

Student Voice for enhancing the Quality of Inclusive Education

تحسين جودة التعليم الشامل من خلال صوت الطالب

By

Lara Numan Jubran

Student ID: 120043

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Master
of Education in Special and Inclusive Education**

Faculty of Education

Dissertation Supervisor

Prof. Eman Gaad

April 2015

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Father and mother for always believing in me, and encouraging me to follow my dreams. I dedicate it to my husband for always being there for me, your love, encouragement, patience and support have “picked me up” through the difficult times. I dedicate it to my sister, my source of inspiration, for making me believe that the light is at the end of the tunnel. I dedicate to the joy of my life my children Zeena, Mohammad and Larina, your “Good luck” wishes, hugs and kisses were my source of strength. And finally, I dedicate to the four students who participated in this study, for inviting me into their worlds and enabling me to see what I was not able to see from the other side.

Lara Jubran

Acknowledgments

To begin with, I would like to thank Dr. Eman Gaad, Dr. Suffian Forawi, Dr. Naz Awan, and Dr. Clifton Chadwick, their knowledge and experience have enlightened me and guided me in my academic pursuit. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my program supervisor Prof. Eman Gaad for her guidance and inspiration throughout my journey at the British University in Dubai.

I also take this opportunity to thank my family for their love and encouragement.

Finally, and above all, I owe much gratitude to Samer, my soulmate, for believing in me and supporting me throughout this process, I could not have done it without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Title	Page
	Dissertation Release Form	ii
	Dedication	iii
	Acknowledgments	iv
	Table of Contents	v-vi
	A List of Abbreviations Used	Vii
	A list of Tables	Vii
	A list of Appendices	Vii
	Abstract in English Language	Viii
	Abstract in Arabic Language	ix
1.	Chapter One: Introduction	1-2
1.1	Inclusive Education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)	3-4
1.2	Rational and Context of the Study	4-5
1.3	Research Questions	5
1.4	Limitations of the Study	5-6
2.	Chapter Two: Literature Review	7
2.1	Student Voice	7
2.2	Student Voice a Relatively New Notion in Inclusive Education	8
2.3	Student Voice as a Child’s Right	8-10
2.3.1	Student Voice as a Child’s Right in the UAE	10-12
2.4	Reliability of the Voices of Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)	13
2.5	The Positive outcomes of Student voice in Inclusive Education	13
2.5.1	The Positive outcomes of Student voice for Students with SEN	13-14
2.5.2	Student Voice for enhancing the Quality of Inclusive Education Policies and Programs	14-15
2.5.3	The Positive outcomes of Student voice for Teachers	15-16
2.6	Applying Student Voice in Inclusive Education	16
2.6.1	Understand and value Student Voice	16
2.6.2	Believe in the Abilities of Students with SEN	17
2.6.3	Have the appropriate Skills, efforts and Resources in Place	17
2.6.4	Avoid Tokenism	18
3.	Chapter Three: Methodology	19
3.1	Research Method	19
3.2	Site Selection	20
3.3	Organizational Access	20
3.4	Research Sample Selection	20-21
3.5	Informants Access	21-23
3.6	Research Tools	23
3.6.1	Documents	24
3.6.2	Observations	24

3.6.3	Interviews	24-28
3.7	Data Analysis	28
3.8	Quality Indicators of the Research	29
3.9	Ethical Considerations	29
4.	Chapter Four: Findings	30
4.1	Theme 1: Perceptions about School	30
4.1.1	Activities and Learning	30-31
4.1.2	Learning Support	32-33
4.1.3	Participation in School Life	33-36
4.1.4	Friendships	36-38
4.2	Theme Two: Awareness of Needs	38-39
4.3	Theme Three: insignificant Student Voice	39-41
5.	Chapter Five: Discussion	42-47
6.	Chapter Six: Conclusion, Recommendations, and Recommendations for Future Research	48
6.1	Conclusion	48
6.2	Recommendations	49
6.3	Recommendations for future Research	50
	References	51-58
	Appendices	59-71

A LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

SEN	Special Educational Needs
SN	Special Needs
LD	Learning Disability
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UAE	The United Arab Emirates
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
IEP	Individualized Educational Plan
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
ADEC	Abu Dhabi Education Council
HoI	Head of Inclusion
TA	Teaching Assistant
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder

A LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Students’ profile
Table 2	Students’ Interviews

A LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	Title	page
Appendix 1	Letter seeking Permission from the School	59
Appendix 2	Consent Letter Form	60-63
Appendix 3	Assent Letter Form	64-65
Appendix 4	Students’ IEPs	66-75
Appendix 5	Observations	76-79
Appendix 6	Students’ Interviews transcripts	80-127

ABSTRACT

Student Voice for enhancing the Quality of Inclusive Education

By

Lara Jubran

Supervisor

Prof. Eman Gaad

Student voice in inclusive education has been identified as an important component that enhances the quality of education for students with special educational needs (SEN). Moreover, Research in Academia has also highlighted the benefits that school systems and educators can gain from listening to the views of students with SEN and giving those views due weight. This study aims to see inclusive education through the voices of those who experience it, in this study student voice is used as a tool to find the perceptions of four students with SEN about their academic and social experiences at the school, about their disabilities, and it also investigates to what extent the students participate in making decisions about matters that affect them at the school. The study follows a phenomenological research method through which the researcher tries to get an insider's view by conducting semi structured interviews.

The data analysis revealed that the students have invaluable information to share about their educational and social experiences at the school; however, it has also been found that the absence of their voices has negatively affected their inclusion.

ملخص

يعد صوت الطالب- في التعليم الشامل- مكونا ذا أهمية ،يحسن من جودة التعليم الشامل للطلبة ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة. وفوق هذا ،فان البحث في مجال التعليم أبرز الفوائد التي يمكن أن تجنيها النظم المدرسية ويجنيها التربويون ،من الانصات لوجهات نظر الطلاب ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة ،ومن اعطاء وجهات النظر تلك ما تستحق من وزن واهتمام.

استنادا الى ما تقدم ،جاءت هذه الدراسة هادفة الى الوقوف على ما يمكن تحقيقه من وراء الانصات الى وجهات نظر هذه الشريحة من الطلاب، ولذلك فهي تتبع منهجا مستندا الى علم الظواهر، يحاول الباحث بوساطته الحصول على وجهة نظر من يضطلع بهذا الشأن التعليمي، وذلك بإجراء مقابلات شبه منظمة ،أملا في استكشاف ما يتصل بالتجارب الأكاديمية والاجتماعية من تصورات خاصة بأربعة من الطلاب ذوي الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة، في مدرسة شاملة من مدارس دبي الخاصة في دولة الامارات العربية المتحدة.

وتهدف هذه الدراسة كذلك الى أن نستكشف مدى معرفة هؤلاء الطلاب باحتياجاتهم، والى أن نحاول الوقوف على مدى اسهامهم في صناعة القرارات المؤثرة في حياتهم المدرسية.

هذا وقد كشف تحليل البيانات ان لدى الطلاب معرفة ذات اثر تمكنهم من ان يكون لهم حضور في الامور ذات الصلة بتجاربهم التعليمية والاجتماعية.

ومهما يكن، فقد كشف التحليل كذلك أن لغياب اصوات الطلاب اثرا غير محمود.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

“We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them” (UNICEF 2002).

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is an international movement that is based on the belief that education is a human right. UNESCO (n.d) highlights that education is an essential human right that is necessary for practicing all other human rights, education not only empowers individuals and promotes their sense of freedom, it also develops societies.

Inclusive education calls for the right to education to all children in general education schools. UNESCO (2014, p.14) explains that:

Inclusive education is about putting the right to education into action by including all learners, respecting their diverse needs, abilities and characteristics and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the learning environment.

Creating inclusive schools is a mission that is faced by a number of barriers. Internationally, laws, legislations, plans and policies are created in order to promote and enhance inclusive education. Developing, improving, and implementing inclusive education is an ongoing work of educators, school staff and experts, that aim to identify and find ways to overcome the technical, social, economic and attitudinal barriers that impede schools from implementing meaningful inclusion (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2008). Where there are successful stories, there is also evidence that the realization of inclusive education is still stumbling in many parts of the world. Batten (2005) and Waddington & Reed (2006) agree that inclusion is still perceived as placing a student with special educational needs (SEN) in a general education school, without taking into consideration the outcomes of that placement.

Inclusive education aims to offer students positive educational and social experiences where they learn to become valuable active participants in school life as well as in the society. Inclusive schools are schools where all students are welcomed and accepted as active and valuable members of their community. Presence, acceptance, participation and achievement are four important factors in inclusive education. (Farrell 2004 cited in Tetler & Baltzer 2011).

There is extensive literature on how to create inclusive policies, how to overcome the different obstacles, how to help teachers, parents and communities embrace the idea of inclusive education. However, what is generally not taken into consideration is the importance of student voice in inclusive education. It has been argued that "... although many policies and legislations for inclusion have been put in place during the past 30 years, what do we really know about how students feel about inclusion?" (Gordon 2010, P.6).

Neglecting students' perspectives about their education is believed to be another obstacle that hinders the correct implementation of inclusive education. In order to produce meaningful inclusion it is fundamental to understand how the students themselves perceive their inclusion. Student voice is a valuable way to assess the success or the failure of including students in any setting (Davidson 2010). Employing student voice in inclusive education is very important because it means allowing children with SEN to interpret the inclusive education experience to the other stakeholders, and research on inclusive education started recently to recognize the benefits of listening to the voices of the students (Rose 2005).

1.1 Inclusive education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

In the UAE, the evolution of inclusive education has started in 1979, and is developing ever since. Special education services and programs have developed since 1979 to include comprehensive special education categories including students in upper grades, and to develop inclusive education (MoE n.d).

By embracing the vision of inclusive education, students with SEN in the UAE were granted the right to join general education schools. MOE (n.d, p.14) states that inclusive education in the UAE means that:

[a]ll students have the right to be educated to the extent possible with their age-appropriate peers who do not necessarily have disabilities in the general education setting of their neighbourhood school with support provided.

The formation of the Federal Law 29/2006 in respect of the rights of people with special needs in the UAE, has led to a movement towards implementing inclusive education in the country. The law has set an important rule for public and private schools that states that schools cannot refuse the admission of any child with learning difficulties or with a special need (Reynolds n.d).

The commitment to promote inclusive education in the UAE has been reinforced by ratifying the United Nations (UN) convention on rights of people with disabilities in 2008. Countries who sign the convention have to take steps to improve their laws and by-laws in order to put an end to all types of discrimination against disabled people, provide them with equal opportunities in education, health and rehabilitation services, as well as improving their living conditions (WAM, Emirates news agency 2008).

Inclusive education is a relatively a new concept in the UAE, and there are a number of obstacles that need to be addressed in order to facilitate the creation of inclusive schools in the country. The creation of inclusive education laws, legislations and guidelines has undoubtedly helped in setting the base for creating inclusive schools in the UAE. However, Laws, legislation and guidelines are not the only requirements that schools need to become inclusive, many schools in the UAE are still struggling to find the right path to inclusive education. In a study that took the

teachers' perspectives about the proposed inclusive education policy in the UAE, Gaad & Thabet (2009, p. 159) found that "The limited knowledge, resources, training, and facilities resulted in high percentage of disagreement by the teachers about the proposed inclusion policy".

1.2 Rational and Context of this Study

A fundamental step that is believed to aid schools in implementing inclusive education is generally neglected, and that is the use of student voice in creating and implementing inclusive policies and plans. UNICEF (2007, p. 21) highlights the importance of valuing the voices of students with disabilities, and stresses on the importance of giving their views due weight:

Children with disabilities, like all other children, have a right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and to have these views given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Student voice is a main component of inclusive education that leads to better inclusion. It has been clarified that "children's voices should not only be used as a strategy for developing more inclusive forms of education, but as a manifestation of being inclusive" (Messiou 2006, p. 313). Listening to the perceptions of students with SEN and taking their views into consideration when creating plans and policies that affect them has great advantages. The input of students who receive inclusive education is very important, since they are the ones who receive that education; they are the ones who are able to judge the efficacy of their inclusion (Gordon 2010).

However, a major problem in making use of the views of students in inclusive education is that children with SEN are not seen capable of making decisions. It has been argued that "All too often, however, there is a reluctance to recognize the competence of children with disabilities to contribute effectively to decision making processes" (UNICEF 2007, P. 21).

There is extensive literature about the importance of student voice in inclusive education, however, in the UAE, as well as in the Arab World the notion of inclusive education is still flourishing, and the phenomenon of student voice in inclusive education is still unexplored.

This study employed student voice to explore the inclusive education experience of four students with SEN in an inclusive school in Dubai.

As the aim of the study was to get an insiders' view, the descriptive phenomenological method was chosen as the research methodology. It has been explained that "The phenomenological research model is qualitative in that it explores personal experiences as perceived by the participants" (Omizo & Omizo 1990, p.30).

1.3 Research questions

In order to investigate the importance of student voice in inclusive education, this study asks the following questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of students with SEN about their educational and social experiences at their inclusive school?
- 2) To what extent are the students aware of their own educational needs?
- 3) To what extent is student voice significant at the school?

1.4 Limitations of the study

A major limitation of this study was the lack of relevant literature for the Arab world and the UAE context.

Access to the study participants, was also a limitation, as getting the consent forms back from parents took longer than anticipated, and the head of inclusion had to remind parents several times to confirm or reject the participation of their children in this study. Furthermore, the number of participants was reduced from six to four after two parents withdrew their permission to interview their children, and due to time constraints, and because the school was breaking for the winter holidays it was not possible to identify and contact other parents.

The small number of participants has also its implication on the representativeness of the research findings, since it is based on the data gathered from four students only, which implies that the findings are limited to their perceptions.

Despite the limitations that were faced in conducting this study, it is hoped that the findings would highlight the importance of student voice in inclusive education, and that it encourages others to explore this unexplored area in the UAE.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This section of the study explores literature in the area of student voice. It aims to highlight the importance of listening to the voices of students with SEN.

2.1 Student voice

In general, the aim of student voice is to understand how students perceive their educational and social experiences at the school. Student voice is about getting the students views about teaching, learning and any other school matters (Rudduck &Flutter, 2004). Listening to the voices of students is perceived to aid the implementation of inclusive practices. Messiou (2006) points out that students can be used to provide useful information on how to ameliorate inclusive education.

Successful schools aim to help all students reach their full potentials through different educational methods. In recognizing that we are all different, it is paramount that teachers understand that teaching should be adapted to match the abilities of their students. However, it is easier said than done because not all teachers have the required skills that enable them to decode the unique strengths and needs of each student. In order to be able to create teaching plans and chose appropriate teaching methods and resources, it is indispensable that teachers get the appropriate training, have the experience and the will to cater for all students. Additionally, student voice is now gaining more attention in educational research as a way to facilitate and improve the teaching and learning process.

For student voice to take place at schools it is imperative that teachers understand and believe in the benefits of listening, responding and learning from their students. It has been pointed out that student voice “calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students” (Cook-Sather 2006, p. 363).

2.2 Student voice a relatively new notion in inclusive education

The attentiveness to the importance of listening to student voice in inclusive education is relatively new. What research about student voice has found is that in many educational systems, teaching is about what teachers think, believe and feel, and that the children play a passive role in their education journey. Qvortrup et al. (1994) clarify that in the past it was assumed that children were not capable of giving correct information, or making judgments about matters that affect them.

Seeking to understand how students with SEN perceive their inclusion is to an extent a new idea. Beveridge (2004), and Quicke (2003) state that in the recent years, considerable body of research in special education (SE) started to highlight the importance of listening to the views of children with SEN. Research in SE started to highlight the great value of the information gathered from listening to students' views, and explain how these views can assist educators in creating inclusive schools where children with SEN can be truly included. Roaf 2002 (cited in Messiou 2006) points out that researching students' views on inclusive education can greatly affect the students' educational experiences, and it can also help teachers to better understand their students.

2.3 Student voice as a child's right

Historically, researchers in academia have used children as objects for research, children were not perceived as active participants that have the ability to contribute to research. (Chakrabortya et al. 2012). Legislations and research concerning children with SEN have undoubtedly been influenced by a number of international child's right agreements. The first international agreement that was constructed to promote and protect children's rights worldwide was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) in 1989.

The UNCRC had valuable impact on researchers in academia; it was an eye opener that made researchers think that it is about time to conduct research with children and not only about children. Chakrabortya et al. (2012, p. 544) argue that "Both Articles 12 and 13 challenge

researchers to consider when and how to involve children in research that affects or has the potential to affect them”. Article 12 of the convention implies that state parties who have ratified the convention need to make sure that children who are able to form views about matters that affect them, have the right to freely express those views, and that depending on the child’s age and maturity, those views have to be given due weight (United Nations Human Rights 1989). Here it is noteworthy to mention that article 12 clearly states that age alone does not indicate if a child is capable of forming views about matters that affect him/her. UN (2009, p.8) confirms that research has shown that information, experience, environment, social and cultural expectations, and levels of support all contribute to the development of a child’s capacities to form a view. Moreover, article 13 of the UNCRC grants children the freedom of expression, and explains that children should be allowed to use any type of media (writing, speaking, print, or using art) in order to communicate, receive or seek information (United Nations Human Rights 1989).

Highlighting the importance of involving children in taking decisions about matters that affect them is also evident in the recommendation of the SEN toolkit. This guiding document in inclusive education gives prominence to student voice in inclusive education. The Department for Education and Skills (2001, p.54) asserts that “Children should be enabled and encouraged to participate in all decision-making processes that occur in education”.

Another international document that accentuates the importance of seeking student voice in inclusive education is the Salamanca statement. Salamanca (1994, p. 6) states that “Every person with a disability has a right to express their wishes with regard to their education, as far as this can be ascertained”.

Empowering student voice and enabling children to have a say about decisions that affect them led to important changes in the revised SEN code of practice. The involvement of children in decision making about their education has been given greater importance in the revised version of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Bearne 2002). Lewis (2002, p. 110) points out that “The previous version of this Code, only seven years earlier, had no specific section on pupil participation. This difference reflects an important shift in the intervening period”. Here again the importance of providing children with the necessary help in order to form their views was also highlighted. Department for education & Department of Health (2015) affirm that the local authorities are responsible to provide children with SEN with the necessary support, advice

and information in order to enable them to have a say in discussions and decisions about the support they need. Furthermore, the Code drew attention to the misconception that through the views of parents, the needs of children can be understood and plans can be created. The Department for education & the Department of Health (2015) confirm that parents' views cannot be used as a proxy for children's views, explaining that the children's perspectives are different from those of their parents.

Valuing People, a document that was published in England in 2001, with a view to ameliorate the life of people with Learning Disabilities (LD), also accentuates the importance of seeking the views of people with LD. This document points out that effective advocacy can be life transforming for people with LD, advocacy enables people with LD and other people with less profound disabilities or more severe disabilities to play an active role in their lives (Department of Health 2001).

Ascertaining the views of children and its positive impact on the quality of services provided to them has also been part of the "Every Child Matters" paper. This paper was produced after seeking the views of the academics, practitioners, policy makers as well as children, and it aims to help teachers meet the needs of all children in their classes. It has been argued that "Real service improvement is only attainable through involving children and young people and listening to their views" (Her Majesty Government 2003, p. 10).

2.3.1 Student voice as a child's right in the UAE

In the UAE the creation of the Federal Law 29 of 2006 in Respect of the Rights of People with Special Needs has also been influenced by the UNCRC. This law covers different aspects of the lives of people with disabilities in the country. It has been stated that "This law aims to guarantee the rights of the person with special needs and to provide all the services within the bounds of his abilities and capacities" (Ministry of Social Affairs 2006). The right for people with disabilities to have a voice is safeguarded in article 7 of this law. Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) (2006) explains that like any member of the society, People with special needs have the

right to ask for information, receive information, as well as express their opinions, and they can use their preferred method of communication in order to practice this right.

Articles 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the Federal Law 29 of 2006 in Respect of the Rights of People with Special Needs in the UAE, set the foundation for inclusive education in the country. MoSA (2006) confirms that the law guarantees equal educational chances for people with disabilities in all educational institutions. This section of the law clearly states the importance of collaboration between the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education with the different stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education. However, and despite it being influenced by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons of disabilities, the law misses the importance of taking students perceptions into account when creating and implementing inclusive education. Messiou (2002) explains that listening to children in inclusive education is considered to be an important component in the process and progress of inclusive education.

The Child's Rights Law in the UAE has also been influenced by the UNCRC, and the freedom of expression is one among other basic rights that are granted by this law. Salama (2013) states that The Child's Rights law grants children the right to freely express their views alongside other rights such as, the right to life, the right to name, the right to security, the right to healthcare, the right to education, the right to protection, the right to protection from sexual exploitation, the right to protection from economic exploitation, and the right to freedom from any type of cruel, degrading or unhuman treatment.

Despite the fact that laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities in the UAE mention their right to freely express their views, the absence of student voice in inclusive education is perceptible in a number of documents that were issued to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education in the country. For example, eliciting student voice in inclusive education was not among the rules that were provided in the guide that was issued by the MoE in order to provide the different stakeholders with the general rules for the provision of inclusive education in public and private schools. Eliciting student's voice was only mentioned once in the guide. Students with SN should be encouraged to select where to sit in the classroom, and they should also be encouraged to express how they feel about their seating arrangement (MOE n.d). Nevertheless, the guide neglected the right for students to have a say about their education, and only considers collaboration with the parents of students to be important. MoE (n.d) states that

the ministry aims to collaborate with the parents throughout the educational process, starting with assessment to creating individualized educational plans (IEPs) up to the monitoring progress phase.

Here it is important to draw attention to the fact that such an important document that aims to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education, and to help schools overcome the different barriers that stand in the way of the creation, and the implementation of inclusive practices, has missed out the importance of involving the most important stakeholder in its improvement plans. UNICEF (2007, p. 40) argues that “In advancing inclusion and overcoming obstacles, persons with disabilities themselves are the experts – nobody understands the impact of exclusion better than those who experience it”.

The importance of student voice in inclusive education is also absent in the Dubai schools inspection handbook, while the handbook values the importance of cooperation with parents, the input of the students themselves is neglected. KHDA (2014, p.13) counts that “ The involvement of parents is a key factor in the success of the provision for students with special educational needs. Inspectors will ascertain the impact of this co-operation”. Comparably, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) does not mention the role of students in creating and implementing inclusive education plans, however, it heightens the importance of parents’ participation. ADEC (n.d) affirms that the parents of children with SN play an important role in planning, implementing, and monitoring the child’s IEP.

Student voice in special education is gaining more attention around the world. However, from the absence of literature about the importance of student voice in the creation and the implementation of inclusive education in the UAE, and from the little evidence found in the different legislations and documents mentioned above, it can be argued that student voice is still an unexploited phenomenon in the UAE.

2.4 Reliability of the voices of students with special educational needs

Only those who live an experience can truly explain it, therefore in the inclusive education reform the views of the different stakeholders should be taken into consideration, and that includes the views of the students themselves. Students of all abilities are able to share their views about matters that affect them. Maxwell (2006, p. 20) asserts that “Children are viewed as being capable of reliably reporting their experiences and their views, and thereby being able to contribute to their own assessment and plans about their future”. Even those with disabilities are able to express their views, and have a say about their lives, if they were provided with the appropriate methods. Department of Health (2001) affirms that making choices is everyone’s right and that does not exclude those with severe disabilities, because with the appropriate help and support even people with severe disabilities can take decisions about their lives.

2.5 The positive outcomes of student voice in Inclusive Education

Inclusive schooling requires detailed understanding of all the barriers that might hinder the realization of its goals. Creating implementable policies and plans requires the collaboration of all school staff, policy makers, parents, and students. Listening to the perceptions of students with SEN can help schools better understand the strengths and needs of the students which in return leads to the creation of implementable policies and plans. It has been argued that “A prerequisite for successful inclusion is the maintenance of a dialogue between those involved and those who experience this process” (Hodkinson 2010, p. 63).

2.5.1 The positive outcomes of student voice for students with SEN

Research on student voice in inclusive education draws attention to the many positive outcomes of gaining the perceptions of students with SEN on the different aspects of their lives. students’ participation in decision making is beneficial in many ways, and especially for children with SEN because it helps in increasing their motivation, and their independence, and it also helps them to better understand personal control, develops their meta learning skills, makes them aware of their individual strengths and needs as well as their preferred learning styles, and it also makes them more responsible for their progress (Roller 1998). Additionally, Miller and Fritz

(2002) found that listening to student voice helps students develop a commitment to learning, increases their intrinsic motivation, strengthens their self - esteem and self -confidence and it also increases their enjoyment of school life.

Children with SEN who are enabled to have a say about their education, and about what needs to be done in order to enhance their school experiences are able to get the best of their learning experiences and are able to achieve their targets. All students, including those with disabilities have the ability to evaluate the curriculum and give meaningful suggestions that impact their learning outcomes (Byrnes & Rickards 2011). Furthermore, giving students the chance to share their views about matters that affect them allows them to be more engaged in their education, and can greatly affect their behavior at school. Shared decision has been found to positively affect the students' behaviour at the school (Fielding 2001).

Student voice in inclusive education not only affects the students' lives inside the school walls, but has its positive impacts on their social life as well. By listening to students and valuing their input and participation in school life, students learn important social skills that they can transfer and use outside the school. Listening to the views of students with disabilities develops their sense of citizenship, and provides them with the necessary skills to live within democratic societies (Flutter & Rudduck 2004).

2.5.2 Student voice for enhancing the quality of inclusive policies and programs:

Inclusive schools are schools that welcome all students, and that are able to cater for the wide variety of needs. In order to include children with SEN into general education schools, educators and policy makers work on designing programs that from their point of view fit the students' needs. However, the reality is that policies and plans do not always lead to satisfactory outcomes, and school systems struggle to find the correct way out. Research on student voice values the importance of information gained from students with SEN, and explains that students' perspectives help educators and policy makers to create systems that truly cater for the different needs. No matter how well we think we understand how children feel, what they think, what they need and value in life, and how they react to events and circumstances, the information gained from an in-depth analysis reveals surprising information (Davis 1998).

Inclusive schools can greatly benefit from what children with SEN have to say about their learning preferences and about how they feel about programs that are supposed to be tailored to fit their strengths and needs. Research on student voice in inclusive education explains that inclusive policies that work are those where the students' perceptions are taken into consideration, therefore schools should benefit from what SEN students have to say about their school experiences, and use their views to overcome barriers and create useful, implementable policies. Byrnes & Rickards (2011) argue that listening to student voice in inclusive education helps schools identify where programs and policies are failing, and helps them to pave the way for improved educational systems. For example, in a study about students with Autism, Saggars, Hwang and Mercer (2011) clarify that listening to the voices of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) not only helped with identifying the difficulties they face in inclusive schools, but also helped in finding possible solutions.

2.5.3 The positive outcomes of student voice for teachers:

In inclusive education student voice can be considered as a helping hand for teachers. Rose & Shevlin (2005) argue that in general students have the ability to express their needs more accurately than people who surround them, and that by listening to their views, teachers get the opportunity to learn how to teach more effectively in inclusive classrooms. Teachers, who listen to the views of their students, get the chance to evaluate their teaching methods and improve them. A systematic benefit of listening to student voice is that it enables teachers to enhance their teaching methods and professional qualities. (Daniel, Kalkman, and McCombs 2001). This means that when teachers listen to the views of their students and give them due weight, they are getting a clearer image about their students' strengths and needs, and that they can use their perspectives to produce educational plans that better fit their needs. It has been argued that "staff who promoted pupil involvement improved their understanding of how pupils learn and were more focused upon addressing these through their planning and teaching practices (Rose & Shevlin 2005, p. 5).

Student- teacher relationship can also benefit from the implementation of student voice. Bahou (2011) pointed out that several studies about student voice reported positive outcomes not only

on learning and communication, but also on the relationship between the students and their teachers.

2.6 Applying student voice in inclusive schools

The UNCRC argues that there are no boundaries for involving children in the decision making in education, yet the reality is that incorporating student voice in educational research comes with many challenges (Lewis & Porter 2007, Cited in Florian 2014). Applying student voice in schools is easier said than done, it is a mission that faces a number of obstacles. It has been explained that "...listening to pupils can present demands that not all schools are ready to confront" (Bearne 2002, p. 127).

Despite the fact that eliciting the views of students with SEN is not an easy mission, however the positive outcomes that have been highlighted in research on student voice in inclusive education should encourage schools to include student voice as an important part of their inclusive policies. Roller (1998) explains that it is evident that there are positive outcomes from involving students with SEN in matters that affect them at the school, such as planning, assessment and the review process.

Literature on student voice in inclusive education proposes a number of recommendations that schools should follow in order to promote and implement student voice:

2.6.1 Understand and value student voice:

In order for student voice to be implemented in inclusive education, it is important that educators understand and believe in its' advantages. Rose & Shevlin (2005) argue that teachers and other professionals are more likely to nurture the importance of student voice when they can see its benefits for the students and for them as well. Moreover, in order to encourage teachers to promote student voice it is paramount that teachers understand that listening to their students and giving their views due weight does not mean taking the authority from them. Byrnes & Rickards (2011) believe that a possible reason to why the voices of students with disabilities are not given due weight is that teachers may consider listening to the views of their students as a threat to their authority.

2.6.2 Believe in the abilities of students with SEN

The misconception that students with disabilities are incapable of giving credible information about matters that affect them is a major factor that deprives students with SEN from their right to have a say about their lives. Middleton (1999) points out that one possible reason for why the voices of students with disabilities are less recognized than the voices of other students is that the trustworthiness and the credibility of the information provided by those children is doubted by some people. Students with SEN can provide invaluable information about their education if they were helped to express their views. Rieser (2012, p. 188) Confirms that "... experience has shown that all children can be helped to find the means to express meaningful choices and preferences".

2.6.3 Have the appropriate skills, efforts and resources in place:

As mentioned above, In order to implement student voice at schools it is important to understand what students voice is about, understand its benefits, and believe that it is a right, and that all students can express their views in a way or another. However, understanding and believing alone cannot help teachers in eliciting the views of their students with SEN. Whitehurst (2007) asserts that in general teachers neither have the skills nor the resources that enable them elicit the views of students with disabilities. The lack of skills and resources that help teachers in eliciting the views of their students, is one of the reasons why the voices of students with SEN remain silent, therefore it is important that schools have clear policies, procedures and resources that facilitate the process of eliciting the views of students with SEN. Bishton (2007) clarifies that school leaders should have in place a variety of methods that can be used to elicit the views of students with different abilities.

2.6.4 Avoid tokenism

Listening to students' perspectives is perceived meaningless when schools apply it for the sake of implementing a policy or legislation. Meaningful students' participation implies avoiding tokenism and promoting full participation in decision making. Fielding & Rudduck (2002) explain that tokenistic participation is at the bottom of the ladder of participation, in this type of participation it seems that children are given the chance to express their views but in reality they neither have a say about how they prefer to express themselves, nor are given time to formulate their views.

Student voice does not mean allowing students to express their views, it is a combination of listening to their views, understanding them and giving those views due weight to inform practice. Fielding & Rudduck (2002) confirm that it is pivotal to respond to students' recommendations and perceptions.

In summary, literature about student voice in inclusive education highlights that student voice is an ethical imperative and a right, the literature recommends applying student voice in inclusive school as a way to enhance the quality of services for students with SEN, and points out the benefits that schools and teachers can gain from listening to the perceptions of students with SEN about their inclusive schooling. Moreover, research on student voice in inclusive education suggests that all students can participate in making decisions about matters that affect them when they are encouraged and provided with appropriate means that enables them to share their views.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This study aimed to employ student voice in order to explore, understand and describe how four students with SEN perceived their educational and social experiences at their inclusive school. Furthermore, it aimed to explore to what extent the four students were aware of their needs and to find out the significance of their voices at the school.

In this section, the research methodology and the research tools are explained, and the main research tool (the interviews) is described in detail.

3.1 Research method

Conducting research in special education is not an easy mission. It has been explained that “Research on special needs education is often very complex and puts specific demands on the methodology used. Data-triangulation, at the very least, is required (Ghesquiere, Maes & Vandenberghe 2004, p. 17). In order to choose a research method that best investigates the phenomenon under study, extensive literature on research in education, and special needs education was consulted and the qualitative research was found to be an appropriate method to carry out this study. It has been explained that “... qualitative research procedures are flexible, exploratory, and discovery oriented. They allow the researcher to change or add to the types and sources of data gathered as the study progresses (Stainback & Stainback 1984, p. 402)

This study was carried out following Husserl’s descriptive phenomenological method. Sanders (2014, p. 293) explains what Husserl’s phenomenological method is:

Husserl’s phenomenology is eidetic or descriptive, whereby individuals are seen as the vehicle through which the essential structure or “essence” of the phenomenon of interest can be accessed and subsequently described.

In this study the researcher aimed to set all presumptions aside and see the inclusive experience from the students point of view, therefore the descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology was chosen in conducting this study and analyzing its data.

3.2 Site selection

This study was conducted in a school where the researcher has worked previously. Shenton & Hayter (2004) ensure that having previous connections with an organization chosen for a study as well as contacting its staff members can be used as valuable source for gaining access.

The chosen school is an international private school in Dubai, that provides education from foundation 1 to year 10, and that has started applying an inclusive education policy in 2012.

3.3 Organizational access

The researcher has contacted the school principal by e-mail, asking for permission to conduct the research at the school (Appendix 1). The purpose of the research, the methodology, and all ethical considerations were explained to the principal. After obtaining verbal permission from the school principal, the researcher met with the head of inclusion (HoI), in order to further explain the research and to identify possible research participants.

3.4 Research sample selection

Purposeful sampling was used in selecting the research participants. Purposeful sampling means selecting information-rich cases that enable the researcher to study the purpose of the research in depth (Patton 1990). In line with purposeful sampling, the following criteria were taken into consideration when selecting the research candidates:

- participants had to be on the SEN register and were getting extra help in school
- the parents and the children had to be willing to participate in the research
- participants had to be able, and willing to share their views

In Phenomenology a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study is required, therefore a relatively small research sample has been chosen. Connelly (2010) argues that in phenomenology the number of the research participants is relatively small, but that would allow the researcher to become deeply involved in the phenomenon under study. Moreover, phenomenological research is not meant to lead to generalization, and that the research value depends on the transferability of the results, therefore using larger research samples does not necessarily lead to deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Lynne also points out that analyzing the interviews data for big number is considered to be impractical, since an hour interview may produce a twenty pages transcript (Centre for Research quality 2013).

The box bellow represents the students' profile. For the sake of protecting the anonymity of the research participants, students' names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Student	Age	Class	SEN
Ben	11	6	Dyslexia
Hugh	11	6	Autism
Amelie	11	7	Dyslexia & Dysgraphia
Karim	13	8	Low average intellectual ability

Table 1: Students' profile

3.5 Informants access

After receiving the school's principal approval, the researcher met with the HoI of the school, explained the research, and what the characteristics of the research participants were. Initially three steps were taken to gain informants approval. First, the HoI contacted the six research candidates parents by e-mail, explaining the purpose of the research, and asking for their permission to provide the researcher with the names of their children. Initially all the six parents gave the HoI the permission for their children to take part in the research. Secondly consent letters (Appendix 2) were sent to the parents, and provided them with the following information: (the purpose of the research, the research tools, the risks and benefits of the research on their children, privacy and confidentiality of the data gathered from their children, and the rights of

the parents and of their children). It has been highlighted that Parents' consent provides a safeguard to protect children's interests and integrity, and is based on an assumption that parents act in the best interests of their child (Helseth & Slettebø 2004, p. 303). The parents were also asked to explain the purpose of the research to their children, and to ask for their assent (Appendix 3).

After sending the consent letters to the parents, two parents expressed that they were no longer interested that their children participate in the study, while one of the parents did not mention the reason for not allowing their child to take part in the study, the other parent specifically mentioned that she was not happy with the point in the consent letter that explained that the researcher has to respect the privacy of the children by not sharing any information with the parents, or the teachers unless the child agrees to do so. Helseth & Slettebø (2004) define the right to privacy in research as research participants' decision on how much information they want to share or suppress from others. However, despite it being a point that could discourage some parents from allowing their children from taking part in the research, taking the students' permission for sharing their information is an ethical issue that could not be neglected.

After getting the signed informed consents from parents, the researcher met with each student on the day of the interviews in order to ask for their assent. It has been highlighted that "Beyond permission, when enrolling minor participants in research, affirmative agreement to participate in research or assent must be obtained from the child participants themselves (Sterling & Walco 2003, p. 237). The researcher read and explained the assent letter to the students, explained the purpose of the study, explained that the researcher would use an audio recorder, explained the use of the red card, and the yellow card, and explained the use of the magical writing board. Thereafter, the researcher asked the students questions to make sure that they have understood the researcher's explanation. The Department of children and youth affairs (2012) states that before participating in a project, it is important to inform the children about the purpose of the project, its aims, methods and potential outcomes, the children should also be given adequate time to decide whether to participate or not, they should also be allowed enough time to think about their participation, to discuss with others about it, and to ask questions. Moreover it is indispensable to explain to children that their participation is voluntary and that they can

withdraw at any time without any consequences. Additionally, children should also be aware that their parents' consent does not oblige them to participate.

After explaining the assent letter, the children were asked to sign the assent form to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. Gaining children's written assent can often make children feel that their participation is important, and it also strengthens the feeling that their assent to participation is valuable. Here it is important to mention that the participants' assent was checked out throughout the interviews. It has been argued that in qualitative research the researchers have to constantly check for the consent or assent of the participants, and that this is even more important when the research participants are vulnerable children (Munhal 1988).

3.6 Research tools

In qualitative research the researcher is the data collection instrument, which means that the researcher decides which questions need to be asked and how, what needs to be observed and which notes to write down (Mertens 1998). The main data source for this study was the interviews (Appendix 6); however in order to gain deeper understanding of each student before conducting the individual interviews the researcher consulted a number of documents (Appendix 4) for each student and conducted observations (Appendix 5). Stainback & Stainback (1984) contend that in phenomenological research in order to produce logical perspectives it is important that the researchers collect data from different sources, they study documents, interview people, and observe participants to see how they behave in their environment. The researcher started with studying the different documents that were provided by the HOI prior to observing and then interviewing each student. It is also important to mention that the researcher had also had informal interviews with teachers, the HOI and the learning support teachers, in order to clarify some findings from documents and observations, those informal conversations were very helpful because they allowed the researcher to better understand the specific needs of each one of the students, and have also helped the researcher in customizing the interviews.

3.6.1 Documents

Studying different documents related to each child was an important first step in this research. The researcher had access to the participants IEPs and other documents; getting access to those documents was an invaluable foundation of this study as it provided the researcher with important information about each participant and enabled the researcher to plan for the interviews. Mertens (1998, p. 324) points out that “In special education research, documents that might be important include report cards, special education files, discipline records, IEPs, IEP meeting minutes, curriculum materials, and test scores”.

3.6.2 Observations

After gaining information about the research participants from documents, the researcher conducted passive observations that enabled the researcher to observe the students in their school environment. Morris (2003) highlights that observations allow the researchers to get empirical experience of the research participants environment. Taking this step prior to interviewing the students enriched the interviews as it allowed the researcher to add questions about topics highlighted during the different observations. The number of observations was not predetermined, and the researcher stopped observing when no new information was gained from the observations. Mertens (1998) explains that in qualitative research the researcher decides that adequate observation has taken place when themes and examples start repeating instead of expanding.

3.6.3 Interviews

As mentioned earlier, phenomenological research does not seek to find answers, rather seeks to gain better understanding of the phenomenon under study. Individual semistructured interviews were conducted in order to enable the students to freely express their views, and in order to gain deeper insights into the students’ experiences. When conducting semistructured interviews, the researcher does not look for particular answers, rather endeavors to obtain deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Omizo & Omizo 1990).

- **The interview procedure**

In the view of enhancing the external validity of this study, a detailed description of the main research tool (interviews) is explained.

In order to reconfirm the parents' consent and the students' assent, and to insure that the parents were informed about when their children will be interviewed, the researcher made sure to contact the parents via e-mail notifying them of the date of their child's interviews. Additionally, the teachers were also notified by the HoI about the day and time that students will be withdrawn from their classes to be interviewed.

Before each interview, the researcher was introduced to the students by the HoI. The researcher has also respected the students' preferences about the interview timings; the researcher checked if the students agreed to be interviewed on the selected times, and made sure that each student was aware of those timings. Prior to the interviews, the researcher collected the students from their classes and accompanied them to the interview room, this short walk to the interview room worked as an "ice breaker" and permitted the researcher to build some kind of rapport with the students. Moreover, before interviewing the students, the research was explained to the students, and the researcher answered any questions they had before asking them to sign the assent letter.

All the interviews were conducted in one of the achievement centre rooms, and all the students were happy to be interviewed there. Only one interview started in a different room because the room in the achievement centre was occupied, but was resumed in the achievement centre room upon the student's request. The interviews were audio-recorded, and the use of the recorder and the interview tools (the magical writing board, the flash cards, and the red and yellow cards) was explained to the students prior to starting the interviews.

The interviews were constructed on predetermined themes that covered (academic and social experiences at the school, awareness of needs, and participation in decision making). All the interviews started with a general question (what do you like most about your school?) Yet, the order, and number of questions varied from one student to another. Here it is noteworthy to mention that the semistructured nature of the interviews enabled the researcher to add questions to the interviews when something new arose from the student's perspectives. Knox & Burkard

(2009) argues that semistructured interviews allow the researcher to be creative and flexible in order to fully uncover the participants' story.

In respect of the descriptive type of this phenomenological study, the notion of "phenomenological attitude" was respected in all the interviews. Phenomenological attitude requires researchers to "bracket" their own biases and to put all previous knowledge, and beliefs aside and to be prepared to conduct the research with no presumptions. It has been explained that "Using this attitude, the researcher strives to be open to the "other" and to attempt to see the world freshly, in a different way" (Friesen, Henriksson & Saevi 2012, p. 24). Besides engaging in a phenomenological attitude, the phenomenological interview method was applied to conduct the interviews, applying this method meant creating an informal interview atmosphere by using open ended questions that gave the students the freedom to share their perspectives about their schooling. Stainback & Stainback (1984, p. 405) conclude that "This unstructured, open-ended approach allows the subjects to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by prearranged questions".

Initially, the researcher planned to conduct three interviews on one day for each participant, with each interview lasting from 10-20 minutes. Conducting shorter and more frequent interviews has ethical and methodological importance because it reduces the chances of children getting tired or the chance of losing concentration (Kelly 2007). However, this plan for conducting the interviews has not been fully respected, as the researcher respected each student's pace. (duration and number of interviews illustrated in table 2).

The interviews were informal, and unhurried, and the researcher made sure to comment on the students' answers to acknowledge the importance of their views and to encourage them to freely express their views. It has been found that "The way in which a researcher responds to the child's attempts to reply to questions can be pivotally important in maintaining rapport and sustaining the young person's co-operation (Morison, Moir & Kwansa 2000, p. 125). Moreover, the researcher was aware that the students might change their mind about taking part in the study; hence the students' assent was checked throughout the interviews. Helseth & Slettebøe (2004) explain that the research participants consent should be continuously checked especially when the participants are children, because during the research process children gain better

understanding of the research, which enhances their ability to think about whether they wish to take part in the research or not.

Additionally, the researcher avoided making assumptions, therefore, the students were asked to clarify any point that the researcher was not sure about. Moreover, after analyzing the interviews data the researcher asked the students to verify the information gained from the interviews in order to check that the information gained from the students were accurate.

Student/ class	Interviews	Total Duration	SEN
Ben / 6	1	50 minutes	Dyslexia
Hugh / 6	2	50 minutes	Autism
Amelie / 7	1	45 minutes	Dyslexia
Karim / 8	3	55 minutes	Low average intellectual ability

Table 2: Students’ interviews

- **Interview Tools**

It has been pointed out that “There is a necessity on the part of the researcher to match research techniques and tools to the individual, based on their communicative ability, interest and maturity” (O’Keeffe 2011, p. 56). In deciding what tools will be needed to conduct the interviews, the researcher relied on the information gathered from the students’ documents, observations, and from talking to the HOI and the support teachers. In doing research with children with disabilities it is important that the researcher speaks to people who know the children, spends time to find out what type of communication a child prefers, and also have a number of tools that support the communication between the researcher and the child (Knight & Oliver 2007).

For conducting this study the researcher did not have to use any special tools to facilitate communication. The researcher has only used a “magical writing board” when asking the students to express a wish related to their lives at the school, and the students were given the option to write or draw on the board. Here it is noteworthy to mention that the children reacted differently to this activity, two participants were excited to use it, one of the participants did not like to use the board and preferred to say her wishes, and the fourth participant drew the wishes on the board and the researcher had to ask the student to explain the drawings.

The researcher has also used a yellow card and a red card during the interviews, and the students were told why and when they could use them (The yellow card when they do not wish to answer a particular question, and the red card when they wish to stop the interview if they were tired or for any other reason, or if they wish to withdraw from the study). Having these cards available in front of the students during the interviews was important because it reinforced the idea of the importance of their assent; moreover it helped in reminding the students that they have the right to withdraw from the interviews when they wish to do so. The yellow card was not used in all the interviews, however, the red card was used by one student, once because the student wished to change the interview room, and twice because the student was feeling tired and wanted to stop the interview and go back to class.

3.7 Data analysis

The data that emerged from the unstructured interviews was analyzed, summarized, and explained through Colaizzi's phenomenological data analysis approach (1987). The data analysis was carried out by adhering to the seven steps of that approach:

1. The audio recorded interviews were listened to several times then transcribed
2. Significant statements were extracted from the interviews
3. Meanings were formulated from the significant statements
4. The meanings were then clustered into emergent themes
5. An exhaustive description of the experiences was written using verbatim quotes (findings)
6. The findings then were summarized into short and clear statements (discussion)
7. The research participants were asked to validate the findings

3.8 Quality indicators of the research

In conducting this study, the researcher adhered to applying the “phenomenological attitude” by bracketing own biases and prior assumptions. In applying this important step in this descriptive phenomenological study, the researcher entered the world of the participants with a clear mind, and was able to see their worlds through their perspectives. Moreover, “bracketing” is also important because it enhances the quality of the study. Ahern (1999) explains that bracketing is used to ensure the validity of data collection, the data analysis, and it also preserves that objectivity of the phenomenon under study. The credibility of the study was ensured by asking the participants to verify the accuracy of the findings. Moreover, in reporting the study findings verbatim quotes have been used in order to enhance the credibility of this study.

3.9 Ethical considerations

As mentioned earlier, all ethical considerations have been respected throughout the research, starting from the very first step of gaining access to the participants by asking parents for their informed consent and the students for their informed assent, as well as respecting the confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants.

The recorded interviews were all deleted after the interviews were transcribed, and pseudonyms were used instead of the real students’ names.

As the parents and the HoI expressed their interest in finding out what the students experiences looked like from their perspectives, the researcher made sure to ask the students whether she can share the findings with their teachers and parents, and the students preferences were respected when the findings were reported to the HoI, who in his turn reported the findings to the parents.

Chapter four

Findings

After analyzing the interviews using Colaizzi's method the research findings were categorized under three themes:

Theme 1: School perceptions: Activities and learning, Learning support, participation in school life, and friendships.

Theme 2: Awareness of needs

Theme 3: Insignificant student voice

Following Colaizzi's method the three themes were described and verbatim quotes were used in the body of the themes in order to give the reader a clear image about the students' perceptions.

4.1 Theme 1: Perceptions about school

The findings of this theme emerged from the information that the four students shared with the researcher about four different aspects:

1. Learning
2. Learning Support
3. Participation in school life
4. Friendships

4.1.1 Activities and learning

The four students in this study shared their perceptions about teaching and learning at their school. The students perceived that learning through activities helped them learn better and enhanced their concentration. "Hard to concentrate" were the words used by one of the students to describe how the lack of activities affected her learning:

"..... I like find it easier to learn things when there is activities in the lesson, I I find it boring and also hard to concentrate when we do nothing but reading and writing in the lesson" (Amelie).

Lessons that were merely based on reading and writing were perceived as “boring” lessons, whereas lessons where the students were able to do activities were described as “Fun” lessons and perceived to help in retaining information:

Karim: I like geography, it is fun.

Researcher: why is the geography lesson fun?

Karim: we do many activities and we watch videos.

Researcher: what about reading and writing in the geography lesson, how do you find that?

Karim: in geography I listen and see more things, that's why I remember. I learn better in geography, Miss G. asks me to tell her what I have seen and heard and I tell her, I don't always read or write.

Researcher: how does that help you learn?

Karim: it's not boring like reading and writing, I can remember things when we see them in class, like on the interactive whiteboard.

Similarly, “I learn better” were the words used by one of the students to describe the importance of using activities in lessons:

Hugh: It's boring to learn science in class; I think we know better if we go to the lab.

Researcher: Why do you think you will know better if you go to the lab?

Hugh: I don't know maybe..... I think we do things, I learn better.

“Fun” lessons” as described by one of the students were also perceived to enable the student not only to enjoy the lesson, but also to learn “something” from lessons that the student found hard:

Researcher: you told me that you find the Arabic and the French lessons fun!

Ben: yeah

Researcher: so, is Arabic hard or do you enjoy it?

Ben: it's hard but when the lesson is fun I enjoy it because I learn something from playing the games or interacting in the class.

4.1.2 Learning support

The students in the study have also shared their views about the learning support that they received at the school. There was evidence from the data that support for learning was appreciated by all four students. All students agreed that the support that they get at the school facilitated their learning:

“Mr. J and Miss E. help me learn, I learn better in this school” (Hugh).

“Because Miss E. and Miss L. Help me sometimes I understand more. It’s easier” (Karim).

Positive words such as (Happiness, confidence, and feeling comfortable) were used by the students to describe how they feel about getting learning support at the school:

“Oh, I’m so happy because he is trying to help us, trying to make us improve” (Ben).

“The school helped me and I’m definitely more confident probably in this school. I definitely got more help than the other schools I’ve been to” (Amelie).

“I’m really happy, because when they help me I feel more comfortable and I feel less stressed” (Ben).

The students also perceived that the absence of support would have negative impact on their learning:

“I can’t learn better if they are absent” (Hugh).

“I think I will find things hard, many things are hard and they help me understand and do things better” (Karim).

The students also described how the absence of support would make them feel:

Researcher: Hugh, how would you feel if Miss E. and Mr. J were not in the school?

Hugh: oh, worried.

Another student explained:

“a bit scared, I might not know what to do, and I’m like how do I do this?” (Ben).

The students held similar views about the importance of the learning support that they get at the school. However, their perceptions about the best place to receive the support varied, and they were able to explain their preferences.

Two of the students did not mind to be withdrawn from class or to stay in class to get the required learning support:

Researcher: do you prefer to get help in classroom or in the achievement centre?

Ben: I like both.

“I like it in class and here” (Karim).

In contrast, another student opposed to the idea of getting learning support inside the general classroom, and perceived it as unhelpful:

“I only learn better in the achievement centre, it’s noisy in the class, I can’t learn” (Hugh).

However, (Amelie) perceived that getting the support outside the classroom would only be beneficial in one case:

“but I think maybe if I get support in the achievement centre for Arabic, just me and the teacher, I think I can learn more, because last year I was taken out of Arabic class for the whole year, because I was doing that tutor thing for English, so I’m a bit behind, even the letters and sounds is confusing to me”.

Getting support outside the classroom was not a preference for (Amelie), she explained:

“I like to know what the lesson is going to be about, or what we will be tested on. Like to do the same thing as my friends, if I need more help I like it to be in class or after school, not going out of the lesson”.

4.1.3 Participation in school life

- In class participation:

The students shared their perceptions about working with their peers in the general education classroom. The students held different views about collaborative learning, and they explained how they feel about working in a group and in pairs, and explained their preferences:

“but most of the time no one wants to pick me, that’s why I like to work alone, just alone well I have many friends but I like to work alone” (Karim).

Another student explained how working in a group or in pairs affected her learning, and what her preferences were:

Researcher: Tell me how do you prefer to work in the class; do you prefer to work in pairs, alone or in a group?

Amelie: in pair, but it depends who because sometimes people are not good at concentrating, again when I get confused it's hard to learn, or harder when people can't help.

About group work (Amelie) explained:

"I don't like group work as much, I just find it..... like sometimes people try to take over, or I just find it distracting, and I can't work".

Contrasting the above views, working in a group was perceived to be helpful to another student:

"I like to listen to my friends' ideas and work together" (Ben).

Another student, held a totally different view:

Researcher: so, tell me Hugh, in class do you prefer to work in a group, with a friend or alone?

Hugh: I don't prefer, I think I like to work with the teacher?

Researcher: why do you like to work with the teacher?

Hugh: because the teacher can help me, I I think I can learn better with the teacher.

- Participating in the general school life:

Another type of participation that was mentioned in the interviews was the participation in the school's students' council. Two of the students agreed that it was boring to take part in the students' council and they also described it as "extra work":

Researcher: Ok, Amelie, tell me about the student council, do you like to be part of it?

Amelie: emmm, not really, I don't like the pressure of having to remember everything, and then writing notes.

She further explained:

"I find it boring and also it's like extra work".

Another student who experienced participating in the students' council explained:

Researcher: would you like to be a student councilor or vice councilor again?

Karim: no I don't like it, it's not fun, it's extra work.

Researcher: extra work, like what?

Karim: we have meetings and we have to write notes, I don't like writing notes, it's hard for me.

However, one of the students wished to participate in the school's students' council, yet despite believing that he could help the school with his good ideas, he perceived that his writing difficulty was a barrier to his participation, he explained:

Ben: and I wish my writing gets better so I can be a student councilor.

Researcher: what does writing has to do with students' councilor?

Ben: because in meetings councilors have to write notes and ideas, if I write something and come to read it the next day I would forget what the word is, and my teachers also can't read my handwriting, so it is confusing.

Participating in school assemblies and school productions was generally seen as an undesirable experience, one student explained:

"I don't really like it....I get really shy and nervous, and sometimes I forget my part, because I forget really easily" (Ben).

Agreeing with that point of view, (Hugh) explained:

"it's hard to learn your part".

Another student explained:

"I don't like it a lot... it's more work" (Karim).

Contrarily, one student expressed positive feelings about performing in school productions, she explained:

"I like performing, it's fun..... I'm used to perform, I have been learning contemporary dance for 4 or 5 years, and I love it" (Amelie).

Likewise, the students held different views about participating in sports day, three students said that they liked sports day, one student explained:

Karim: I like it.

Researcher: why do you like it?

Karim: because you don't have to go to lessons.

Researcher: any other reason?

Karim: It's fun.

At odds with the views of the three other students, and despite the fact that all four students liked their Physical Education (PE) lessons, one student perceived sports day as a stressful experience, she explained:

Amelie: I don't really like the houses competition, I've always felt intimidated by the house competition, I just don't enjoy it really.

Researcher: you told me earlier that you like PE, but now you are saying that you don't enjoy sports day!

Amelie: because you have to compete and I can't do it very well if I have to compete, like really I get stressed more than in assessments.

Researcher: why is that?

Amelie: because in assessments everyone is quiet, but there is cheers and everything in sports day, it just stresses me out.

4.1.4 Friendships

The students shared views about their social experiences at the school. Three students agreed that having friends at the school was the thing they liked the most about their school, one of the students explained:

"and also I have very supportive friends, when I first arrived M. and B. helped me a lot" (Amelie).

Another student said that he likes school because of his friends:

"I get to spend time with my friends" (Ben).

"I will miss my friends, I like my friends" (Karim). Was the answer to how the student would feel if he had to change school?

The same three students expressed that they like to spend break and lunch time with their friends, for example (Amelie) explained:

“I normally stay with my friends, I don’t like being alone at break and lunch time, we always agree where to meet each other after we finish eating” (Amelie).

Only one student expressed that he does not have friends and when asked to make a wish related to the school he said:

Hugh: I wish... my wish is that my friends sometimes visit my house.

Researcher: why do you want your friends to visit your house?

Hugh: to visit..... to play and also to have fun with them...

Opposing the positive perceptions the students had about friendships, the students also shared their views about bullying or “teasing”. For example “teasing” was found to be the reason why one of the students preferred to play alone:

Researcher: why don’t you play with your friends?

Hugh: I think because they don’t like to play with me.

Researcher: why do you think that?

Hugh: sometimes they tease me, but I tell the teacher, she tells them off

Another student expressed that “teasing” makes him sad, however he also explained how he overcomes that negative feeling:

Researcher: what do people tease you about?

Ben: sports and spellings, but now they know that I’m bad at spelling so they don’t tease me anymore, they know I’m bad so they know not to mess around with me.

Researcher: what do you do when people tease you?

Ben: I’ve been learnt to walk away and just ignore it, try to cheer up and act that it never happened, my mum taught me that not to tease people who tease me, I don’t care what they say, that’s who I am and everyone is bad at something, no one can be perfect.

“No one annoying anyone”. Was the response of (Karim) when he was asked to make a wish related to the school, he explained:

Researcher: why do you wish that no one annoys anyone?

Karim: annoying makes people sad and angry, it's not good.

4.2 Theme 2: Awareness of needs

This theme emerged from the views the students shared with the researcher regarding the second research question (To what extent are the students in this research aware of their needs?)

The interviews with the four students revealed different level of awareness. (Hugh) for example did not mention how he perceived the effect of his disability on his learning; however, he mentioned several times what helped him learn “better” at the school:

“I know better if I listen on the interactive white board”.

“.... I think I learn better in the achievement centre”.

The other three students showed that they were aware of their needs and some were very articulate in explaining how their needs affected their learning and also some were able to suggest methods or give solutions that they believed would facilitate their learning. For example (Karim) used these words to explain how he was aware of his needs and he explained what he thought was suitable for him:

“I can't do the hard things”.

“You have to do something you enjoy”.

“not work and paper, and reading and writing.... I like working, but I can't go to academic”.

Another student (Amelie), was able to explain how her learning disability affected her learning, she also explained what makes assessments and doing homework hard for her:

“when I say it in my head and write it I miss quite a few words out, and also when I read it over I don't understand, if I say something to myself that I want to write, I can't remember when I want to write it”.

“but the problem is that I don’t like sitting down, I can only concentrate in the classroom but it’s hard at home, I just have to move around, I’m trying to teach myself to concentrate, but I just find it hard”.

“yea, I find that I can concentrate for half an hour but then find it hard to concentrate, and I feel like I want to move around, so I find it hard to stay concentrated for more than half an hour”.

Moreover, (Amelie) was able to suggest what she thought might help her to do better at school, in assessments, and in doing her homework:

“but I think maybe if I get support in the achievement centre for Arabic, just me and the teacher, I think I can learn more”.

“So, I find like recording myself helps in writing”.

“so, if I had to do a test I prefer to do thirty minutes then a rest then another thirty minutes”.

Regarding doing homework (Amelie) explained:

“maybe if I could do it at school, because I find it much easier to concentrate, because at home I have so many things in mind, and I also have lots of pets, it’s just very distracting”.

Another student explained what he thought would help him improve at the school:

“well basically, I wish I could have more classes with Mr. J to improve my reading and writing” (Ben).

“maybe if I get support in Arabic class, I would understand more things, then I can answer some questions in the assessment paper” (Ben).

Furthermore, (Ben) explained what he does to improve at school:

“I keep reminding myself of the things that I have to take care of, and always practice and try to do my best”.

4.3 Theme 3: Insignificant student voice

This theme emerged from the views that the students shared with the researcher regarding sharing their views about matters that affected them at the school.

The interviews revealed that the views of the four students about matters that affected them at the school were not sought; two students explained why they do not share their views with their teachers.

One of the students believed that accommodating her needs would not be easy, and that's why she did not share her views with her teachers:

Researcher: do your teachers know that recording what you want to write makes writing easier for you?

Amelie: no.

Researcher: why don't you tell them?

Amelie: maybe....., because I know it's not easy to do that in school. But like also when we are doing a test I will not be able to do that.

Another student perceived that his teachers would not value his voice:

Researcher: have you told any of your teachers about what you think can help you learn better?

Karim: no, I just do what they want us to do, I don't think teachers will listen to us, maybe some of them not all.

One of the students perceived that even if there was something that had negative impact on him at the school, he did not believe that his voice can make a difference:

Researcher: don't you think that if you told your teacher he could help you feel better about assemblies?

BEN: I don't think we have a choice; everyone has to do their part.

The students also revealed that they did not participate in setting their targets, or in choosing their preferred learning style during IEP meetings, and two of the students pointed out that they did not take part in their IEP meetings:

Researcher: what do you do in the IEP meeting?

Hugh: I don't know, I don't go to meetings.

Researcher: you do not attend your IEP meeting?

Karim: No

Researcher: would you like to be in these meetings?

Karim: maybe..... I don't know

The two students who attended their IEP meetings had no input into their IEPs, one of the students explained:

Researcher: how do you participate in those meetings?

Amelie: I just listen to what they say, like they explained to me what I have to do this term and I said that I understood that

Researcher: are you happy with your IEP, or do you think you should have other targets?

Amelie: I agree, I understand that what is written in my IEP is what I need to improve, but like sometimes I think I might need targets for other stuff that I find hard, like for example..... something to help me in Arabic class.

Researcher: did you tell your teacher that in the IEP meeting?

Amelie: no, no I didn't

Believing that the teachers are more capable to understand the students' needs, was why one of the students did not share his views about his IEP with his teachers:

Researcher: would you tell your teachers if you were not happy with your IEP targets, or with how they help you?

Ben: ohh, I'm not sure, I know that they want me to improve, so maybe they know better.

Chapter Five

Discussion

This study revolves around students voice, starting from listening to the students in order to find out their perceptions about their school lives, their awareness of their needs, to investigating to what extent their voices were given due weight in matters that affected them at their school. The study explored the two important aspects of school life, the academic and the social aspects. In order to get a complete picture of how students experience inclusive education, it is important to investigate the students' experiences from both dimensions, academic and social (Lehman & Lava n.d).

All the students who participated in this study despite their different abilities and disabilities enabled the researcher to get an insider's view into their academic and social life at the school. It has been argued that "students are the only legitimate source for some of the answers we need for understanding and promoting school inclusion, because it is their world, not ours, that defines it" (Schnorr 1990, p. 240).

On the academic dimension the students shared their views about a number of points. Active learning has been perceived to be the best way for learning by all the four students. Research on inclusive education promotes the value of actively engaging students with SEN in lessons. Active learning strategies can be important and effective learning strategies in the inclusive classroom, such strategies enable students to learn more and to learn faster by actively engaging them in the lesson, moreover, interactive learning and hands –on activities encourages students to learn, improves attention and can also help in reducing bad behavior (Choate 2004, cited in Green & Giannola 2011). In this study the students perceived that lessons that were solely taught through reading and writing activities were not only uninteresting but were also deemed to impede learning, they perceived that learning through activities enhanced their learning, improved concentration, and facilitated acquisition of difficult lessons. It has been pointed out that "Support in learning is achieved through the teacher's role as mediator in providing activities that will challenge learners to create meanings around the aspects of their learning and progress" (Mweli & Kalenga 2012, p. 15).

The students also shared their views about learning in a group or in pairs. Research on inclusive education highlights the benefits of collaborative learning. Wood et al (1993) assert that cooperative learning can help students with SEN to overcome obstacles that hinder their learning. Katz & Porath (2012) argue that for academic inclusion to happen it is important to give all the students the right to participate in the classroom life, this implies that students with SEN learn through their interactions with their classmates, and not parallel or separated from the rest of the class and not only through an adult that provides support . However, not all the students perceived cooperative learning as a beneficial learning strategy, some perceived that they learn better when working alone or with a teacher or a teaching assistant (TA). Similarly Sniezek (1990, p. 436) concluded that "... the opportunity for students to study together does not guarantee gains in academic achievement".

In this study the students valued the learning support that they received at the school. Mweli & Kalenga (2012, p. 14) affirm that successful implementation of Inclusive Education relies to a large extent on the support rendered to learners during the learning process. The four students held positive views regarding the school's learning support, and they perceived the learning support that they get at the school as an essential component of their school life that not only facilitated their learning, but also made them feel happier, more confident and more comfortable at the school. Additionally, the importance of the learning support that the students received at the school was further highlighted by the views that the students shared about how the absence of support would affect them, the students perceived that not receiving learning support at the school would have negative impacts on how they learn and feel at the school. It has been explained that "Disabled children and children with SEN tell us that they can feel frustrated by a lack of the right help at school or from other services" (Department for Education, 2011, p.4).

However, despite the fact that all the four students shared the same views about the importance of learning support, they had their individual preferences on where they preferred to be supported. One of the students preferred to be supported in class in order to do what the other students do in class, another student did not mind where to receive the support, and two students perceived that pull out support is more effective because they needed to work in a quiet

environment and that learning in a noisy classroom was perceived to be unbeneficial. These findings mirror the findings of a study that was conducted by (Klingner et al, 1998) to find out the perceptions of students with learning disabilities about their preferences regarding in class and pullout support.

Alongside investigating the students' academic experiences, it was important to find out the students' perceptions about their social experiences at the school. Farrell (2000) explains that including students with SEN means that those students should be valued members of the school community who actively participate in school life.

Friendships were the highlight of the students' social experiences at the school. Three out of the four students perceived that having friends at the school was the reason for why they liked their school. This finding mirrors the findings of Rose & Shevlin (2005, p.15) who pointed out that "Being accepted by their mainstream peers and establishing viable relationships with their mainstream peers were perceived to be priorities for the young people from marginalized groups". Moreover, the findings revealed that three students out of four valued their friendships and that they had more than one friend at the school, this finding contrasts the findings of Koster et al (2010, p. 69) who found that "Students with special needs had, on average, fewer friends and belonged less often to a group of friends". However, it has also been found that the social inclusion of one of the students who participated in this study was affected by his disability. That student expressed that he wished to have friends at school and friends who visited him at home, however, because he had ASD he was not able to socialize with his peers. Chamberlain et al. (2007) clarified that students with ASD are weak in social interaction and that this weakness negatively affects their social inclusion.

Bullying as an issue that affects the inclusion of students with SEN has also been investigated. Davis & Watson (2001) state that bullying at schools is an important issue for students with disabilities. Yet, the findings of this study revealed that bullying was not an issue that greatly affected the inclusion of the four students, the students did not perceive bullying as a serious problem at the school, and they perceived that the school dealt well with the problem of bullying. Moreover, the students were aware of how to deal with bullying when it occurs.

An important dimension of school life that appeared to affect the school experiences for the four students in this study was how they perceived participating in the different school activities and functions, such as the sports day, students' council, school assemblies and school productions. Tsang (2013, p. 43) points out that "Social participation is distinguished from social inclusion as participation suggests individuals taking the autonomy to choose to commit whereas social inclusion frequently involves being enabled by others to take part". The students held different views about how they felt about participating in each of the school activities and functions, the students views varied between enjoying taking part in certain activities and functions to describing the participation as a stressful experience. For example, all the students agreed that they liked their PE lessons, yet some perceived participating in the school's sports day as fun, others described it as a stressful event.

Notably, the four students who participated in this study were able to provide the researcher with invaluable insights about different aspects of their school lives. This finding is in common with the findings of Cooke et al (2001) who confirmed that students with disabilities are able to tell us how they perceive inclusive education and that their views should be taken into consideration.

The findings of this study also revealed that three students out of four were aware of their needs and how their needs affected their life at the school. This finding mirrors the findings of a previous research by Kelly & Norwich (2004) about self-perceptions of students with moderate learning disabilities both in special and main stream schools where the researchers found that over 90% of the students who participated in their research were aware of their needs. Moreover, it has been found that the students were also able to identify and suggest different practices that they perceived to facilitate their learning, like for example learning science in the lab through activities, using the interactive whiteboard in lessons, using a recorder to help with reading comprehension difficulties, suggesting shortening assessment times, and suggesting the need of individualized support in certain lessons.

Student voice as an important component of inclusive education has also been investigated in this study. From the perceptions that the students' shared about the different school aspects, it has been found that they did not have a say about matters that affected them academically or socially at the school. The findings revealed that despite the fact that the students were aware of their needs, and were able to suggest strategies that they believed might help them overcome

their difficulties; their voices were not employed in enhancing their school experiences. For example, the students shared with the researcher their views about what teaching styles helped them “learn better”, they also shared their views about the effect of collaborative learning on their achievement, as well as their preferred place for receiving learning support, and how they feel about participating in the different school activities. However, it has been found that neither the school asked the students for their input and views about matters that affected them, nor were the students willing to share their views with their teachers. Wienstein (1983) clarifies that schools rarely ask students for their opinions about decisions that affect them at the school.

The findings also revealed that the student voice was also missing in creating their IEPs. The SEN toolkit highlights the importance of encouraging children to take part in decisions in education; this includes the process of target setting as well as creating IEPs. (DfES 2001). The data revealed that some students did not attend their IEP meetings, and that those who attended the meetings were not involved in the creation of their IEPs. In other words, the IEPs were solely created by the teachers and approved by the parents. This finding matches the finding of a previous research about inclusion as perceived by students with disabilities, where the researchers expressed their concern that they have found that students were not included in taking part in planning meetings where educational decisions that affect them took place and that the students were not consulted about their education, about their input about what needs to be done to help them feel included in the general education classrooms (MacArthur & Kelly 2004).

The findings of this study not only highlight the insignificance of student voice at the school, it has also been found that the students in this study were not aware of the importance of their voices, and that they perceived that their voices would not make a difference to their school experiences. Tetler & Baltzer (2011) ensure that depriving Students from having a say about their learning might lead them to restrain their wishes and motivation.

It is evident from the findings that the students who participated in this study did not value the importance of their voices. Lewis and Porter (2004) found that many young people and children with disabilities think that their views are of no value because they are not used to being asked to share their views. The students held different opinions about why they did not share their views about matters that affected them at the school with their teachers. The students perceived that the teachers knew better about what modifications, accommodations or support they needed at the school, they also expressed that their views were not important because they believed that it is not always possible to accommodate their needs, for instance one of the students perceived that shortening the assessment time would help her do better in assessment, however she also explained that she would not ask her teachers for that because in her opinion it was not possible to accommodate her need. Moreover, two of the students perceived that their views were not important because they believed that their teachers would not listen to their views. These findings are in contrast with the findings of previous research by Taylor et al (1998) where the researchers found that students in SE appreciate to participate in taking decisions about matters that affect their schooling.

Chapter six

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Future Research

6.1 Conclusion

This study employed student voice in order to get an insiders' view of how four students with SEN perceived their inclusive education experiences. The voices of the students were also employed to find out to what extent the students were aware of their needs, and to find out the significance of their voices at their school. It has been argued that "An exploration of what inclusion looks like in schools and classrooms should include the voices of children and young people with disabilities" (MacArthur & Kelly 2004, p. 44).

The findings of this study indicate that the students were able to share their views about academic and social matters that affected them at the school. The students were also aware of their strengths and needs, and were able to suggest what could be done to enhance their school experiences.

The research findings also revealed that the students had no voice at the school, in other words, the students did not have a say about matters that affected them at the school. Furthermore, the students did not believe in the importance and power of their voices. Fielding & Rudduck (2002, p.2) explain how school systems fail to teach students the importance of their views:

There are many silent or silenced voices - students who would like to say things about teaching and learning but who don't feel able to without a framework that legitimates comment and provides reassurance that teachers will welcome their comments and not retaliate.

The findings of this study imply that the inclusion of those four students was affected by the absence of their input into the educational and social aspects of their school lives. The inclusion of those students could have been improved by listening to their voices, and giving their views due weight. UNICEF (2007) confirms that decisions about children are more likely to lead to positive outcomes when the children themselves participate in the process of decision making about matters that affect them, and that giving children the right to participate in making decisions is an essential component of the learning process, that teaches children how to take decisions, be responsible and develops their confidence and self -esteem.

6.2 Recommendations

Despite the general positive feelings that the four students who participated in this study held about their school experiences, yet there were a number of barriers that were found to affect their inclusion, the findings of this study suggest that by promoting students voice, the school could overcome some of the difficulties that impede the realization of meaningful inclusion for students with SEN. Whitehurst (2007, p. 60) highlights the importance of student voice in inclusive education, she ensures that:

[w]e need their voices to inform our practice. We need to ensure that the voices, which have for so long remained silent, reach us, inform our practice and create a way of working which takes everyone's view into account. Only then can we say we are truly working inclusively.

Implementing inclusive education comes with a number of challenges, listening to the voices of students with SEN, and seeing inclusive education from their perspectives can be used as a tool that helps schools in creating and implementing inclusive education policies and programs.

Listening to the voices of the students and taking their views into account about matters that affect them, is not only beneficial for the students but also for the school and the teachers as well. Literature on inclusive education highlights the many positive outcomes of listening to the voices of students on the realization of meaningful and successful inclusive education. Corbet (2001), and Sebba & Sachdev (1997) all agree that choosing the best methods that support students with SEN, and assisting schools in developing inclusive education can be achieved by listening to what the students themselves have to say about their school experiences.

In order to maximize the benefits of inclusive education it is recommended that the school values the importance of student voice. This change cannot be achieved without a policy that sets the foundation for using student voice as a way to better understand the needs of the students. The school is also recommended to enlighten the teachers of the several benefits of listening to the views of students with SEN, train teachers on how to elicit the views of their students and have the appropriate resources in place. Additionally, the school is recommended to go beyond listening to the voices of the students to giving their voices due weight, and make the students believe and understand the value of their voices.

6.3 Recommendation for future research

This study investigated the inclusion experience of four students through employing student voice. Student voice and its' effects on inclusive education is an area that has not yet been researched in the UAE.

Research investigating the significance of student voice in inclusive schools in the country, as well as researching the barriers that hinders inclusive schools from giving the students the chance to make decisions about matters that affect them, and how to overcome those barriers, could help schools and educators see the benefits of taking the students views into consideration when creating inclusive policies and programs, which can be considered as a further step forward towards realizing meaningful inclusion in the UAE.

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APPENDIX: 1

Letter seeking Permission from the School



15 November 2014

The Principal
International School
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

This is to certify that **Ms Lara Numan Jubran**, Student ID No **120043** is a registered part-time student on the **Master of Education** programme (following the pathway in **Special and Inclusive Education**) in **The British University in Dubai** from September 2012

Ms Jubran has completed all the taught modules and is currently doing her dissertation. As part of the dissertation procedures she is expected to collect some data. We kindly request you to assist her so that she can conduct her visit for data collection as appropriate.

This letter is issued on Ms Jubran's request

Yours sincerely,

Josephine Joy
Faculty Administrator



APPENDIX 2:

SAMPLE CONSENT LETTER AND FORM

Student Voice for enhancing the Quality of Inclusive Education

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

This is to inform you that your Son /Daughter was nominated by the school to participate in a research study. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the necessary information, in order to help you decide whether or not to allow your son to take part.

My name is Lara Jubran, and I am pursuing my master degree in Special and Inclusive Education at the British University in Dubai. For my dissertation I am interested in researching how children with special educational needs perceive their school life. Research on Student voice highlights that listening to what children with special educational needs have to say about their experiences in inclusive schools enables teachers and school systems to better cater for their needs, which in return has positive impact on their school experiences.

In order to conduct my research I will need to collect information about your Son/ Daughter through different means (documents, observations, and interviews). Giving your Son/ Daughter the permission to participate in this research is highly appreciated.

Once you agree to allow your Son/ Daughter to take part in this research, please take your time to talk to him/ her about the purpose of the research, the duration, the procedure, and his rights, (detailed information is provided below). After that, please ask your Son/ Daughter if he/ she would like to participate in this research.

If your Son/ Daughter is interested in participating in this research, I will meet with him/her at the school in order to thoroughly explain the research and answer any questions he/she might have. Afterwards, your Son/ Daughter will be asked to sign an assent form. A copy of the signed assent form will be sent to you in a closed envelop in your son's/daughter's bag.

Research procedures:

- After gaining your permission, I will study different documents related to your child i.e.: (IEP, IEP meeting minutes, school reports, Educational Psychologist report....)
- Your child will be observed in different school settings

- In order to create personalized interviews techniques, I will need to interview your child's teachers, teaching assistants, the Special educational needs coordinator, and any member of staff that might have useful information about your child's school experience, if required I might need to ask you for some information as well
- **As the aim of the study is to understand students' perspectives**, I will need to interview your child. After receiving your signed informed consent form, I will:
 - Meet with your child for 10 minutes to introduce myself, explain the research and to ask him/her to sign an assent form
 - In the following day/s I will interview your child for 3 times 15-20 minutes each (either on the same day, or on consecutive days, depending on how your child feels about the interviews i.e. tired, bored, interested...).
 - During the interviews your child will be asked questions related to **3 different aspects of school life:**

- 1) **Learning**
- 2) **Social life**
- 3) **Participation**

- **You will receive an e-mail to inform you of the date of your child's interview, if you think that there is anything that I need to know before interviewing your child (if your child is unwell, upset, or anything that might affect the interview) please contact me**
- **Your child has the right to stop the interview at any time if he/she feels uncomfortable, your child also has the right to refuse to answer any question/s**
- **Please be informed that the interview will be audio- recorded in order to help me write the interview transcript. However, all collected information will be highly confidential, and no one else will listen to the interviews**
- **Please be advised that if during the interviews I feel that there is any information that I need to share with you or with the school, I will discuss this with your child and ask him/her to allow me to share the information.**

Risks:

There are no known risks to taking part in this research

Benefits:

I cannot guarantee that your child will personally gain benefit from participating in this research. However, it is possible that the school will find the information gained through listening to your child beneficial, which might lead to better provision.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the research data will be highly respected

- Your child's name will not be used in the research paper
- No names will appear on any hand written notes throughout the different data collection procedures as each participant will be given a pseudonym
- The school's name will also be confidential
- Recorded interviews will be deleted after writing the interview transcript
- All data will be saved on a password protected laptop.

Your Rights

Your child's participation in this research is voluntary

- Your child has the right to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from participating in this research at any time without any consequences
- Agreeing to allow your child to participate in this research does not mean that you cannot change your mind later
- During the research period you can contact me should you need any clarification or if there is any problem

I do understand that you and the school might be interested in obtaining information about your child after the interviews. I believe that in order to move beyond listening to your child's views it is important to give his/her views do weight and use them to better cater for his/her needs. However, as a researcher, it is my duty to respect your child's privacy, which means that I would not be able to share with you or with the school any information about your child unless he/she gives me the permission to do so.

- ❖ **If you / your child wish to withdraw from this research please contact me either by phone or by e-mail**

Contact details:

Mobile number: 050 423 5104

E-mail: larajubran@yahoo.com

Student Voice for enhancing the Quality of Inclusive Education

Permission for participation in Research

As parent /legal guardian, I authorize /do not authorize my son /daughter
..... to take part in the research study described in this letter.

(Please delete as appropriate)

Parent/ legal guardian signature e-mail

Date

- ❖ Upon signing this letter, you will receive a copy of it
- ❖ Please return this letter to your child's class teacher/ form tutor by Sunday, 30/11/2014

APPENDIX: 3

SAMPLE ASSENT LETTER AND FORM

Student Voice for enhancing the Quality of Inclusive Education

Child Assent Form

I am Lara from The British University in Dubai. I am interested to learn about how you describe your school experience. I am asking you and some other students in the school to participate in this research because I believe that you have very important things to tell me about your learning and your school life. By participating in this research, you might help the school better understand what you need.

You will help me in this research by answering some questions, and by telling me about your leaning, your social life at school and your participation in school events and activities. Your answers to my questions will be kept private; I will not share any information you give me with your teachers or with your parents without your permission to do so.

I do not think that there will be any problems during the interviews, but if any question makes you upset or sad, you can chose to forget about it, or to talk to me about it if that will make you feel better.

It is important that you understand that:

- Your parents said that it is OK for you to participate in this research, but you get to choose if you do so or not. You will not get into trouble if you refuse to participate
- If you participate in this study, but then feel you do not want to continue, that is perfectly fine
- During the interview, if there is any question that you do not want to answer that is Ok

APPENDIX: 4
Students' IEP'S

APPENDIX: 5

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

Appendix: 5.1

Hugh / 11.12.2014

Lesson	Notes
Literacy	Sits close to the teacher's table Writes a story about a holiday/ rest of the class are learning how to write a recipe Easily distracted/ speaks to himself Finds it difficult to follow teacher's instructions Does not finish his work by the end of the lesson Supported by class teacher
Physical Education	very active happy finds it difficult to follow instructions hardly joins with his classmates in any conversation
Break time	Sits alone when eating Wonders alone in the play area
Numeracy	Sits close to the teacher's table Does not participate in class Miss E. takes him and they sit on a table alone Loses concentration easily Asks questions not related to the lesson
Science	Sits on the mat with his classmates to watch a video on the interactive whiteboard Seems to be interested Asks the teacher a question about the video Fills in a worksheet with the help of the teacher
Arabic	Greets the teacher with a big smile Sits on a table with 3 other students Not concentrating Does not participate Teacher does not join him in the lesson Draws on a paper while the rest of the students answer a worksheet
French	Sits on a table with 3 other students Not concentrating Does not participate Teacher does not join him in the lesson Students playing a t groups game about family members, the team he joined not happy to have him as a team member

APPENDIX: 5

SUMMARY of OBSERVATIONS

Appendix: 5.2

Ben / 9.12.2014

Lesson	Notes
Literacy	Sits in a group of four Joins in group conversation Participates in class Not very confident when reading aloud
Topic	Joins a group to plan a project about the romans Enjoys working with his classmates Happily Joins a group to prepare a small act about the romans Participates in class
Break time	Eats and plays with a group of four boys
Numeracy	Sits in a group of three Listens carefully Works quietly on his worksheet Asks teacher for explanation Participates in class
Arabic	Sits next to another boy Listens carefully Sings with the rest of the class Struggles with the worksheet No support from teacher
Physical Education	Happy Active Very competitive
Library	Sits with a group of students to look for information about the romans in a book Gives suggestions on what information to use for finishing their project Reads quietly

APPENDIX: 5

SUMMARY of OBSERVATIONS

Appendix: 5.3

Amelie / 10.12.2014

Lesson	Notes
Music	Listens carefully Tries to play the piano Asks the teacher for help Happily joins in singing
History	Listens carefully to a presentation on the Interactive white board Struggles with answering a worksheet Teacher sits with her for a while explains and supports Worksheet not finished by the end of the lesson
Break time	Eats and plays with a group of girls
Numeracy	Sits in a group of four Peer assessing a worksheet of another student Discusses answers with her group Participates in class
English	First part of the lesson joins the rest of the class Listens carefully Helped by miss E. in taking notes Sits with miss E. to work on answering comprehension questions
Physical Education	Enjoys the swimming lesson
French	Enjoys the lesson Participates in class Seems happier and more active than in the other lessons

APPENDIX: 5

SUMMARY of OBSERVATIONS

Appendix: 5.4

Karim / 8.12.2014

Lesson	Notes
Physical Education	Enjoys swimming
Arabic	Does not participate Struggles to write answers in his notebook No support
Break Time	Eats and plays with his friends
English	Sits alone Seems bored No support Scribbles in his book Does not participate ❖ (the students listened to the teacher for a whole hour, no other activities in the lesson)
Science	Listens carefully to the teacher Listens to his group discussions and participates in discussion Supported by the teacher Asks teacher a few times about questions in a worksheet
Islamic	Listens carefully Asks questions about a presentation on the interactive whiteboard Seems to be interested in the lesson
Drama	Not interested in the lesson Sits next to a friend Talks all the time Does not finish practicing the part given by the teacher

APPENDIX: 6
INTERVIEWS