better communicate with my child"

Theme 7: SEN Teachers

The SEN teachers who attended the course explained that they learned a lot and gained many skills. Here are some of their words:

"As a teacher, I learned a lot from this training" (outcome)

"I applied many of the acquired skills, for example how to motivate my students and I noticed that there was development" (outcome)

Theme 8: Inclusion

This topic was particularly important to parents as they were clueless about their rights. In the session on inclusion, the trainer informed parents about the different laws and about their children's rights to be included in mainstream schools. They were also able to understand the difference between covert and overt inclusion; one of the parents, numerating the learned lesson, said ""I learned that my child has the right to be included

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in mainstream schools and that I should not be satisfied with covert inclusion. A SEN teacher stated, "As a SEN teacher, I called parents and informed them about their rights to include their children and I will fully support them in this process". Another parent, thanking the UAE government, said, "Thanks to God, our government issued the laws that regulated inclusion of children with disability".

Theme 9: IEP

The session on the IEP was well received as it was the first time for parents to learn about the IEP. As soon as they finished the session, they went immediately to the school/centre where their children are enrolled to follow up and attend the meeting of the IEP.

Theme 10: Harassment

The facts introduced on sexual harassment took many parents by surprise. They raised and spoke openly about their concerns. They were also advised to meet the trainer in privacy, if they found their inquiry was too embarrassing to be discussed in public. One of the parents said, "I learned about the clues that could prove that sexual harassment occurred". Another one confirmed that she "… learned how to protect ..child from sexual harassment". Another participant said, "We learned also about the behaviours that usually accompany sexual harassment. We learned also how to support the school policy against harassment".

Theme 11: General Impression about the Course

It was also equally interesting to find that parents were aware of the importance of getting together with other parents of children with disabilities. One of them commented on this point in her course expectations by saying that she wished to be "Benefitting from the mothers' questions raised during the sessions". When the outcomes were examined, this theme was touched upon by one of the parents in the focus group. This participant highly appreciated being together with the SEN teacher by saying "The most interesting thing in this course is that both parents and their children's teachers are attending the same course". Another parent explained that she was reluctant to join the course as the venue was far away from her house. However, after attending the first part of the first session, she felt that she would have missed these informative and enlightening sessions.

4. Recommendations

The number of participants is not big enough to generalize the findings, so more training courses with bigger number of participants could be conducted. Additionally, conducting additional training sessions would help validate the findings of this current program. In other words, redoing the training with a different group of participants would validate the positive impact of the current training. Generalization is also limited because the participants are from different age groups and their education levels vary greatly. Moreover, a longitude study needs to be conducted to measure the impact of the training in the long run.

4. Conclusion

This paper discussed the impact of a training program on the quality of lives of parents/caregivers and their children with disabilities. It clearly showed that it is possible to enable parents to avoid behavioural problems before they occur. It also helped them to manage the undesirable behaviour if already evident. The training achieved most of its objectives as evidenced from the responses and level of agreement given by parents before and after the training. The appreciation was not only confined to the questionnaire responses, but also noticed to be in line with previous studies of courses undertaken (Gaad & Thabet, 2016). The findings of this research are also in line with other studies that measured the impact of training courses on parents of children with disabilities (Bernard-Opitz & Kok, 1992; White & Hastings, 2004). Such a training course is considered a kind of social support extended by community to the families/caregivers to help them manage the challenging behaviour of their children with disabilities (Woodgate, Ateah, & Secco, 2008). The training programme itself was also evaluated by the training sponsor. During this assessment, the participants provided some suggestions which would help improve the future delivery of the course. These suggestions would also help in increasing the number of participants joining the course in the future. This research raises some recommendations to policy makers and other practitioners to offer more training courses to parents of children with disability. It is also hoped that the researchers paved the way for other fellow researchers to tap into the area of parental support in order to better assist people with

disabilities in the region.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards provided by the British University in Dubai. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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