Perceptions and Expectations of Palestinian Teachers towards Inclusive Education in Bethlehem District

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Abstract

Introduction. The study investigates about the reality of inclusive education in Palestine according to the opinion of teachers. It is presented in the legislative and social framework of education in Palestine and compares it with current knowledge on inclusive education, from which a series of essential elements for inclusive education can be derived. Teachers are a key to achieving inclusion of students with special educational needs in ordinary classroom; so it is critical to take into account their perceptions of the challenges and realities of inclusion and their expectations.

Method. The summary gathers the opinions of a representative sample of the teachers including students with special educational needs in ordinary classrooms in the Bethlehem sector. A descriptive methodology is used, and results attained by inference and correlations from respondents of a questionnaire. The most important results are taken from the study variables in the areas in which difficulties occur such as: the students with disabilities, teachers, parents, administration, work environment (school), curriculum, classroom management, extracurricular activities, methods and teaching aids, awareness and attitudes.

Results. As in the questionnaire, questions on the real and desirable state of inclusive education are posed and from the responses possible scenarios are identified in which there can be progress from a positive and common sense perspective. The results inform us that the Palestinian teacher is aware of the reality and difficulties in facing the challenge of inclusive education. There is strong criticism and at the same time awareness of some measures that should be taken to make it possible.

Discussion and conclusion. The educational inclusion is still in its infancy in Palestine, but there is a hope framework. The teaching is critical to their reality shows and ways of action to move towards inclusion. To give and to take these measures is is essential to a System that finds itself taking its first steps towards inclusion and it also has the eagerness of conquering and building the future.

Keywords: school integration, inclusive education, teachers' attitudes, special educational needs, educational challenges.

Percepciones y expectativas de los docentes palestinos hacia la inclusión educativa en el distrito de Belén

Resumen

Introducción. El estudio indaga sobre la realidad de la educación inclusiva en Palestina en opinión de su profesorado. Presenta del marco legislativo y social de la educación palestina, y lo pone en contraste con el conocimiento actual en el tema de la educación inclusiva. Desde ahí se extraen una serie de elementos clave para la inclusión. El profesorado es determinante para posibilitar o no la inclusión en el aula; por eso interesan sus percepciones y expectativas ante el reto y la realidad de la inclusión educativa.

Método. Recoge la opinión de una muestra representativa del profesorado que trabaja en clases ordinarias con chicos con necesidades educativas especiales del Sector de Belén. Utiliza una metodología descriptiva, inferencial y correlacional, mediante un cuestionario. Se señalan los resultados más interesantes en relación a las variables de estudio en las que se concentran las dificultades: estudiantes, profesorado, padres, centro, currículum, actividad extraescolar, gestión del aula, dirección, metodología didáctica, conciencia y actitud.

Resultados. Como en el cuestionario se pregunta sobre el estado real y deseable de la cuestión, se identifican los escenarios posibles en los que se podría avanzar desde una perspectiva posibilista y de sentido común, así como los elementos que contarán con mayor resistencia entre el profesorado. Los resultados nos informan que el profesor palestino es consciente de la realidad y las dificultades para afrontar el reto de la educación inclusiva. Hay una fuerte crítica con la realidad y, al mismo tiempo, la conciencia de que algunas medidas se deben tomar para que sea posible.

Discusión y conclusión. La inclusión educativa está aún en sus primeros pasos en Palestina, pero existe un marco de esperanza. El profesorado es crítico con su realidad y muestra vías de acción para avanzar hacia la inclusión. Ofrecer y asumir estas medidas es esencial para un sistema que se encuentra dando sus primeros pasos hacia la inclusión y que también tiene el afán de conquistar y construir el futuro.

Palabras Clave: Integración escolar, educación inclusiva, actitud del profesorado, necesidades educativas especiales, retos Educativos.

Introduction

The study revolves around the Palestinian teachers' opinions about the increasing presence of students with so many differing needs in their classes and about the progress of inclusive education in general. In doing so it aims to become familiar with the perception of the teachers who are surrounded by the challenges and difficulties of integration and inclusive education of students with handicaps in Palestine. A panorama of the situation can be shown that encompasses ten dimensions of analysis and two different focus points: Perception of the present reality and expectations about an optimal situation.

Bruns and Mogharreban (2007) bring to attention that the differences between the beliefs and actual practices of inclusion are clear. Based on differing degrees of harmony and discrepancy, these results show a plan for possible integration and a route map for the improvement of inclusive education in Palestine. These results are intended as a tool to generate awareness and opinions on the subject and subsequently as a first step toward changing perspectives and attitudes of teachers and all other involved parties in the search for just alternatives that would improve the situation and offer real opportunities for inclusion in Palestine.

Inclusive Education in Palestine

Since the last quarter of the past century, attendance and attention to all students' needs have been defended in the educational system. However, without distorting this premise, it must be admitted that integration, its efficiency and positive effects are still a focus for debate (Kugelmass, 2004; Barton, 2005; Miles, 2005). The recent Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), the growing presence of international declarations (UN, 2006), the impact they have had on education systems, as well as new proposals, instruments and indicators have marked a clear before and after in the matter (Ainscow, 1999; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Villa & Thousand, 2005; Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006). The principle of inclusive education has been increasingly recognized over recent decades and most countries officially support schooling of students with disabilities in mainstream settings as it is ''*the most effective means of building an inclusive society and achieving education for all*'' (Sentenac et al., 2013; UNESCO, 1994a).

The school integration of students with disabilities gained significant international recognition when the United Nations (UN) promoted the idea of 'Education for All' at the World conference in Thailand in 1990 (Khochen & Radford, 2012; Kuyini & Desai, 2007; UNESCO, 2012a), and inclusion of people with disabilities in both education and society in general is a global trend (Raphael et al., 2013).

Although it is still far from being achieved, currently the international community considers inclusive education a question of ethics and justice and as such it should be promoted in a way that questioning its importance would be unthinkable (Barton, 2005; Echeita et. al., 2009; Echeita & Ainscow, 2011). Inclusive education is the entitlement of all children and young people to quality education, irrespective of their different dispositions or disabilities; it embraces educational values of equity, diversity and social justice (Moran, 2007). For the above reasons, inclusive education occupies a predominant place in the current teaching literature, including an important number of journals that aim to report the most notable advances in investigation on the social and educational areas of this subject.

The Arab community in general, and the Palestinian in particular, have not remained indifferent in this respect, but rather have continued to follow their own processes. The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) has adopted UNESCO's definition for inclusive Education that states that education should offer equal educational opportunities for all students, and find a suitable way to merge them in school education no matter how diverse their needs are. It also adopted the Salamanca declaration in which Articles 2 and 3 are related to regular schools and acceptance of all students with disabilities, along with Article 55 related to teaching disabled girls. *"Guarantee the disabled rights to have equal opportunities to attend educational institutions and universities, within the frame of the curricula adopted in these institutions"* (Palestinian Legislative Council, Law on Rights of Disabled Palestinians, 1999, p. 2; Palestinian Ministry of Education, 2008).

Inclusive education started in Palestine with a pilot phase between 1997-1999 with the support of Diakonia/NAD, UNESCO and Save the Children-Sweden. The program was broadened to include all the schools in the country during 2006-2007, where friends-of-the-disabled committees were created, and a teacher was nominated to be responsible for inclusive education (a full-time teacher with a full teaching schedule, he/she only works as a contact person between the ministry's advisor and the students). One of the aspects of the pro-

gram that was criticised was the lack of any obvious criteria for the integration process, the lack of specialized teachers, the heavy work load of the mainstream teacher, and the lack of funds (Karlsson, 2004; Al-Sabbah & et al, 2008).

For this reason, the *UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS)* of international aid for educational development was created in Palestine (UNESCO, 2012b). Development of UNESCO National Education Support Strategies (UNESS) must play a much more strategic role in supporting national educational needs and priorities and in strengthening partnership with other development agencies, in conformity with international development goals.

As in other countries, the present reality is far from what is desired, in the early stages of development (Climent, 2009). Some difficulty is involved even to demonstrate that first steps have been taken towards the improvement of school attendance, normalization, and integration. Palestine, even with its relatively up-to-date regulation and noticeable progress in some of the proposed programs and schools, cannot at the present time guarantee inclusive education and success for all.

Reflecting on this point, it becomes clear that there is a current need to create greater awareness of the right to inclusive education and its necessity for students with disabilities in Palestine. Hence the need to find out teachers' perceptions about present reality and initiatives.

Teachers' Perceptions about Inclusive Education

Views regarding the education of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have changed dramatically over the past two decades, and several countries have led in the effort to implement policies that foster integration and, more recently, inclusion of these students into mainstream environments. Although the inclusive education movement has gained momentum here in recent years, a key element in the successful implementation of the policy are the views of the personnel who have the primary responsibility for that implementation: the teachers. It is argued that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices since teachers' acceptance of the policy of inclusion is likely to affect their commitment to implementing it (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Teachers strongly influence the implementation of inclusive education in any country (Kim, 2011). Some studies that address teacher attitudes and opinions towards disability, toward students with disabilities and inclusion or integration, clearly indicate that the success of any inclusion policy is highly dependent on the attitudes and beliefs of teachers (Ojok & Wormnaes, 2012; Thaver & Lim, 2012).

Attitudes toward students with disabilities are an important aspect of integrating them into regular classrooms or other social activities. When students have a positive attitude toward peers with disabilities, this can facilitate the inclusion of disabled children, while a negative attitude can hinder inclusion (De Laat et al., 2013; Vignes et al., 2009). An indifferent or even negative attitude on the part of mainstream teachers can have damaging repercussions on students with disabilities, and lead to feelings of alienation, psycho-social distress and a deepening sense of being 'less than' because of their disability (Thaver & Lim, 2012).

Teachers in ordinary schools have a responsibility to accommodate the needs and interests of all learners, including children with disabilities. The attitude and willingness of primary school teachers to teach pupils with intellectual disabilities in regular schools is one of the factors that is critical to successful implementation of inclusive education (Ojok & Wormnaes, 2012).

The aims

The aim of this study is twofold: firstly, to verify whether Palestinian teachers are aware of the present reality and the difficulties of meeting the challenge of inclusive education in Palestine, and whether or not they want to address them; and secondly, to identify the main aspects that form the basis of their opinions, areas which may need to be influenced for improvement.

Method

Participants

The study was created in the 2012/2013 academic year. The population consists of all the Palestinian mainstream school teachers (grades 1-12), in Bethlehem schools, whose classrooms include students with disabilities , whether they work in public, UNRWA or private schools. The population includes 1008 male and 1732 female teachers. The study population

was selected for various reasons: It was the first district where the school integration program was implemented and can be considered representative of the present situation in Palestine, it fulfills all school requirements, it includes varying types of schools, is considered an average political, social and educational zone with respect to population and number of schools (Lempinen & Repo, 2002). The study sample consists of 340 Palestinian teachers that work in ordinary classes with students with special needs or disabilities. This sample was obtained by a stratified random system of selection and was calculated using the web site http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm, which calculates sample size, with an error margin of 0.05.

Instruments

To meet the research objectives, the researchers developed a specific questionnaire for this study, entitled "Difficulties of integrating Palestinian students with disabilities into regular classrooms: a study of Bethlehem (actual and desired). It was designed based on a theoretical revision and on other instruments used to analyse the inclusion situation in Palestine. The resulting questionnaire has two sections: (1) demographic characteristics of the Palestinian teachers, and (2) 107 items distributed among ten subscales (dimensions) to study the challenges and difficulties of disabled Palestinian students in the ordinary classroo. The ten subscales were: challenges and difficulties related to the students with disabilities, teachers, parents, administration, work environment (school), curriculum, classroom management, extracurricular activities, methods and teaching aids, awareness and attitudes. Teachers were require to complete the subscales twice, first according to the present reality of the challenges and difficulties faced by teachers, and second according to the desired condition, from their perspective.

A four-point Likert scale (1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= disagree, and 4= strongly disagree) was used. The questionnaire gathers opinions on the current state of inclusion in Palestine as well as expectations about what would be more adequate and possible. The questionnaire meets the necessary quality standards for relevance and validity. Content validity of the questionnaire was validated by multiple reviewers, a group of referees and expert arbitrators (Cohen & Manion, 2002), 24 specialized referees in diverse areas from universities and educational institutions. Construct validity was assured by means of a powerful theoretical revision and factorial analysis: the resulting essential components accounted for more than 50 % of the variability and coincided with the dimensions which were the object of the study.

Lastly, in relation to the predictive validity or criteria, the Cronbach Alpha reliability test was applied, on the global level as well as for the dimensions and scales, obtaining a high rate of reliability: the global rating is .965; for the present reality scale the value is .950, and for the dimensions it varies between .949 and .951. In the scale that describes expectations or what is considered possible, Cronbach alpha is equal to.980 and varies between .979 and .980 for the dimensions.

Procedure

The Ministry of Education was contacted and the research project was presented as a data collection instrument. Their contributions and suggestions have been incorporated into the report. We were given access to schools in the Bethlehem sector and the school principals were encouraged to present the questionnaires to their teachers, and ask that they be filled out. The data was gathered and analyzed; finally, correlations and inferential analyses are presented here.

Statistical analysis

In order to gather precise evidence for the analysis, three types of analysis were necessary. Firstly, the basic descriptive texts were analyzed to obtain the average tendencies by calculating arithmetic averages and the means that most affect teacher opinions using the dimensions and factors. A factorial analysis of the dimensions, was able to reduce them to the essential dimensions that explained where the main variability occurred in the questionnaire.

From all the investigation about the actual and the desired state of the issue, three panoramas were obtained: the present reality of inclusion in Palestine, a scenario of what the teacher believes to be desirable, and finally, the identification of commonalities and similarities between realities and the desire/possibility to change. To achieve this, the bi-variate correlations of the essential components of each factor are analyzed, comparing reality and desire.

The underlying premise is that we can learn what needs to change from the difference between the real and desired conditions. The considerable difference between reality and desire show possible scenarios for progress from an optimistic and common sense perspective, whilst other elements face greater resistance from teachers because they are more ingrained or not seen as necessary to change.

Results

The study aimed to identifying perceptions and expectations of Palestinian teachers towards inclusive education in Bethlehem district. These results were based on the responses of the school teachers on the questionnaire. The results are presented here according the study questions.

Table 1 shows the principal results of the study. The main dimensions are identified where results with the greatest variation are found. Next, the percentage of variability and the average opinion is explained (for the analysis of reality, desired state, and degree of correlation between the two). All this is explained in greater detail in the following sections.

Table 1. **Correlation of essential components extracted from factor analysis.**

Essential Components extracted from factor analysis	Reality		Desired		Comparative	
	% Variance	Mean	% Variance	Mean	Mean Difference	Correlations
Dimensions						
Students with Disabilities — Facing neglect and rejection in regular schools	28.554	2.6961	36.997	2.1628	-0.533	-.16**
Personal and social Integration of students with disabilities	19.021	2.797	17.34	2.879	0.0819	.027
Not accepting students with disabilities at regular schools	10.550	2.574	*	*	-0.411	.019
Teachers — Inadequate training and supporting for teachers	31.469	3.0915	41.055	2.6196	-0.4719	-.093
Inadequate teacher training and not using the correct methods to deal the students with disabilities	10.413	2.904	10.08	2.935	0.0309	-.097
The teachers accept integration of students with disabilities and the requirements that help the success of the integration	9.751	2.779			0.1559	.23**

Parents	Parents of students with disabilities lack the required awareness of integrating their children in regular schools	45.625	2.6106			0.0563	
							-.103
				55.257	2.5543		
	Parents of students with disabilities do not accept integrating their children at regular schools	10.413	2.962			-0.4075	
							.002
Administration	Inadequate support, health services and lack of clarity in the powers	37.738	2.9422			-0.4698	
	School principals do not accept the idea of integrating	8.957	2.242			0.2305	-.078
				59.196	2.4724		.122*
	Educational System does not provide the necessary possibilities for integrating	8.480	2.869			-0.397	
							.038
School	The school environment is not conducive to the success of the integration program	47.233	3.0373	65.959	2.4527	-0.5846	-.119*
Curriculum	The Curriculum does not help promote the integration process	39.622	2.9064			-0.3747	.383**
				60.751	2.5317		
	The curriculum does not develop positive attitudes towards students with disabilities	11.634	2.505			0.0272	
							.188**
	Does the curriculum give the time needed for students with special needs?	8.589	2.788	8.522	2.531	-0.256	.080
Management	Teachers do not use correct Classroom Management methods	38.181	2.4993	53.944	2.4204	-0.0789	.208**

	Teachers do not use the same method of punishment and reward with all students and must take into account individual differences	13.876	2.925	11.12	2.664	-0.261	.081
Extracurricular activates	Students with disabilities are not involved in visits and field trips, do not practice sports, or participate in activities with other schools	55.684	2.7156	57.855	2.5290	-0.1866	.000
	Training for Life (outputs, clothes, food , etc.)			16.965	2.825	0.1093	.040
Methods and Teaching	Failure to observe the Methods and teaching aids for students with disabilities	43.694	2.7037	58.249	2.4674	-0.2363	.376[**]
	Teaching methods are used appropriately for students with disabilities and presence of resource rooms	9.588	2.602	9.948	2.775	0.173	.079
Awareness and Attitudes	The lack of appropriate specialists, norms, attitudes, training, monitoring and supervision for integration	42.510	2.8738	42.510	2.4619	-0.4119	.016
	Missing activities and information on integration	8.459	2.949			-0.4866	-.014

Teacher Perceptions of the reality of inclusive education

First: Challenges and difficulties related to students with disabilities. Three principal dimensions explain 58.125 % of the variance of responses in the factorial analysis of the dimension:

- Facing neglect and rejection in regular schools (28.554% and mean = 3). According to the means found, teachers did not agree that 'Students with disabilities are exposed to other students' misconduct, like beating and mocking', but they did agree that difficulties exist in the rest of the items in this block.

- Personal and social integration of students with disabilities (19.021% and mean = 3). The teachers agreed that integration and existence of previous programs helped personal and social development for this type of student.
- Not accepting students with disabilities at regular schools (10.550% and mean = 3). This denotes that the teachers who participated in the survey agreed that their students did not welcome disabled students in their schools.

Second: Challenges and difficulties related to teachers. Teacher difficulties are divided into the following factors:

- Inadequate training and support for teachers (31.469% and mean = 3). Palestinian teachers admit that there is a lack of training, media, resources, skills, etc. to face the problem of integration.
- Teachers not using the correct methods to deal with disabled students (10.413% and mean = 3).
- Teachers accept integration programs for students with disabilities and the conditions and requirements that make integration possible (9.751% and mean = 3).

Third: Challenges and difficulties related to parents. With regards to the parents, there are two factors that explain the variation in teacher opinion:

- Parents of disabled students lack the required awareness to integrate their students into regular schools (45.625% and mean = 3).
- Parents of disabled students do not accept integration of their children at regular schools (15.539% and mean = 3).

Fourth: Challenges and difficulties related to administration. The difficulties related to administration are:
- Inadequate support, health services and lack of clarity in the powers (37.738% and mean = 3).
- Principals at the schools do not accept the idea of integration (8.957%). A mean of 2 means that they do not agree with thisstatement, thereby denoting a strong plus for integration: support of school principals.

- Education System does not provide the necessary opportunities for integration (8.480% and mean = 3). Considerable deficiencies are detected in the system which make it difficult to provide sufficient support for inclusion in Palestinian schools.

Fifth: Challenges and difficulties related to work environment (school). It has been shown that the teachers agree (mean = 3) with the opinion that the school environment is not directly related to the success of the integration program. This component explains 47.233 % of the variation in the response to this dimension.

Six: Challenges and difficulties related to curriculum. Regarding the school curriculum, 59.845% of the variation of responses is found between the following essential components, agreeing with all of them (mean = 3) in the following views:

- The Curriculum does not help promote the integration process. (39.622%).
- The curriculum does not develop positive attitudes towards students with disabilities. (11.634%).
- Does the curriculum give the time needed for students with special needs for evaluation? (8.589%).

Seven: Challenges and difficulties related to classroom management. Regarding classroom management the following elements of understanding can be observed:

- Do not agree (mean = 2) with the statement 'Teachers do not use the correct classroom management methods' (39.622%).
- In comparison (mean = 3), they agree that 'Teachers do not use the same method of punishment and reward with all students, and the into account individual differences' (13.876%)'.

Eight: Challenges and difficulties related to extracurricular activities. Regarding extracurricular activities, dimension that explains 55.684% of the variance of responses could conclude that teachers (mean = 3) believe that 'the students with disabilities are not involved in visits and field trips, do not practice sports, or participate in activities with other schools'.

Nine: Challenges and difficulties related to methods and teaching aids used. Teachers agree (mean = 3) and the following two factors constitute the greatest response variation in regards to teaching methods. This is in fact contradictory.

- On one hand, they affirm that there is a 'Failure to observe the Methods and teaching aids for the students with disabilities' (43.694 %). They believe that the methods utilized are not appropriate and that they do not encourage learning, active participation or reflect the real life of a disabled student.
- Whilst on the other, they state that 'Teaching methods are used appropriately for students with disabilities and presence of resource rooms' (9.588%).

Ten: Challenges and difficulties related to awareness and attitudes. The teachers agree (mean = 3) in 50.970% of the factors that explain the variance of responses from Awareness and Attitudes:

- Lack of appropriate specialists, brochures, studies, seminars, activities and school radio programs on students with disabilities, awareness, legislative knowledge. (42.510 %)
- Missing activities and information on integration (8.459%).

Teacher perceptions of the desired state of inclusive education

First: Students with Disabilities. The 54.334% of the variance of responses occurs in the following dimensions: On one hand, teachers desired integration (36.997%); but on the other they consider that there will still be specific difficulties due to 'The absence of programs to prepare and organize students with disabilities to enter regular schools (preschool programs)'. Teachers also agree (mean = 3) that there is a need to offer help in integration because it improves motivation, learning and strengthens relations between the students (17.337%).

Second: Teachers. The three major dimensions that explain 59.334% of the variance of responses are:

- The belief that there will still be inadequate support services for teachers (41.055 %). Although they desire an improvement in this area there was a decrease of 0.4719 in the average grading of the responses.
- They (mean = 3) agree that they 'accept programs to integrate students with disabilities and the conditions that make integration successful (10.082%).

Third: Parents. Considering 55.257% variance of responses, the teachers have low expectations (mean = 2.5543) about change in families.Their desired state for the near future is

that parents of students with disabilities would not need to be made aware of the importance of integrating their students in regular schools.

Fourth: Administration. Teachers want adequate support from health services and clarity on areas of responsibility (59.196% of the variance of responses), they do not agree with the current inadequate situation of support and ambiguity in regard to responsibilities.

Fifth: Work Environment (School). Incorporating (65.959%) of the variance of responses, teachers would not agree in the future (mean = 2) that 'The school environment is not conducive to the success of the integration program.'

Six: Curriculum. The 69.273% of the variance of responses are found in the following affirmations or dimensions; although with a certain amount of disagreement (mean= 2): The Curriculum does not help promote the integration process (60.751%); and the curriculum allows the time needed for students with special needs (8.522%)

Seven: Classroom Management. The desired changes are shown in dimensions that explain 65.062% of the variance of responses. Although slight decreases were shown in the respective averages of opinions, they desire future disagreement with the statement that 'Teachers do not use correct classroom management strategies (53.944 %)'. Nevertheless they are aware of the difficulties of the other change and they agree that in the short term 'Teachers should not use the same methods of punishment and reward with all the students, and must take into account individual differences' (11.118%).

Eight: Extracurricular Activates. Two dimensions are especially relevant in 74.820% of the variance in their responses: The teachers believe that gradually 'Students with disabilities should be involved in visits and field trips, practice sport and activities with other schools (57.855%); They also consider (mean = 3) that they should receive training for life (outputs, clothes, food, etc.) (16.965%).

Nine: Methods and Teaching Aids used. 68.197% of the variance of responses are explained by the following aspects: on one hand (mean = 2), they do not desire the 'Failure to observe the Methods and teaching aids for the students with disabilities (58.249 %)'. And on

the other (mean= 3), they agree with 'improving teaching methods for students with disabilities and the use of resource rooms (9.948%)'.

Ten: Awareness and Attitudes. 50.970% of the variance of responses related to the desired state is presented in two dimensions: On one hand, to reduce the amount of 'Failure to observe the Methods and teaching aids for the students with disabilities (42.510 %)', while continuing to advance 'Teaching methods used appropriately for students with disabilities and resources (8.46 %)'.

Improvement possibilities: the way forward

In the first comparative study, the need for change in diverse aspects of educational inclusion in Palestine can be observed. This need for change is concentrated in the dimensions where a high level significant correlation is found (**level 0.01). These would be the priority areas for improvement in the judgment of the teachers and what would easily be admitted by professionals, such as the following:

- Work with a curriculum that opens possibilities for the integration process (0.383**). The general belief is that there should be diversified curricular elements that permit creativity and adaptation to diversity, better determine of the tasks of these students, improveevaluation methods, etc.

- Promote the existence of specialists, teacher training, knowledge of the regulations related to integration and the use of methods and teaching aids for disabled students (0.376**). This way the negative influence of the students' performance on the rest will be reduced, prejudices are overcome and the level of teacher and parent satisfaction will increase.

- Increase the level of acceptance of integration programs and support successful integration (0.234**). They propose the improvement and increase of initial and ongoing training that teachers receive to face the challenge of inclusion.

- Teachers use correct classroom management strategies (0.208**). Promote the use of tools by teachers to control class diversity, modify behaviour or observe and manage the learning of all the students as well as increase the level of communication with the students and parents using positive speech without stereotypes.

- Keep in mind the curriculum and development of the teaching process, develop positive attitudes towards students with disabilities (0.188**).

- Teachers desire a considerable reduction in the amount of difficulties involved in integration of these students. They believe that there should be a change in the situation of classroom integration, an improvement in the attention given to these students and in general, that they should be attended to according to their needs, with elimination of harassment, exclusion or discrimination (-0.163**).

Following these differences there are some more subtle variations (*level 0.05) between the reality of the situation and the desired state, as seen in the following results:

- The school principals must continue to accept the idea of integration and actively work for its development (0.122 *).
- The teachers desire an improvement in the class atmosphere, meaning that it should become more inclusive (-.119[*]), or even that changes should be made to the structure of the school: The believe that there should be improvedaccessibility, communication and adaptation of resources and equipment as well as the promotion of spaces, times and activities in which students with special needs participate.

The rest of the dimensions that have been shown in the factorial analysis of the questionnaire, with insignificant correlation, demonstrate that teachers consider these areas relatively consolidated or for the moment no change is possible without experiencing great difficulty and resistance.

Discussion and conclusions

Educational inclusion is still in its infancy in Palestine, but there is a framework for hope. The results inform us that the Palestinian teacher is aware of the reality and difficulties in facing the challenge of inclusive education. There is strong criticism and at the same time awareness of some measures that should be taken to make it possible. These measures, being desired, demonstrate the possibility of action which is essential to a system that finds itself taking its first steps towards inclusion and is also eager to conquerconquer and build the future.

If we agree with Kim (2011), Thaver and Lim (2012) or McDougall et al. (2004), who said the support of the teachers is absolutely necessary for any change to be possible, their voice and insight is fundamental to the success of any project. This would make more sense for the proposed change (Fullan, 2007), than if it were only an administrative or regulatory

matter, that only with great difficulty could overcome classroom reality. Even if inclusive education is mandated by law, it will never succeed without the enthusiastic support of its practitioners. However, one must be cautious. Obtaining such support involves behavior and attitudinal change which is not a quick or easy process.

The Palestinian teachers offer a panorama that concurs with that already found in other countries and previous studies (De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). For that reason, some of the measures that have already been adopted for such situations, can be put in context and strategically implemented, offeringan important incentive to the Palestinian Educativonal System. Important lessons should have been learned from prior experiences with these changes and should not be forgotten (Fullan, 2007).

International research indicates – and this study also shows – that the complex mix of positive teacher beliefs combined with fears and perceived inadequacies is quite common in the evolution of practice towards inclusive learning environments (Shevlin et al, 2013). Teachers' demand for better training in specific and general areas has been demonstrated (Khochen & Radford, 2012). They believe that there is also the need to establish atmospheres of inclusive learning and even more awareness of diversity, not only for the disabled (Shevlin et al, 2013; Slee 2011; Florian et al, 2010). To achieve this, dynamics and values for all the students must be put in place and the idea of inclusion must be properly accepted by all (Beyene & Tizazu, 2011). For inclusive education to succeed, it is important that teachers, principals and other education stakeholders be firmly convinced of the benefits that inclusive practices bring to all students (Habayeb & Othman, 2005).

For all of the above reasons, one can conclude that inclusive education is under construction in Palestine. And, although it is still in the initial phase (school attendance and normalization), an original idea is beginning to form in which the teachers can take part. This requires pertinent support and awareness of the size of the challenge and the numerousissues that should be dealt with: institutional commitment, education management, the system of initial and ongoing teacher training, curriculum modification, cultural changes in schools, structures and class dynamics, increasedparticipation and interaction, level of participation of families and the community, etc.

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