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EDU523: Project Report

**An investigative study regarding the Assessment Procedures
for students with special needs in private schools in Dubai**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Glossary.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
I: Introduction	
a. Introduction.....	9
b. Problem.....	10
c. Significance.....	10
d. Definitions.....	11
e. Purpose – Research questions/specifications.....	11
f. Structure of this project report	12
II: Theoretical Background	
a. Theoretical/Conceptual Framework.....	13
b. Review and analysis of the literature.....	17
III: Methods	
a. Methods.....	19
b. Design and Instrumentation.....	19
c. Sample.....	21
IV: Results and Discussion.....	23
V: Conclusions	
a. Discussions & Implications for Practice.....	28
b. Limitations.....	28
c. Recommendations for Future Area of Research.....	29
VI: References.....	30
VII: Appendices	
a. Appendix-1: Questionnaire Form	35
b. Appendix-2: List of accommodations/modifications.....	42
c. Appendix-3: Sample of completed questionnaire.....	43
d. Appendix-4: Interview Summary.....	55
e. Appendix-5: Letter seeking permission from schools.....	58

Glossary

UAE	United Arab Emirates
MoE	Ministry of Education
DoE	Department of Education
SED	State Education Department
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
LD	Learning Disabilities
NJCLD	National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NCLD	National centre for Learning Disabilities
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
IB	International Baccalaureate
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
EADSNE	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

Executive Summary

The United Arab Emirates is a relatively young country progressing towards the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) in regular classrooms in the K-12 educational system. The UAE Vision 2021 ensures equal access for students with SEN to general education. The KHDA, a UAE government body responsible for private education sector, revised its guidelines for K-12 education advancing its support for inclusion of children with SEN.

The provision of an early intervention can be improved with a comprehensive diagnosis of the children. This helps in the identification of each child's needs, strengths and problem areas. Additionally, a vast repertoire of assessment processes are utilized in a variety of contexts including the identification procedure of the specific needs or disability, formative and summative tests, informal or standardized examinations in different grades in educational institutions. Appropriate accommodations and modifications form a significant component of these assessment procedures.

The present study investigated the identification procedures of children with SEN and explored the assessment procedures including the accommodations or modifications used in private schools in Dubai. In addition, this project examined the obstacles faced by educators in practicing special assessment procedures, and made a few recommendations to enhance the support services available to children with SEN.

The identification of SEN involves significant understanding of the need for diagnosis, validity of assessment practices, criteria on which the identifications are based, and professionals involved in the diagnosis. Student engagement in the academic context needs to be recorded and assessed for evidence of learning as well as enhancing further learning formatively. Assessment accommodations alter the

way the student is instructed or tested, whereas modifications change the learning outcomes. The assessment procedures including the accommodations or modifications do not give any unfair advantage to these students but only safeguard the participation of children with SEN.

An international concern about equal opportunities and the basic educational rights of children has promoted legislation regarding these issues by the national governments over the past two decades. The UAE federal law gained momentum from the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities. The UAE federal law no 29/2006 caters to the basic educational rights of all the children. These national laws constitute the legal background for provision of equal access to regular schools for children with disabilities.

Structure of this project report

Chapter I of the report introduces the background of this study followed by a detailed literature review in Chapter II. The methodology used is explained in Chapter III succeeded by an extensive evaluation of the information collected in Chapter IV. The subsequent Chapter V has the conclusions, the limitations of this study, and some recommendations for future research. The references used for this study are enlisted in Chapter VI and the Appendices are enclosed in Chapter VII.

Methodology

The researcher conducted this qualitative study in totally three schools: one school following UK curriculum, one school following IB curriculum, and another school following US curriculum. The intention was to get a broad perspective of assessment strategies followed for students with SEN. The present study was carried out using qualitative methods with an inductive approach across private schools in Dubai. This simple descriptive qualitative research was carried out by first disseminating Questionnaires followed up with interviews with the SEN teachers, SENCO, or

Principal. This study was conducted with rigor and the intent of maximizing useful outcomes for the field of SEN.

Findings/ Results and Discussion

The findings of the current study regarding issues related to identification or diagnosis of children with SEN indicated that all the schools researched seemed to have appropriate identification procedures in line with the recommendations by the National Joint Committee of Learning Disabilities (2011). The interviews revealed the differences in the way the students with SEN were managed by various schools. The most commonly used assessment accommodations by educators across all three schools are similar to those reported by previous research in the UAE. These findings showed an urgent need to train teachers in the use of technology for students with SEN and understand the fact that inclusive education requires an understanding that it takes focused teaching for students with SEN.

Teachers enlisted the impediments to good inclusion of the SEN group as availability of relevant assessments, interpreting the results accurately, providing suitable accommodations, and handing alternate assessments. Other significant hurdles include improper classroom layout, large number of students with SEN, insufficient trained staff, lack of external agency support, inadequate parental involvement, time constraints, less funds, and extra work load for teachers.

Some strategies employed to address these concerns were collaborative efforts inter-school and intra-schools, consultation with therapists, modified assessments, employing more trained staff, and involving students in assessment procedures. The suggestions from the educators include establishing a proper SEN policy with clear procedures, training to teachers on SEN, small class contact time, individual support services, professional therapist services, having realistic IEP goals and offering differentiated curriculum.

Conclusions

This study has explored the assessment practices and its significance on inclusion of children with SEN in regular private schools in the UAE. The affective factors of early identification of special needs, appropriate assessments with suitable accommodations and modifications, having clear assessment policies, making relevant trained staff available in schools, improved collaboration between general and special educators, and greater parental involvement can go a long way to ensure better participation of students with SEN. Other important provisions including the availability of resources, training staff to change their attitudes, better collaboration between schools to ensure professional sharing, a broad spectrum of pedagogical approaches catering to the individual needs of pupils and appropriate legislation to enforce compulsory admissions of students with SEN in all educational institutions would UAE to achieve its Vision 2021.

Recommendations for Future Area of Research

Further investigations are recommended for assessment practices in more private sector schools to get a broader picture, analyze educational outcomes for students with special needs, integrate parents' opinion on the subject and explore ways of enhancing the systems of effectiveness regarding inclusion in schools.

Project Report

Chapter I: Introduction

a. Introduction

The UAE is a young nation slowly advancing towards inclusion of students with special educational needs in regular classrooms in the K-12 system. The UAE Vision 2021 assures equal access to students with SEN to general education along with appropriate infrastructure and required support services (Section 4.2 of UAE Vision 2021). Successful inclusion can be achieved by employing research-based strategies, relevant staff training, relevant support from schools, appropriate policies, ongoing research, availability of resources and active parental involvement (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004). The KHDA, a UAE government body responsible for private education sector, recently issued revised inspection guidelines lending greater significance to the schools' capability to cater to children with SEN (Shahbandari 2012).

Inclusive services for students with SEN can be greatly improved with early diagnosis of the children to enable the provision of effective intervention (Frederickson and Cline 2002). The goal of an extensive assessment is precise identification of each child's needs, strengths and problem areas. In educational system, assessment is used in varied contexts including the identification procedure of the specific needs or disability, formative and summative tests, informal or standardized examinations in different grades in K-12 education (NJCLD 2010). Relevant accommodations and modifications form a significant component of these assessment procedures (Mertens & McLaughlin 2004).

Prior research by Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2010) from UAE University investigated the extent to which teachers could understand and provide assessment modifications for children with LD in the public schools in the UAE. The present study builds on this previous research by extending the investigation to private schools in Dubai and also includes the aspect of identification of children with SEN. The subsequent

paragraph discusses the problem encountered in the UAE regarding the assessment procedures of students with SEN.

b. Problem

There is no unified policy or practice regarding the battery of assessment methods used for diagnosis of SEN in different countries. According to the UK-based NCSE (2010), many discrepancies exist across countries regarding the assessment methods employed and the professionals involved in the diagnosis the SEN. A similar situation exists in the UAE regarding the assessment procedures of the children with SEN (Elhoweris and Alsheikh 2010). An area of particular concern to the researcher was exploring the prevalent assessment practices and the accommodations available in the private schools. The researcher has a child with LD, who was transferred within various schools in Dubai and Sharjah due to lack of provision of suitable accommodations and supportive services. The significance of the assessment procedures with respect to meeting the needs of pupils with SEN in private schools is discussed herewith.

c. Significance

A professional framework needs to be established to assess SEN in any nation, in order to identify the availability of local services, resolve the immediate services required and raise funds or resources to meet these needs (Csépe 2008). There is an urgent need to concentrate research efforts to study efficacy of the inclusive practices in schools. Teachers are at the centre of this debate and classroom based practices need to be investigated to meet the SEN in a numerous contexts (Rose and Grosvenor 2001). The present study was conducted in 3 private schools offering varied international curriculum to study the school practices regarding the assessments and the services offered to students with SEN. The objective of collecting information from numerous schools was to get a broader database of practices followed with respect to the assessment process in order to identify good

strategies and recommend further developments for K-12 education (Porter & Lacey 2005).

d. Definitions

The definitions listed below have been adhered to for the current study purposes and have been selected from the UAE legal documents to suit the terms used in the local context.

The UAE federal Law 29 adopts a very broad definition of *special needs* to include people with temporary or permanent incapacity in physical, sensory, mental, communication, educational or psychological abilities (Reynolds n.d.).

Accommodations are changes that do not alter what is being taught and includes alterations of the environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to gain access to content and/ or complete assigned tasks (UAE MoE – SED 2010).

Modifications may be used to describe a change in the curriculum (UAE MoE – SED 2010).

e. Purpose – Research questions/specifications

The current study was carried out with the objective of understanding the existing procedures followed across private schools in Dubai regarding the identification and assessment practices of students with SEN. This study has a three-fold objective:

- i) To explore the procedures of identification of children with special educational needs in private schools in Dubai,
- ii) To investigate the assessment procedures including the accommodations or modifications available to students with special needs, and

- iii) To understand the challenges faced by educators regarding assessment processes for the SEN group and find ways to improve the provision of support services in schools.

Additionally, educators' opinion on the challenges faced regarding special assessments in regular classes and how these barriers can be overcome in the near future was also researched. The study outcomes could be used to gain insights regarding assessment processes used in private schools in UAE and make recommendations to improve these practices for children with SEN.

f. Structure of this project report

Chapter I introduced the background of this study along with the rationale, purpose and scope of the current research. This is followed by Chapter II which discusses the literature review including the theoretical framework and an analysis of the literature. The methodology employed is explained in Chapter III succeeded by an in depth analysis of the data collected in Chapter IV. The subsequent Chapter V has the conclusions, the limitations of this study, and some recommendations for future research. The references used for this report are enlisted in Chapter VI. The Appendices are enclosed in the final Chapter VII.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Inclusive education has been an emerging concept for the past two decades globally and necessitates the education system to continually renew and broaden its horizon. This section includes a detailed evaluation of the relevant areas of concern to the current project. These include the Identification process for students with SEN, the Assessment and Reporting procedures, the academic accommodations and modifications, the supporting legal framework, and prior research done in the UAE. Each of these areas of interest is discussed below.

a. Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

i) Identification or Diagnosis process for Students with SEN

The identification of SEN involves significant understanding of the need for diagnosis, validity of assessment practices, criteria for diagnosis, professionals involved, and the importance of the evaluation report to avail special services in schools (NCSE 2010). This identification process of students with SEN should be carried out by a multidisciplinary team using varied sources of information like observations, parents' report, numerous standardized assessments, progress monitoring information, informal tests, child self-evaluation or any other relevant data source (NJCLD 2011). Additionally, the research by Benson and Newman (2010) highlights the significance of using the actuarial methods, in addition to the clinical assessment, to enhance the identification or diagnosis. Nonetheless, if the goal is to successfully include these children in regular classrooms, important factors are improved teacher-student ratio, usage of cognitive activation techniques, training educators with differentiation methods and assessment practices that focus on their strengths rather than weaknesses (Lebeer et al. 2010). An awareness of cultural diversity in assessment process is an important factor to be taken into consideration (Gaad 2005/2006). Another significant factor to be examined is the involvement of parents in the SEN identification processes and educational program (McCloskey

2010). The upcoming section details the recent research reports on the assessment strategies used in schools.

ii) Assessment and Reporting procedures

The curriculum, assessment and reporting (CAR) provisions for students with SEN are essential to devise inclusive strategies to embrace the diverse learning needs of all pupils and treat each individual equally (ACARA 2012). A study by Rouse and Florian (2006) provided evidence that including students with SEN need not decrease the efficiency of education of other pupils. However, pedagogy including the teaching and learning environment, individualization of curriculum, a team approach, and appropriate assessments, is fundamental to the success of inclusion of the SEN group (Cornett 2006). Additionally, student engagement in the academic context needs to be recorded and assessed for evidence of learning as well as enhancing further learning formatively. This explains the purposes of assessments and how they should be ideally used and reported in schools.

Some significant factors affecting the assessment procedures are increased access to regular curricula, greater emphasis on formative assessments, timely feedback, and differentiation of instructions based on students' prior knowledge (NJCLD 2011). Additional factors which can improve the assessments are provision of appropriate accommodations or modifications, and use of other technological advances (New York SED 2006). Some recommendations to progress SEN services include teacher training, increased parental involvement, establishing appropriate policies, and cultural sensitivity (Gaad 2004 and Thekkepat 2009). The next part will explain the significance of the accommodations and modifications in assessments.

iii) Academic Accommodations and Modifications

Assessment accommodations and modifications are required to change the learning environment to cater to the individual needs of students with SEN. The

Accommodations allow children to demonstrate their understanding without reducing their learning objectives. In general, accommodations can be categorized into five groups, namely, Accommodation of Presentation, Accommodation of Scheduling, Accommodation of Timing, Accommodation of Response and Accommodation of Setting (NCLD 2005). Assessment accommodations alter the methods of testing pupils, however modifications alter the learning outcomes. Modifications decrease the academic goals by reducing the complexity of activities or lowering the number of tasks to aid a student to demonstrate his or her potential (UAE MoE – SED 2010).

Modifications should be considered only after all relevant accommodations are unsuccessful, as the child with a modified curriculum may be unable to get a standardized qualification and this would hamper the future career options (Florida DoE 2003). A comprehensive list of all provisions for students with SEN can be referenced in the US Federal Register (U.S. DoE 2006). A study by Thurlow (2010) showed the benefits of reading accommodation on assessments of students with disabilities. Another research by Maccini and Gagnon (2006) showed the benefits of simple math accommodations like extended time, reading problems aloud, and allowing the use of calculators on the assessments of students with SEN.

The assessment procedures including the accommodations or modifications only secure the participation of pupils with SEN and do not give them any additional benefit. The IEP including details of the accommodations for the students with SEN and the inclusive strategies adopted by the schools in Dubai are inspected by the KHDA annually. The following paragraph deliberates on the legal framework regarding inclusion in general.

iv) Legal Background

An international concern about equal opportunities and the basic educational rights of children has promoted legislation regarding these issues by the national

governments over the past twenty years (NCSE 2010). The IDEA (1997, 2004 & 2007) and Section 504 constitute the legal protection for students with SEN. IDEA 1997 specifies that pupils with SEN should be provided with relevant assessment accommodations to reduce the effect of their SEN to a minimum. The IDEA 2004 also reiterates the importance of identifying, assessing and providing relevant support services for children with disabilities ages 3-21 years. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) subsequently called the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 necessitates all students to participate in inclusive education with relevant accommodations. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) are crucial policies that influence appropriate provision for students with SEN and Disability (ACARA 2012).

The UAE federal law gathered momentum due to the UN Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities of 2006 (Reynolds n.d.). The UAE federal law no 29/2006 caters to the basic educational rights of all the children. An assessment department has been established to analyze the needs of children with SEN, train faculty, develop and implement new policies to support the SEN (Hassan 2010). Article 15/2006 set up a special committee to promote equal opportunities, appropriate academic plans, formulate revised policies and suitable support for pupils with SEN. In addition, the UAE federal law no.116/2009 highlights strategies for application of equal rights to education of the SEN group. The UAE Strategy 2010-2020 which aims to improvise school inspection system further strengthens the keenness to include the children with SEN. The KHDA school inspection handbook 2011-2012 categorically states that the school performance ratings will be linked to the promotion of the inclusive practices and the standards of support services offered to the SEN domain. Additionally, the UAE handbook of provisions for the SEN specifies the different categories of SEN with necessary educational services, the roles / responsibilities of the administration of SEN services, pre referral services, assessment strategies, and the appropriate accommodations and modifications (UAE

MoE - SED 2010). The next section discusses the prior research conducted on the key issues explored in this study.

v) Prior Research in the UAE for background information

The inclusive movement in the UAE was initiated by noted educationalists like Gaad (2001) and Gaad and Alghazo (2004). The UAE is progressing towards inclusive education with a rights-based approach, which is respecting all learners irrespective of their disabilities (Anati 2012). The UAE educational sector is progressing and the field of Special Education is undergoing a major reform (Shahbandari 2012 and Usman 2011). However, lack of well trained and qualified professionals has been cited as a chief deterrent to the inclusion process (Al Najami 2008). Gaad and Khan (2007) researched educators' attitude towards inclusive processes in the private sector in Dubai and their study revealed that the teachers were ill prepared for inclusion. Arif and Gaad (2008) conducted a study to investigate the efficacy of the SEN system and cited the lack of appropriate assessment of teachers and suitable training of staff as major obstacles to the inclusion process. A study by Alghazo (2005) found teachers to be incompetent in instructing students with disabilities and reiterated the importance of appropriate training. Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2010) investigated the extent to which teachers employed the testing modifications for students with disabilities in public schools. They highlighted the absence of clear federal policy on assessment modifications and the lack of relevant training to enhance teachers' awareness about inclusive educational practices. This brief review helps in understanding the UAE background regarding inclusion of the pupils with SEN. An analysis of the literature follows in the subsequent section.

b. Review and analysis of the literature

A transparent education system monitors the support services provided to students with SEN, and can be rigorously followed by trained professionals. Such a clear system leaves little room for inconsistencies, and pupils' rights to basic education

are less likely to be ignored (Csépe 2008). The NCSE (2010) report highlights the significance of the diagnosis of SEN, whereas the methods of identification are discussed by the NJCLD (2011). The importance of the actuarial techniques with regards to provision of support services is discussed by Benson and Newman (2010). The cultural aspect in the UAE is studied by Gaad (2005/2006), whereas parental involvement is explored by a study by McCloskey (2010). A lack of coherence in CAR for students with SEN and Disability across different countries was discussed by the ACARA (2012) report. Pedagogy, including the varied approaches leading to good inclusion practices is explained by Cornett (2006) and the main factors affecting the assessment processes are determined by NJCLD (2011). A few suggestions to enhance the SEN services in the local context are given by the prominent researcher Gaad (2004).

The UAE is in the progression towards achieving total inclusion with the MoE promising that by 2013 upto 60% schools will mainstream students with SEN and disabilities (Zaman 2010). The legal framework supporting this cause has been detailed above. The major deterrents as evidenced by prior research in the UAE are lack of well trained teachers and their attitudes towards inclusion (Gaad and Khan 2007, Arif and Gaad 2008, Al Najami 2008 and Al Ghazo 2005). The study by Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2010) examined the teachers' awareness regarding assessment modifications and recommended faculty training and further research to gain more insight into assessment processes. The current study explored the identification process, assessment procedures and the accommodations and modifications available across private schools in Dubai. In retrospect, the progression of classroom pedagogy can be greatly advanced by close interaction between the teachers and the academic researchers in the field of SEN (Sheehy et al. 2009). This section is followed by a detailed description of the methodology employed for the present research.

Chapter III: Methodology

The researcher conducted this qualitative study in totally three schools: one school following UK curriculum (School-A), one school following IB curriculum (School-B), and another school following US curriculum (School-C). The intention was to get a latitudinal perspective of assessment strategies followed for students with SEN.

a. Methods

The present study was carried out using qualitative methods with an inductive approach across private schools in Dubai. A qualitative perspective can assist educators to change the learning environment by enhancing its compatibility to all the students including those with SEN. This can be achieved by providing tangible information on the existing situation, which itself can act as agents of improvement (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). In addition, the qualitative strategies are appropriate when the researchers intend to gain insight, or interpret information rather than test their hypothesis (Merriam 2001 in McCloskey 2010). This was precisely the intention driving the current study. Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2010) conducted a survey research which focused on assessment accommodations using statistical methods across public schools in the UAE. The present study used their work as the basis for developing the researchable topic in the local context. However, this project had a broader perspective which included identification of children with SEN and assessment procedures used in schools including the testing accommodations and modifications. A descriptive objective of exploring the prevalent assessment practices, determining the problems faced by teacher in assessing students and suggesting some recommendations based on relevant research and the teachers' opinion in the local context guided the usage of qualitative methods.

b. Design and Instrumentation

This simple descriptive qualitative research was carried out by first disseminating Questionnaires in the 3 schools. The questionnaire items were developed after a

relevant literature review including recent research and textbooks (Frederickson and Cline 2002, Elhoweris and Alsheikh 2010, Florida DoE 2003, NJCLD 2010, NCSE 2010, Ohio DoE 2011, NCLD 2005, Alberta MoE 2006, and New York SED 2006). The questionnaires had 4 sections. The first section required teachers to fill in their background information discussed below. Section-B extracted information regarding the identification or diagnosis of children with SEN and the services offered by schools using open-ended questions. New qualitative data could be gathered by these open-ended questions (Woods 2006). Section-C of the questionnaire had a total of 9 open-ended questions regarding the assessment procedures. These questions were adapted from the 'Key questions in CAR development for SEN and Disability students' from the ACARA report (2012). A list regarding the frequently used accommodations and modifications were handed as an appendix which required the teachers to tick those used by the school. This list was designed based on the Accommodations Manual (Ohio DoE 2011), Accommodations and Modifications (Florida DoE 2003) and the 'Test Access and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities' (New York SED 2006). Teachers could also record any additional accommodations and/or modifications used by them.

Data was also collected on the reporting procedures, the decision makers in schools, purposes and types of assessments. The last section gathered information on the challenges faced by educators when providing special assessments for pupils with SEN and the strategies used to address these challenges or any suggestions to improve school services for the SEN group. The information collected was triangulated from general education teachers, SEN teachers, SENCO or Principal, as possible. Appendix-1 encloses the questionnaire used for this study. The questionnaires were followed up with in-depth interviews with the SEN teachers and/or SENCO/Principal. The questions asked in these interviews were also guided by the literature reviewed, data collected by questionnaires and personal experience.

i) Reliability and Validity

The researcher used qualitative methods employing questionnaires, interviews and utilized background data from previous research to confirm that correct procedures were applied. The questionnaire content was approved by the module coordinator, a noted researcher in the UAE, and this ensured the validity. The information collected during interviews was transcribed either during the interview or immediately afterwards to avoid loss of data.

ii) Ethics

All the teachers were treated with dignity and respect and their participation was voluntary. An informed consent was obtained from the educators before involving them in the current study and their anonymity was guaranteed and maintained (Bell 2005). Special care was taken to avoid invading their privacy or making them uncomfortable. The confidentiality of sensitive information was maintained in the report. The researcher was conscious of self bias as she is the parent of a child with learning disabilities and tried her best to be ethical at all times. This project was conducted with rigor and the intent of maximizing useful outcomes for the field of SEN. Appendix-5 encloses the Letter seeking permission from schools for their researcher to conduct the present study.

c. Sample

The participants included the general education teachers, the SENCO, principal, and special educators from 3 private schools following different international curricula in Dubai. A total of 20 questionnaires were distributed and 10 responses were obtained, allowing a response rate of 50%. Since all the 10 responses were duly completed, they were all considered for the current study. The majority of the participants were female (90%), which is typical of general national trends. The greater part of the sample were 30 years and above of age (80%) and the same percentage had an

experience of 5 years and above of working with students with SEN. Table no.1 below shows the break-up of the responses obtained.

	Special Educators (No. of responses)	General Education Teachers (No. of responses)	Principal / SENCO (No. of responses)
School-A	2	0	1
School-B	2	4	0
School-C	1	-	-

This survey was followed up with interviews with the Principal and the Learning Support Teacher at school-A, the special educator at the school-B and an informal interview with the Educational Psychologist in School-C.

This section is followed by the presenting the findings of this study along with detailed discussion and analysis of the results.

Chapter IV: Results and Discussion

This section describes in detail the findings of the present study and discusses them in the light of the theoretical background from the literature review. The contents of this section are covered in three parts according to each research question.

RQ1) To explore the procedures of identification of children with special educational needs in private schools in Dubai

An early diagnosis and appropriate intervention enhance the educational prospects for students with SEN. Children who fail to get early intervention find it increasingly difficult to cope with academic goals and this undermines their confidence, self-esteem and leads to a decreased motivation to participate in classroom tasks (Frederickson and Cline 2002). This can be partly avoided by active involvement of parents and good multidisciplinary collaboration. Some other recommendations by the authors include standardized screening at school entry level.

The findings of the current study regarding issues related to identification or diagnosis of children with SEN and the services offered by the private schools in Dubai are presented in detail as Appendix-3 and summarized in Table-1.

School	How are children with SEN diagnosed?	Support services offered by the school
School-A	Teacher referral, parents request, testing material / checklists, observations, professional diagnosis	Fulltime learning support teacher, resource room, pull-out sessions, additional support , IEPs, individual support, accommodations, full inclusion in mixed ability setup, modifications of facilities to aid student mobility
School-B	Teacher referral, parents request , specialized assessment tools such as WISC, WIAT, Aston etc, screening followed by professional diagnosis	pull-out programs, in-class support, IEPs, Shadow teachers and therapists through external centers (personally funded), resources like graphic organizers, regular parent meetings, full inclusion, accommodations/modifications
School-C	Educational evaluation	Co-taught Math &/or language arts classes, learning support teacher

Table-1: Identification/Diagnostic procedures for children with SEN and support services in private schools

All the schools researched seemed to have appropriate identification procedures in line with the suggestions by Frederick and Cline (2002) and NJCLD (2011). The interview with the principal of the school-A revealed that the school supported students with mild disabilities or SEN. The Learning Support Teacher acknowledged that they had very high academic standards set for all students. The school admissions policy required all aspiring pupils to appear for the entrance tests and get expected scores. This resulted in students with SEN who are high functioning to be able to get admissions and these children did not need any in-class support. They had additional support in the form of pull-out sessions, counseling, or observations by the learning support teacher to guide the general education teachers on appropriate strategies. Appendix-4 encloses all the interview summaries.

School-B offered comprehensive support to over a hundred students with SEN in form of in-class support, pullout support, remedial classes, shadow teachers and additional resources. The interview with the special educator affirmed that some of the services like the provision of shadow teachers or therapist services were arranged by the school but funded by the parents. The educational psychologist at the school-C informed that the school had an assessment including a psychological assessment for all children during admissions and students with SEN were not labeled, although they received relevant support services at school. This showed the differences in the way the students with SEN were managed by various schools. The next section will look at the assessment procedures followed in all three schools.

RQ2) To investigate the assessment procedures including the accommodations or modifications available to students with special needs

Prior research found that teachers in general are not adept in assessment procedures for pupils with SEN. This is endorsed by inappropriate assessments of students with SEN without a proper consideration of their individual needs (Government of Alberta Education 2009). The selection of assessment tools should be guided by the purpose of assessment and the reporting should be clear, consistent, and sensitively handled. The findings of the current study are specified as Table-2 below.

School	School-A	School-B	School-C
Type / basis of assessment	Individual needs, IEP, screening	IEP, standardized tests, Screens + ASTON	Professional psychological evaluation
Development of assessment	Background information from parents, staff & students,	Regular review of approaches, modified assessments, Teachers fill 'Record of Concern', anecdotal evidence	Referral, outside source
Students with SEN participate in assessments?	Yes	Most of them do, based on parents' request	No, changing now that school has a psychologist
Who carries out the assessments? Who determines accommodations / modifications?	Special educators conduct tests. SENCO/ pastoral leaders, psychologists decide accommodations	Special educators, management, specialists, feedback from class teachers, shadow teachers	School psychologist carries out tests. Student support team / regular teachers decide accommodations
Reporting procedure	track progress of IEP goals, find areas of concern, develop appropriate future level of support, inform teachers of strategies for SEN group, same reports as peers	Generate IEP, track progress of IEP goals, inform teachers, regular report card plus a separate report card to parents	Report cards mention receiving learning support by school psychologist
Purpose of assessment	Aid inclusion, formal tests, confidential records, enable students to attain their potential	Determine progress, track IEP goals are met, identify problem areas, measure understanding, inform future intervention	Determine level of support needed, decide best ways to meet individual needs

Table-1: Assessment procedures for children with SEN

This tabulated data shows different assessment procedures in three schools and the findings reveal school-C still developing at a slow pace. The results show an urgent need for trained professionals in schools and proper SEN systems in place (Arif and Gaad 2008).

The most commonly used assessment accommodations by educators across all three schools as ascertained by the current project are enlisted in Appendix-2. These findings are similar to those reported by previous research by Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2010). However, the accommodations of allowing students with SEN to use computers for tests, administering tests in multiple sessions, providing scribe or a reader, monitoring the student responses during tests, using effective behavioral accommodations and providing shadow teachers were commonly employed by educators in private schools. Some accommodations like using text-to-speech technology and use of assistive devices in assessments were hardly used. This finding is consistent with prior research by Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2010) and shows an urgent need to train teachers in the use of technology for students with SEN.

The following section deliberates on the obstacles faced by teachers regarding the assessment practices and possible ways to enhance the support services.

RQ3) To understand the challenges faced by educators regarding assessment processes for the SEN group and find ways to improve the provision of support services in schools.

The most important approach for teachers is based on an ‘acceptance of difference’ (ACARA 2012). Based on the findings of the present study, the need to train educators to understand the fact that inclusive education requires an understanding that it takes focused teaching for students with SEN was highlighted. The lack of clarity on behalf of the teachers regarding inclusive practices for students with SEN was highlighted by prior research in the UAE (Bradshaw 2009). This lack of

appropriate knowledge was reflected by the teachers in the current study as they enlisted the impediments as availability of right assessment, interpreting the results accurately, providing relevant accommodations, and handing alternate assessments. Some other barriers include inappropriate classroom layout, large number of students with SEN without sufficient support, lack of external agency support, inadequate parental involvement, time constraints, funds, and extra work load for teachers. The need for differentiated instruction, extra hours, and smaller class sizes by teachers and funds by management in the UAE was previously highlighted by Gaad (Thekkepat 2009).

Some strategies employed to address these concerns were collaborative efforts within the school and other schools or consultation with therapists, modified assessments with collaboration between regular teachers and SEN teachers, employing more trained staff, using varied tests with suitable accommodations, and involving students in assessment procedures. The importance of collaboration between school authorities was highlighted by previous research on SEN in the UAE (Arif and Gaad 2008).

The suggestions from the educators include establishing a proper SEN policy with clear procedures, training to teachers on SEN, small class contact time, individual support services, professional therapist services made available in schools, staffing more trained educators, having realistic IEP goals, offer differentiated curriculum. The need for having a clear policy in the UAE was mentioned by Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2010) and relevant teacher training was recommended by Arif and Gaad (2008). The other affective factors of smaller class size, greater resources and support services were promoted by a study conducted by Gaad and Khan (2007).

This discussion is followed by a conclusive section based on the present study results.

Chapter V: Conclusions

The present study explored the identification procedures of children with special educational needs and investigated the assessment procedures including the accommodations or modifications available in private schools in Dubai. This research utilized qualitative methods and attempted to understand the challenges faced by educators regarding assessment processes and propose a few suggestions to improve the provision of support services in K-12 educational context.

a. Discussions and Implications for Practice

This study has examined the assessment practices and its significance on including children with SEN in regular schools in the UAE. Successful inclusive practices implies addressing the issues of the special educational needs of students with empathy. The effective factors of early identification of special needs, appropriate assessments with suitable accommodations and modifications, having clear assessment policies, making relevant trained staff available in schools, better collaboration between general and special educators, and increased parental involvement can go a long way to ensure better participation of students with SEN. Some other provisions like availability of resources, training teachers to change their attitudes, better collaboration between schools to ensure professional sharing, a vast repertoire of pedagogical approaches to cater to individual needs of pupils and legislation to enforce compulsory admissions of students with SEN in all educational institutions would help them to gain access to general education.

b. Limitations

This study was conducted on a small scale and hence it may not be representative of the wide spectrum of private schools in Dubai. The sample size for the present study was small. However, the findings of this study were found to be consistent with several prior research conducted in the UAE as identified in the discussion section.

c. Recommendations for Future Area of Research

Further research is required to investigate the assessment practices in more private sector schools to get a broader picture, evaluate academic outcomes for students with SEN, incorporate parents' opinion on assessment processes, study the role and responsibilities of shadow teachers and methods of enhancing the systems of effectiveness in schools.

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Appendix-1: Questionnaire Form

The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation of services on offer for students with special educational needs (SEN) in schools in Dubai. This study specifically targets the core issues of Identification of pupils with SEN and Assessment procedures used in the private schools. Your valued opinion on the challenges faced and how these barriers can be overcome in the near future is also elicited. The study outcomes will be used to develop recommendations to improve the existing practices for children with special needs in private schools in Dubai.

Section A– Background information

This section of the questionnaire refers to background or biographical information. This information will allow us to compare groups of respondents. Once again, we assure you that your response will remain anonymous. Your co-operation is voluntary and highly appreciated.

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
2. Age (in years): _____
3. Your highest educational qualification: _____
4. Experience in teaching profession: _____ (years)
5. Experience with students with special needs: _____ (years)

Section B- Identification of children with special needs

This section of the questionnaire explores your experience with identification of children with special needs.

6. How are children with special needs diagnosed? (teachers, parents, multi-disciplinary team, specialists)

7. What are the services offered to students with special needs in the school? (facilities, accommodations, assistive devices, shadow teachers, therapies, IEP, full inclusion or pull out programs, additional support)

Section C- Assessment procedures for children with special needs

This section explores the assessment procedures and accommodations or modifications used for students with special needs in the school.

1. What type of assessment does the school use? (clear, consistent, transparent, moderated, planned, IEP based or individual case basis)

2. What is the process for developing the assessment?

3. Do all students with disabilities participate in the assessment? If not, please explain the reason.

4. Who carries out the assessment for SWD?

General education teachers

☐

Special educators

☐

Any

other

answer:

5. How is the test results used? (formative/summative)

6. What is the purpose of assessment? (prior knowledge, progress, curriculum innovation, IEP modification, feedback)

7. Who determines if a student with disabilities needs accommodations in order to participate in the assessment?

8. What accommodations or modifications are available to students with disabilities?

(Please use the list of accommodations and modifications available as an Appendix to answer this question)

9. How will the test scores of students with disabilities be reported? (Do Report Cards mention special needs category?)

10. Assessments used are formal or informal? (mention specific types used)

Section D- *Your valuable opinion*

11. Briefly describe the challenges faced by educators when providing special assessment procedures for pupils with SEN?

12. What strategies were utilized to address the concerns?

13. What are your recommendations that would assist the school to provide improved services to students with special needs?

14. Any other comments or suggestions?

Thank you for your co-operation in completing this questionnaire. Your time and participation is highly valued and this information will be utilized for the betterment of the school life of children with special needs.

If you have any questions concerning your participation in this project, you may also contact Prof. Eman Gaad, Dean, British University in Dubai.

<hr/>	<hr/>
<i>Participant</i>	<i>Date</i>
 <hr/>	 <hr/>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Date</i>

Appendix – List of Accommodations and Modifications

(Please use this to answer Question 8 of the form – Tick the ones used in your school)

Assessment Accommodations

A) Presentation accommodations

- Read the test items aloud to students.

- Use text-to-speech technology to communicate directions or test items.
 - Let the student read the test items to self while working on the assessment.
 - Provide copies of tests in Braille or in large print formats.
 - Let the student use assistive technology for magnification or amplification.
 - Let the student use a positioning tool to enhance visual attention on the test.
 - Use blank colored transparencies or overlays to enhance visual perception.
 - Use symbols on the test or answer form that help the student follow directions.
 - Provide a sign language interpreter for oral directions.
 - Read the test directions and writing prompt aloud.
 - Reread or explain the directions of the test if the student needs it.
 - Underline or highlight important words in the directions or test items.
 - Give extra examples for practice to make sure the student knows what to do.
 - Adjust the test appearance, e.g., margins, spacing, increased space between test items, fewer items on a page, etc.
 - Adjust the test design (T/F, multiple choice, matching)
 - Adjust to recall with cues, cloze, word lists.
 - Provide tabbed or modified pages for easy turning.
 - Give papers secured to the work area.
 - Providing a taped test.
 - Providing a reader or a scribe.
 - Any other
-

B) Response accommodations

- Let the student use increased space for answering test questions.
 - Let the student respond orally, dictate answers, or tape record answers.
 - Let the student sign responses to an interpreter.
 - Let the student use a typewriter or word processor to write answers.
 - Let the student write on the test booklet instead of writing on an answer sheet.
 - Let the student Braille responses on a separate paper.
 - Let the student use speech-to-text technology to record responses.
 - Monitor the test to determine if responses are recorded in the correct space.
 - Give partial credit for answers to extended response questions.
 - Let the student use an adaptive calculator to solve math problems.
 - Let the student use technology for writing essays or long answers.
 - waiving grammatical errors
 - Any other
-

C) Timing/Schedule accommodations

- Let students have additional time to complete tests.
- Break tests into small sections and let students take them over a period of days, if needed.

- Let the student take short breaks during the test period.
 - Let the student take the test at a certain time of day.
 - Any other
-

D) Setting accommodations

- Give the test to the student alone or in a small group.
 - Let the student take the test in another room where there are no distractions.
 - Let the student use needed adaptive furniture or equipment.
 - Providing noise buffers (e.g., headphones).
 - Any other
-

E) Behavior accommodations

- Let students use a study enclosure to complete independent work.
 - Give students work that can be completed in short periods of time.
 - Let students use a timer to monitor how much longer they have to work.
 - Reinforce positive behaviors for following class rules.
 - Make a list of consequences for breaking rules.
 - Provide activities for students during free time.
 - Use prompts and follow routines.
 - Let students sit next to an aide or volunteer.
 - Identify a study buddy who can help students when the teacher is busy.
 - Provide instruction individually or in small groups.
 - Any other
-

Assessment Modifications

- Partial Completion of Requirements
 - Expectations below Age or Grade Level
 - Alternate Assessments
 - Requiring a child to learn less material
 - Reducing assignments and assessments
 - Revising assignments or assessments to make them easier
 - Any other
-

Appendix-2: Most commonly used Accommodations and Modifications in private schools in Dubai.

Presentation accommodations

- Read the test items aloud to students.
- Let the student read the test items to self while working on the assessment.
- Provide copies of tests in large print formats.
- Use blank colored transparencies or overlays to enhance visual perception.
- Read the test directions and writing prompt aloud.
- Underline or highlight important words in the directions or test items.
- Adjust the test design (True/False, multiple choice, matching)
- Providing a reader or a scribe.

Response accommodations

- Let the student use technology for writing long answers or computers for responses.
- waiving grammatical errors
- Let the student respond orally, dictate answers, or tape record answers.

Timing/Schedule accommodations

- Let students have additional time to complete tests.
- Let the student take short breaks during the test period.
- Let the student take the test at a certain time of day.

Setting accommodations

- Give the test to the student alone or in a small group.
- Let the student take the test in another room where there are no distractions.
- Let the student use needed adaptive furniture or equipment.

Behavior accommodations

- Give students work that can be completed in short periods of time.
- Let students use a timer to monitor how much longer they have to work.
- Reinforce positive behaviors for following class rules.
- Make a list of consequences for breaking rules.
- Provide activities for students during free time.
- Use prompts and follow routines.
- Let students sit next to an aide or volunteer.
- Identify a study buddy who can help students when the teacher is busy.
- Provide instruction individually or in small groups.

Assessment modifications

- Reducing assignments and assessments
- Revising assignments or assessments to make them easier
- Partial Completion of Requirements
- Expectations below Age or Grade Level
- Requiring a child to learn less material

Appendix-3: Sample Completed Questionnaires (Special Educator - 1 and general Education Teacher – 1)

Questionnaire Form

The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation of services on offer for students with special educational needs (SEN) in schools in Dubai. This study specifically targets the core issues of Identification of pupils with SEN and Assessment procedures used in the private schools. Your valued opinion on the challenges faced and how these barriers can be overcome in the near future is also elicited. The study outcomes will be used to develop recommendations to improve the existing practices for children with special needs in private schools in Dubai.

Section A– Background information

This section of the questionnaire refers to background or biographical information. This information will allow us to compare groups of respondents. Once again, we assure you that your response will remain anonymous. Your co-operation is voluntary and highly appreciated.

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☒
2. Age (in years): 38
3. Your highest educational qualification: Ma. Msc
4. Experience in teaching profession: 12 (years)
5. Experience with students with special needs: 9 (years)

Section B- Identification of children with special needs

This section of the questionnaire explores your experience with identification of children with special needs.

6. How are children with special needs diagnosed?

Tested using different testing material/Checklists and
observations - together with teacher input.

7. What are the services offered to students with special needs in the school? (ex. facilities, accommodations, assistive devices, shadow teachers, therapies, IEP, full inclusion or pull out programs, additional support, any other)

IEP's, Support classes on an individual basis,
accommodations: extra time, computer etc.

Section C- Assessment procedures for children with special needs

This section explores the assessment procedures and accommodations or modifications used for students with special needs in the school.

1. What type of assessment does the school use? (ex. IEP based, individual case basis, any other)

IEP and individual case base.

2. What is the process for developing the assessment?

Gathering all background information from parents, staff
student - before embarking on observation and
testing.

3. Do all students with special needs participate in the assessment? If not, please explain the reason.

all students participate in the assessment otherwise
it would not be an accurate assessment.

4. Who carries out the assessment for SWD?

General education teachers ☐

Special educators ☒

Any other answer: _____

5. How is the test results used?

to inform parents and teachers, to guide appropriate
teaching and develop IEP's

6. What is the purpose of assessment?

To find out where a student is finding difficulties or
any reason for areas of concern and to be able
to help and support appropriately.

7. Who determines if a student with disabilities needs accommodations in order to participate in the assessment?

SENCO / psychologists

8. What accommodations or modifications are available to students with disabilities?

(Please use the list of accommodations and modifications available as an Appendix to answer this question)

9. How will the test scores of students with disabilities be reported? (Do Report Cards mention special needs category?)

It will be used only for records and developing IEPs.

10. Assessments used are formal or informal? (mention specific types used)

Section D- Your valuable opinion

11. Briefly describe the challenges faced by educators when providing special assessment procedures for pupils with SEN?

> Whether the test really is going to be suitable
> How the student responds on one day really varies from day to day.

12. What strategies were utilized to address the concerns?

• Use a broad range of tests
• Test on different days.

13. What are your recommendations that would assist the school to provide improved services to students with special needs?

more for teachers to improve knowledge and understanding of students with different SEN needs.

14. Any other comments or suggestions?

Thank you for your co-operation in completing this questionnaire. Your time and participation is highly valued and this information will be utilized for the betterment of the school life of children with special needs.

If you have any questions concerning your participation in this project, you may also contact Prof. Eman Gaad, Dean, British University in Dubai.

Neha H. Sharma

Participant

18/4/2013

Date

Neha. H. Sharma

Researcher

Date

Appendix – List of Accommodations and Modifications

(Please use this to answer Question 8 of the form – Tick the ones used in your school)

Assessment Accommodations

A) Presentation accommodations

- Read the test items aloud to students.
- Use text-to-speech technology to communicate directions or test items.
- ☒ • Let the student read the test items to self while working on the assessment.
- ☒ • Provide copies of tests in Braille or in large print formats.
- ☒ • Let the student use assistive technology for magnification or amplification.
- ☒ • Let the student use a positioning tool to enhance visual attention on the test.
- ☒ • Use blank colored transparencies or overlays to enhance visual perception.
- Use symbols on the test or answer form that help the student follow directions.
- Provide a sign language interpreter for oral directions.
- Read the test directions and writing prompt aloud.
- Reread or explain the directions of the test if the student needs it.
- Underline or highlight important words in the directions or test items.
- Give extra examples for practice to make sure the student knows what to do.
- Adjust the test appearance, e.g., margins, spacing, increased space between test items, fewer items on a page, etc.
- ☒ • Adjust the test design (T/F, multiple choice, matching)
- Adjust to recall with cues, cloze, word lists.
- Provide tabbed or modified pages for easy turning.
- Give papers secured to the work area.
- Providing a taped test.
- Providing a reader or a scribe.
- Any other _____

B) Response accommodations

- Let the student use increased space for answering test questions.
- Let the student respond orally, dictate answers, or tape record answers.
- Let the student sign responses to an interpreter.
- ☒ • Let the student use a typewriter or word processor to write answers.
- ☒ • Let the student write on the test booklet instead of writing on an answer sheet.
- Let the student Braille responses on a separate paper.
- Let the student use speech-to-text technology to record responses.
- Monitor the test to determine if responses are recorded in the correct space.
- Give partial credit for answers to extended response questions.
- Let the student use an adaptive calculator to solve math problems.
- ☒ • Let the student use technology for writing essays or long answers.
- ☒ • waiving grammatical errors
- Any other _____

C) Timing/Schedule accommodations

- Let students have additional time to complete tests. ✓
- Break tests into small sections and let students take them over a period of days, if needed. ✓
- Let the student take short breaks during the test period. ✓
- Let the student take the test at a certain time of day. ✓
- Any other _____

D) Setting accommodations

- Give the test to the student alone or in a small group. ✓
- Let the student take the test in another room where there are no distractions. ✓
- Let the student use needed adaptive furniture or equipment. ✓
- Providing noise buffers (e.g., headphones). ✓
- Any other _____

E) Behavior accommodations

- Let students use a study enclosure to complete independent work. ✓
- Give students work that can be completed in short periods of time. ✓
- Let students use a timer to monitor how much longer they have to work. ✓
- Reinforce positive behaviors for following class rules. ✓
- Make a list of consequences for breaking rules. ✓
- Provide activities for students during free time. ✓
- Use prompts and follow routines. ✓
- Let students sit next to an aide or volunteer. ✓
- Identify a study buddy who can help students when the teacher is busy. ✓
- Provide instruction individually or in small groups. ✓
- Any other _____

Assessment Modifications

- Partial Completion of Requirements
- Expectations below Age or Grade Level
- Alternate Assessments
- Requiring a child to learn less material
- Reducing assignments and assessments ✓
- Revising assignments or assessments to make them easier
- Any other _____

IB

Gen. Edu. T.

Questionnaire Form

The purpose of this study is to understand the current situation of services on offer for students with special educational needs (SEN) in schools in Dubai. This study specifically targets the core issues of Identification of pupils with SEN and Assessment procedures used in the private schools. Your valued opinion on the challenges faced and how these barriers can be overcome in the near future is also elicited. The study outcomes will be used to develop recommendations to improve the existing practices for children with special needs in private schools in Dubai.

Section A– Background information

This section of the questionnaire refers to background or biographical information. This information will allow us to compare groups of respondents. Once again, we assure you that your response will remain anonymous. Your co-operation is voluntary and highly appreciated.

1. Gender: Male ☒ Female ☐
2. Age (in years): 31
3. Your highest educational qualification: Bachelor
4. Experience in teaching profession: 6 (years)
5. Experience with students with special needs: 1 (years)

Section B- Identification of children with special needs

This section of the questionnaire explores your experience with identification of children with special needs.

6. How are children with special needs diagnosed?

Teacher referrals + parental concerns to the Learning Support team.

7. What are the services offered to students with special needs in the school? (ex. facilities, accommodations, assistive devices, shadow teachers, therapies, IEP, full inclusion or pull out programs, additional support, any other)

Shadow teachers, IEP, ~~full~~ inclusion, pull out of second language program.

Section C- Assessment procedures for children with special needs

This section explores the assessment procedures and accommodations or modifications used for students with special needs in the school.

1. What type of assessment does the school use? (ex. IEP based, individual case basis, any other)

IEP based.

2. What is the process for developing the assessment?

Consideration of foundation, core and challenge questions so that each assessment task provides opportunity for success for each student, as well as challenge for more able students.

3. Do all students with special needs participate in the assessment? If not, please explain the reason.

Yes.

4. Who carries out the assessment for SWD?

General education teachers ☐

Special educators ☒

Any other answer: _____

5. How is the test results used?

To guide instruction in the future and to provide feedback on their current ideas/skills.

6. What is the purpose of assessment?

To measure the skills, knowledge and understanding of a student in any given subject.

7. Who determines if a student with disabilities needs accommodations in order to participate in the assessment?

External assessors.

8. What accommodations or modifications are available to students with disabilities?

(Please use the list of accommodations and modifications available as an Appendix to answer this question)

9. How will the test scores of students with disabilities be reported? (Do Report Cards mention special needs category?)

As per any other students.

10. Assessments used are formal or informal? (mention specific types used)

Formal - tests, investigations, projects
Informal - tests, research, homework

Section D- Your valuable opinion

11. Briefly describe the challenges faced by educators when providing special assessment procedures for pupils with SEN?

Writing new assessment criteria and new questions
for each student with a special need can be
very time consuming for classroom teachers.

12. What strategies were utilized to address the concerns?

Classroom teachers and student assistants participate
and collaborate in the ~~new~~ assessment development procedure.

13. What are your recommendations that would assist the school to provide improved services to students with special needs?

Offer differentiated curriculum/content for SEN.

14. Any other comments or suggestions?

Difficulties often arise in the push for differentiation of tasks, content, assessment and the necessity of reliable / uniform assessment data.

Thank you for your co-operation in completing this questionnaire. Your time and participation is highly valued and this information will be utilized for the betterment of the school life of children with special needs.

If you have any questions concerning your participation in this project, you may also contact Prof. Eman Gaad, Dean, British University in Dubai.

T. Gause
Participant

13/2/13
Date

Neha. H. Sharma
Researcher

Date

Appendix – List of Accommodations and Modifications

(Please use this to answer Question 8 of the form – Tick the ones used in your school)

Assessment Accommodations

A) Presentation accommodations

- ✓ • Read the test items aloud to students.
- Use text-to-speech technology to communicate directions or test items.
- ✓ • Let the student read the test items to self while working on the assessment.
- Provide copies of tests in Braille or in large print formats.
- Let the student use assistive technology for magnification or amplification.
- Let the student use a positioning tool to enhance visual attention on the test.
- Use blank colored transparencies or overlays to enhance visual perception.
- Use symbols on the test or answer form that help the student follow directions.
- Provide a sign language interpreter for oral directions.
- ✓ • Read the test directions and writing prompt aloud.
- ✓ • Reread or explain the directions of the test if the student needs it.
- ✓ • Underline or highlight important words in the directions or test items.
- ✓ • Give extra examples for practice to make sure the student knows what to do.
- ✓ • Adjust the test appearance, e.g., margins, spacing, increased space between test items, fewer items on a page, etc.
- ✓ • Adjust the test design (T/F, multiple choice, matching)
- Adjust to recall with cues, cloze, word lists.
- Provide tabbed or modified pages for easy turning.
- Give papers secured to the work area.
- Providing a taped test.
- ✓ • Providing a reader or a scribe.
- Any other _____

B) Response accommodations

- Let the student use increased space for answering test questions.
- Let the student respond orally, dictate answers, or tape record answers.
- Let the student sign responses to an interpreter.
- Let the student use a typewriter or word processor to write answers.
- Let the student write on the test booklet instead of writing on an answer sheet.
- Let the student Braille responses on a separate paper.
- Let the student use speech-to-text technology to record responses.
- Monitor the test to determine if responses are recorded in the correct space.
- Give partial credit for answers to extended response questions.
- Let the student use an adaptive calculator to solve math problems.
- Let the student use technology for writing essays or long answers.
- waiving grammatical errors
- Any other _____

C) Timing/Schedule accommodations

- ✓ • Let students have additional time to complete tests.
- Break tests into small sections and let students take them over a period of days, if needed.
- ✓ • Let the student take short breaks during the test period.
- Let the student take the test at a certain time of day.
- Any other _____

D) Setting accommodations

- ✓ • Give the test to the student alone or in a small group.
- ✓ • Let the student take the test in another room where there are no distractions.
- Let the student use needed adaptive furniture or equipment.
- Providing noise buffers (e.g., headphones).
- Any other _____

E) Behavior accommodations

- Let students use a study enclosure to complete independent work.
- ✓ • Give students work that can be completed in short periods of time.
- ✓ • Let students use a timer to monitor how much longer they have to work.
- ✓ • Reinforce positive behaviors for following class rules.
- ✓ • Make a list of consequences for breaking rules.
- ✓ • Provide activities for students during free time.
- ✓ • Use prompts and follow routines.
- ✓ • Let students sit next to an aide or volunteer.
- ✓ • Identify a study buddy who can help students when the teacher is busy.
- ✓ • Provide instruction individually or in small groups.
- Any other _____

Assessment Modifications

- Partial Completion of Requirements
- Expectations below Age or Grade Level
- Alternate Assessments
- Requiring a child to learn less material
- ✓ • Reducing assignments and assessments
- ✓ • Revising assignments or assessments to make them easier
- Any other _____

Appendix-4: Interviews with the Principal, SENCO, Educational Psychologist and Special educators

I) Interview with the Learning Support Teacher (S)

Researcher (R): Could you give a brief background about the students with SEN at this school?

S: We support full inclusion of students with SEN in the regular classrooms in mixed ability groups. They are provided with additional support with pull-out classes, counseling or additional academic support. A few need shadow teachers. There is good collaboration between the general education teachers and the learning support. I do not tell the teachers about the SEN label as most of our students are high performing children and a SEN label makes results in teachers lowering their expectations. We want teachers to have high expectations of our students to help them perform better.

I have made the SEN area quite bright and happy place to learn, so students feel special when they come here for support. They get the feeling that the elite ones get to come here and are very excited to come here for additional support. We do need more trained staff and also the general education teachers need training to make their attitudes more positive towards students with SEN. I have been in this school for 9 years and have developed an emotional bond with all my students. However, every passing year the students change and so do the challenges as special educator. It is a learning process for me too.

R: How many students with SEN study at your school?

S: 25 students with SEN and 30 with other children with issues needing counseling.

R: What are the different categories of children with special needs in the school?

S: Aspergers, Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Cerebral Palsy among others.

R: What are the admission procedures for students with SEN?

S: All the prospective candidates have to appear for an entrance test. Our school has very high academic standards and so most of the children with SEN are high functioning students. This is an ideal school for children with high IQs or high performing students with SEN. These students do not need in-class support. The pull-out sessions suffice.

R: How many special educators work in the department?

S: I am the only full time Learning support teacher. We had 2 part-time teachers, but they have not been coming in recent weeks. We need some part-time trained teachers.

R: Which nationalities of students with SEN do you coach?

S: Most of them are from UK or Europe. I have one Indian student and an Emirati student too.

R: Do you face any additional difficulty with the assessment process including the accommodations and modifications?

S: The accommodation of extra time based on individual needs, sometimes student responses vary with time and parental involvement can be an affective factor.

R: Do you need to individualize curriculum?

S: Not needed.

R: What kind of strategies do you employ with students with SEN?

S: Everyday is a learning experience. The strategies to support these children varies according to individual needs. Most students have emotional needs which are supported by counseling. At times when a regular teacher has any problem, I go and observe the class and advice how the teacher can change her teaching approach to suit the particular student's needs. For example, children with dyslexia need help with organizational skills, writing techniques and English. A child with ADHD would need strategies to improve his concentration and we also play memory games. Students with Aspergers' syndrome would need help with social skills and counseling to support his emotional needs. Even the collaboration between teachers and students needs to be looked at for a smooth functioning.

R: Did you need the services of any specialist therapists or educational psychologist?

S: Not needed in the school, if any child needs therapist service, it is managed on a personal basis by their parents.

R: What would be your recommendations for improving the inclusion scenario in the UAE?

S: Teachers need to get professionally trained to become accepting of children with SEN. They need to change their attitudes and clear policies which enforce schools to admit children with SEN.

R: Thank you for your valuable time.

II) Interview with the Principal (P): Summary

P: At our school, we encourage the pupils to develop their talents not only in academics, but in sports, music, history, or any field that they are interested in. As educators, we believe in overall development of a child. We support inclusion of students with SEN in our school. We have about 25 students with mild learning disabilities. There are no children with severe needs. They are provided with any additional support needed. They are fully accepted by peers and there are no bullying issues here. We have one full time Learning support teacher and two part time teachers. They make all the decisions about the assessment practices and any accommodations or modifications needed. We have a good collaboration between the regular teachers and the SEN department, but the regular teachers are not aware of the special assessment procedures. This is taken care by the SEN department alone. Almost all of the students with SEN who graduated from this school went to study further at prestigious universities.

III) Interview with the SEN teacher (T): Summary

T: We have approximately 140 students with SEN across various grades in this school. These children are of mixed nationalities and are fully included in the general education classrooms. They are provided with in-class support, pull-out classes, extra support classes, shadow teachers, therapists and counseling in the school. However, the funds for the shadow teachers, therapists and counseling are managed by their parents. We encourage a professional diagnosis of each identified

student and those at risk. Every child with SEN has an IEP and regular monitoring of the IEP goals are ensured. The school provides the appropriate resources to help the SEN department and all the regular teachers are supportive too. We use specialized assessment tools like WISC, WIAT, ASTON, and others. Anecdotal evidence is maintained and these students are assessed informally. They are provided with relevant accommodations to support them. The teachers have to fill a 'Record of Concern' showing the students' strengths and weaknesses. The assessments are carried out by general education teachers with the help of shadow teachers or the special educators depending on the child's needs. We have good collaboration between general education teachers and special educators and have a consensus on what needs to be assessed for every child. Establishing a SEN policy with clear assessment procedures and roles of each person would help successful inclusion.

IV) Informal chat with the Educational Psychologist (E): Summary

E: Our school supports complete inclusion of students with SEN or disabilities. Every child has to undergo a psychological assessment and hence each student has a file or an IEP. This ensures that there is no marginalization of the SEN group. We have two special educators to support the students with SEN. There are no bullying issues regarding the SEN group. The assessments are conducted by me. We have weekly meetings between the regular teachers and the learning support staff. The assessments are used to determine the level of support needed and see how best this fits the child's learning needs. Additional support is provided for Math and Language Arts too. Some recommendations to enhance inclusion would include individual or small class contact time with learning support teacher.

Appendix-5: Letter seeking permission from schools



20 January 2013

To Whom It May Concern

This is to certify that Ms Neha H. Sharma (Student ID: 110119) is a registered student on the Masters of Education – Special and Inclusive Education programme in The British University in Dubai since January 2012.

As part of her course requirements, Ms Sharma is required to complete a dissertation. She is conducting a research for this purpose. 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 Sharma's request.

Yours sincerely,



Nandini Uchil
Head of Student Administration

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