

Teachers' and Mothers' Satisfaction with Resource Room Programs in Jordan

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Abstract

This paper reports the results of an investigation of satisfaction of 135 resource room teachers and 190 mothers of children served in resource room programs in Jordan. Information from teachers was gathered using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom visits. Information from parents was gathered using a brief questionnaire. Teachers reported a moderate level of satisfaction with working conditions in resource rooms. They were most satisfied with their job as resource room teachers and relationships with colleagues. They were most dissatisfied with salary and fringe benefits and family involvement in educational programs. Mothers were highly satisfied with resource rooms. They were most satisfied with the improvement in the academic performance of their children in the resource room and least satisfied with the school's communication with them.

Introduction

Jordan has recently made progress in teaching students with special education needs in public schools (Al Khatib & Al Khatib, 2008; Al Jabery & Zumberg, 2008; Hadidi, 1998). The resource room has been the major service-delivery model used by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to help students with mild disabilities stay in public schools (McBride, 2007). Resource rooms serve children from grade two to grade six. These rooms seek to support student's learning in the regular classroom. They are not intended to be an alternative educational setting. A student is referred to a resource room only after the regular classroom teacher, parents, the resource room teacher, and the principal jointly agree that resource room placement is appropriate (Directorate of Special Education, 2008).

Students referred to the resource room are grouped into small groups each consisting of 4-6 students. The resource room teacher is expected to teach 3-4 groups a day. In some cases, students are assisted on individual basis (Directorate of Special Education, 2008). MOE has made reasonable efforts to recruit teachers who are better qualified. Universities in Jordan have been offering programs in special education for many years. In addition, MOE offers interested regular classroom teachers a one-year diploma program in learning disabilities (Directorate of Special Education, 2008).

MOE has not yet evaluated these resource rooms. However, some studies conducted by university faculty members and graduate students evaluated different aspects of resource room programs in Jordan lately. For example, both Al Ayed (2003) and Hadidi (2003) studied problems faced by resource room teachers in Jordan have been investigated. These researchers

found that most common problems were: working with parents, school regulations, school community, instructional resources, program delivery in the resource room, referral and diagnosis, and teachers' role.

Fraihat (2007) investigated teachers' and parents' satisfaction with services offered by resource rooms. One hundred twenty teachers and 190 parents participated in the study. Results showed that both teachers and parents were generally satisfied with services. Bairat (2005) also investigated parents' satisfaction with educational services offered to their children with learning disabilities in resource rooms. Parents were most satisfied with teacher skills and least satisfied with the progress made by their children.

This study was conducted to evaluate teachers' and mothers' perceptions of resource room programs in Jordan. The study attempted to answer the following two questions:

1. What is the level of teachers' satisfaction with the working conditions in resource rooms?
2. What is the level of mothers' satisfaction with programs offered to their children in resource rooms?

Methods and Procedures

Participants

An accessible sample of 135 resource room teachers from 12 out of 36 educational directorates in the Kingdom participated in this study. They represented 24% of the population (Al Khatib & Al Kahtib, 2008). Ninety seven percent had a special education degree (42% had a Bachelors, 10% had a Masters, 45% had a high diploma, and 3% had a non-special education

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degree). According to teaching experience, 30% had five years or less, 33% had 5-10 years, and 37% had more than 10 years. Seventy percent of participants were females and 30% were males. Teachers' age ranged from 22 to 48 years, their mean age being 28.5 years.

Also, an accessible sample of 190 mothers agreed to voluntarily participate in this study. Mothers' age ranged from 21 to 52 with a mean of 34.5. Fifty two percent of mothers held a university degree and 48% had high school diploma.

Data Collection Methods

For the purposes of this study, a questionnaire containing 18 items (see Table 1) was developed and used to assess teacher satisfaction with working conditions in resource room programs. The questionnaire included items mentioned in previous local research (Al Ayed, 2003; Fraihat, 2007; Hadidi, 2003) and interviews held with both teachers and supervisors. The initial version of the questionnaire was modified based on a review by a panel of experienced supervisors and resource room teachers of the clarity and relevance of questionnaire items. Then, the questionnaire was administered to individual or small groups of teachers by two research assistants trained by the researchers. Participants' responses to the questionnaire ranged from 1 to 3. To create index levels for responses, absolute cut-off points were established as follows: 1.00-1.66 (low level of satisfaction), 1.67-2.33 (medium level of satisfaction), and 2.34-3.00 (high level of satisfaction).

Semi-structured interviews with ten teachers and visits to their classrooms were conducted to collect additional information about certain aspects of resource rooms. The purpose of classroom visits was to observe the physical setting, materials and aids available, student files, etc. Interpersonal interactions between the teacher and students could be observed in only three classrooms.

Mothers' satisfaction was measured by a brief questionnaire consisting of four items (see Table 2). Most copies of this questionnaire were distributed by the two research assistants or teachers to mothers at drop-off and pick-up times of their children to and from the schools. The remaining copies were sent home to mothers with their children after a phone call from teachers or principals. As with the teachers' questionnaire, mothers' responses also ranged from 1 to 3 and the same index levels were used.

Results

Teachers' Satisfaction with Working Conditions in Resource Rooms

One hundred thirty five Jordanian resource room teachers responded to an 18-item questionnaire addressing their satisfaction with the working conditions in resource rooms. Results are shown in Table 1. Teachers were moderately satisfied

with working conditions in resource rooms. They demonstrated a medium level of satisfaction on 12 out of 18 items, a low level of satisfaction on 4 items, and a high level of satisfaction on 2 items. They were most satisfied with their job as resource room teachers and relationships with colleagues. They were most dissatisfied with salary and fringe benefits, family involvement in educational programs, and opportunities for professional development.

Interviews with teachers and visits to their rooms revealed the following: (a) duties of resource room teachers are basically self-defined because there are no clear job descriptions; (b) decisions related to resource room placement, the process of instruction, and the time a child may stay in a resource room are unsystematic; (c) resource room teachers are generally doing very little in terms of curriculum adaptation or alternative testing methods; (d) in-service training of resource room teachers is seasonal and conducted in ways that are not expected to have real impact on teacher practices; and (e) resource rooms are equipped with few educational resources that are of limited educational value for students with special needs.

Resource room teachers reported that they were not offered opportunities to interact with their colleagues. In fact, the researchers felt a sense of isolation among these teachers. They suggested that awareness programs and special incentives have to be offered to principals in order to motivate them to become genuinely committed to practical support for resource rooms. Finally, there was an assumption held by teachers that their roles were confined to academic skills and that supporting students in resource rooms was their sole responsibility.

Mothers' Satisfaction with Resource Room Programs

Table 2 shows mothers' responses to the 4 questionnaire items. As can be seen in the table, mothers were generally satisfied with resource rooms. In particular, they were most satisfied with the improvement in the academic performance of their child in the resource room. They were least satisfied with the school's communication with them.

Discussion

The results of this study shed light on how resource room teachers in Jordan function and what needs to be done to enable them to assist students learn more effectively. The results of the present study are consistent, to a large extent, with the findings of previous studies (Al Ayed, 2003; Hadidi, 2003). However, the present study adds much information to what has been available thus far.

The working conditions of resource room teachers need to be improved. The results revealed that resource room teachers were generally moderately satisfied with their work. Major sources of dissatisfaction among these teachers were: low salaries, lack of family involvement, unavailability of support staff, limited opportunities for professional development,

Table 1

Teachers' Satisfaction with Working Conditions in Resource Rooms (n=135)

No.	Item	Level of Satisfaction**						M*	SD
		3		2		1			
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	Salary and fringe benefits	2	1.5	58	43.0	75	55.6	1.35	.56
2	Opportunity for professional development	7	5.2	68	44.4	60	44.4	1.61	.59
3	School regulations related to adapting the curriculum to meet needs of students	17	12.6	70	51.9	48	35.6	1.77	.66
4	Time available to collaborate with regular classroom teachers	45	33.3	72	53.3	18	13.3	2.20	.66
5	Adequacy of student assessment	41	30.4	72	53.3	22	16.3	2.14	.67
6	Physical aspects of the work environment	36	1.96	57	42.2	42	31.1	1.96	.76
7	Support received from school principal	16	11.9	68	50.4	51	37.8	2.26	.66
8	Family involvement in educational programs	10	7.4	43	31.9	82	60.7	1.47	.63
9	Progress of students	31	23.0	90	66.7	14	10.4	2.13	.57
10	Amount of time available for planning what to teach and how to teach	56	41.5	66	48.9	13	9.6	2.32	.64
11	Amount of paperwork required	29	21.5	55	40.7	51	37.8	1.84	.76
12	Relationships with colleagues	69	50.4	52	38.5	15	11.1	2.39	.68
13	Teacher load	50	37.0	65	48.1	20	14.8	2.22	.69
14	Availability of technical support	9	6.7	48	35.6	78	57.8	1.49	.62
15	Quantity and quality of feedback from supervisors	20	14.8	74	54.8	41	30.4	1.84	.66
16	Availability of resources (e.g., supplies, textbooks)	30	22.2	56	41.5	49	36.3	1.86	.76
17	Satisfaction with work as a resource room teacher	85	63.7	38	28.1	11	8.1	2.56	.64
18	Being part of an educational team	66	48.9	45	33.3	24	17.8	2.31	.76

*The higher the mean, the higher the level of satisfaction

**3 (high satisfaction), 2 (medium satisfaction), and 1 (low satisfaction)

Table 2

*Mothers' Satisfaction with Resource Rooms (n=190)**

No.	Item	Level of Satisfaction**						M*	SD
		3		2		1			
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	School's communication with parents regarding resource rooms	94	49.5	85	44.7	11	5.80	2.44	.60
2	Academic progress made by child in the resource room	147	77.4	36	18.9	7	3.70	2.74	.52
3	Social and emotional progress made by child in the resource room	130	68.4	53	27.9	7	3.70	2.65	.60
4	School's policies related to teaching in the resource room	93	48.9	89	46.8	8	4.20	2.45	.58

*The higher the mean, the higher the level of satisfaction

**3 (high satisfaction), 2 (medium satisfaction), and 1 (low satisfaction)

inability to adapt curricula to meet the needs of students, amount of paperwork required, insufficient feedback from supervisors, and lack of technology and resources. Interviews also revealed that resource room teachers were working without clear job descriptions and were not offered opportunities for interaction with the school community. Thus, duties of resource room teachers need to be determined more clearly.

It was also evident that resource room teachers did not give adequate attention to tasks that may be influential in assuring that students get quality remedial education programs. Among these tasks are: adapting general curriculum units to meet the special needs of resource room students; collaborating with parents and other school staff in developing and implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or adapting lesson plans, instructional materials, teaching methods; assessment of students; and enriching students' experiences and teaching them functional life skills through community-base instruction. This supports the conclusion made above that students are getting only limited and partial services.

Mothers were generally satisfied with the programs offered by resource rooms to their children. In this regard, this result is consistent with the findings of Fraihat (2007) who reported that parents were satisfied with resource room services. However, the finding that mothers were most satisfied with the academic improvement of their children in the resource room is inconsistent with Bairat's (2005) finding that parents were least satisfied with the progress made by their children. Thus, further research is warranted. Since the mothers' questionnaire used in the present study was very brief, future studies should use more comprehensive questionnaires and various data collection tools.

The results of this investigation indicated that educational services offered by resource rooms are still of low quality despite the fact that resource room teachers are getting better academic preparation currently. Teacher education programs may need to rethink their approaches and must give practical skills adequate attention. Recruitment of experienced special education consultants to initiate drastic changes in design and delivery of resource room programs may also be needed.

While the results of this investigation are both informative and interesting, the data have limitations that should be noted. First, the data collected in this investigation are based solely on the resource room teachers' and mothers' perspectives. Self-report data are susceptible to social desirability bias (Holden, 1996). In addition, it would be helpful in future studies to

consider the perspective of others (e.g., regular classroom teachers, principals, students, and fathers) when collecting information about resource room programs. Second, the sample used in the present investigation was an accessible sample; therefore, generalizations may be limited (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The results may or may not be representative of resource rooms in Jordan and caution should be used when making inferences about other resource rooms. In future research, it would be helpful to randomly select participants from various geographical areas in the country.

Finally, this study was concerned with overall evaluation of resource rooms. It did not attempt to analyze the role of demographic variables that may determine teachers' and parents' perceptions. It is suggested that future research explores the role of such variables.

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