

THE LEADERSHIP ROLES OF SAUDI SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS FROM THEIR OWN PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTARCT

This study examined the leadership roles of Saudi special education teachers from their own perspective and surveyed their views toward challenges in leadership. The study used the survey method, for which a questionnaire was developed and distributed to a sample of (n = 200). The results indicated that special education teachers had little experience in leadership roles, where they considered participation in conflict resolution among colleagues as their most important leadership role participation in mentoring, follow-up or training is the least important. The results of the study revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female special education teachers in their level of enacted leadership. The level of education and years of experience were found to have a significant impact on the leadership level of teachers.

Keywords: leadership; special education teacher; perceptions; educational reform.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership refers to the practice of influencing individuals to create an atmosphere of cooperation between them (Ciulla, 2004). It is also defined as a set of practices that enhance the performance and growth of an organisation, treat challenges and obstacles, and increase the satisfaction and loyalty of subordinates and pay attention to their psychological needs. The leadership of teachers is the right to practice an effective role in the education process and in learning outcomes (Moller & Scrivner, 2000). Leithwood (2004) indicated the direct impact of leadership inside schools on the performance of teachers and academic achievements of students through his systematic review of research conducted globally. He highlighted the importance of focusing on the humanitarian values and standards, motivation, intellectual loyalty, empowering teachers, engaging them in decision-making, designing the mission and vision of the school, and developing and supporting teachers. Spillane (2012) stated that the distributed leadership is a set of group activities, operating through teamwork, and not through individual efforts. Gronn (2002) also argued that distributed leadership, which engages teachers in the process of decision-

making, requires strengthening the teachers' capacities to promote students' academic achievements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on education describes different kinds of the leader-teacher, such as the school headmaster, the association leader, head of department, educational supervisor, and peer-to-peer coach (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). The leader-teacher can also participate in developing school plans, promoting curricula, teaching, and evaluation of students at the level of schools. He also plays a leading role in providing educational and learning new ideas that depend on school research on different curricula, drafting educational policies and rules, assessing the quality of school education and participating in career development plans based on teachers' training needs (Abdel-Hameed, AlMahdi, Abouzeid, Al-Wadi, Jalal, Fateel & Yousuf, 2018). The special education leader-teacher contributes to nurturing the students' with special needs in the school and faces many problems related to the way these students should be treated. Therefore, he needs assistance and cooperation in all educational situations and settings to satisfy the needs of students' with special need and to solve their problems (Khaled Bin Sulaiman & Al Salehi, 2017). Sue Englert, Tarrant & Mariage (1992) considered leadership as a main factor in the new practices of teaching students with special needs.

The special education teachers usually work in isolation and do not have clear control on important decisions in school (Harris, 2013). According to Al-Natour, Al-Zboon, Alkhamra and Amr (2015), special education teachers suffer from other problems, such as the lack of training before and during service and the huge number of students in each classroom. Therefore, special education teachers should be given the opportunity to play a leading role in decision-making, to motivate and encourage learners, to deepen the cooperation between students, to solve rising problems, and to take precautionary measure to prevent such problems. In addition, as a leading role, teachers can form working groups and assign roles to learners according to their abilities and interests (Al-ajami, 2016).

A study conducted by Doğan & Aslan (2016) showed that the recognition level of the Servant Leadership style among administrators indicated a significant difference in favor of male teachers and schools' headmasters working in Special Education Schools more than teachers in Arts and Sciences Centres. The results of the study also showed a significance difference in favor of teachers with ages between (41-50) years old. The level of recognition of Servant Leadership style among headmasters was related to their levels of commitments in a positive manner.

Doğan and Aslan (2015) conducted a study to investigate the teacher leadership and classroom management practice on special education with learning disability. The study found that teachers

have practiced leadership on high levels and that the perception of special education teachers towards practicing classroom leadership correlated positively with the leadership style of the teacher.

Al-Zboon (2016) conducted a study to investigate the leadership experience of Jordanian special education teachers and the constraints that prevent them from taking leadership roles. The study found that the perceived leadership roles of special education teachers were limited in scope and frequency. Special education teachers realized many barriers to the leadership roles, which are the lack of time to take leadership roles, absence of laws and regulations related to teacher leadership, lack of pre-service training, negative attitudes towards special education teachers, overload of responsibilities and disharmony between roles, and the lack of communication opportunities within the Ministry of Education.

Ngang (2012) reviewed the level of consensus on inclusive teacher leadership recognized by special education teachers in Malaysia and China. The study used a quantitative method using a "survey questionnaire" for special education teachers, and was conducted in the four Malaysian states, with a sample of 369 special education teachers. The study in China included four Chinese provinces, and included a sample of 380 special education teachers - four regular schools with special education programs from four randomly selected provinces and a special education school for learning disabilities. The results showed that there is a strong consensus among Malaysian and Chinese special education teachers that teacher leadership skills are important to engage them in the management of their classroom, but they do not implement them in their daily practice. The ratio of consistency between agreement and application of leadership came with almost the same percentage in both countries; 94.5% in Malaysia and 95.8% in China.

Bruns, LaRocco, Sharp, and Sopko (2017) conducted a study aimed at defining early intervention/ early childhood educational service systems as required by the Education for Individuals with Special Needs Act, which includes a national system international governed by a number of funded and supported international and federal laws. The sample of the study consisted of (820) individuals who participated in two questionnaires through the Internet, and who work in administrative positions in special education. (6) knowledge aspects and (5) competencies were included to measure the leadership competence required in a person to become a leader in the field of early childhood educational service systems in accordance with Part B-619 and Part C of the Education Law for Special Needs. The results of the study showed the necessity of having the competence and knowledge aspects of people to become leaders in the field of special education. The study recommended further similar research on another sample and support leaders who can satisfy the needs of children and their families.

DiPaola, & Walther-Thomas (2003) conducted a study aimed at clarifying the concept of leadership associated with effective private education, in addition to its review of emerging standards for effective managers in order to identify knowledge and skills that affect the needs of school leaders as applied in the United States. The study used the inductive approach by comparing practices with standards. The study identified, through extrapolation of studies related to the standards required in effective schools, five priorities for the educational leadership of the principals: (a) identifying and communicating the educational mission of the school; (b) managing the curriculum and teaching; (c) supporting and supervising teaching; (d) monitoring students and (e) promoting a learning environment. The study concluded that the training methods of school principals are rather weak and require more support, as stated in many previous studies. The study also concluded that university preparation programs, professional organizations, educational researchers, educational bodies and local communities must be involved to ensure the development of the basic leadership skills needed in school principals.

The study of Bays and Crockett (2007) aimed at defining educational leadership and its relationship with special education. The study sought to clarify how students with special needs receive appropriate education in public schools, given the importance of educational leadership as an important link between the general goals of schools and the needs of teachers, in addition to students' education. The study followed the descriptive analytical approach. Interviews, data collection and monitoring were used as tools for this study, which was applied to a sample of nine primary schools in three US Directorates of Education, which were chosen purposefully. The results showed that the following leadership aspects are the most important to be available in the leader, follow-up educational vision and the development of standards of trust and cooperation, academic journalism and teacher support in addition to monitoring instructions and innovations. The results of the study showed the effective role of practicing educational leadership to help teachers in their daily work. The study recommended access to previous studies and research, and recommended further research to support educational leadership, which may provide researchers with more information on leadership in special education.

Rivera (2017) conducted a study aimed at linking the leadership qualities mentioned by John Adder (2009) with the qualities that special education teachers must possess in order to reach collaborative advantages with the supporting teacher. The study was conducted to identify how the special education teacher coordinates and leads the supporting teacher and how to align the educational leadership skills in the cooperative classroom. This study used the sequential illustration design (quality and quantity) as a mixed method, for which a questionnaire was designed and distributed to a sample of 85 teachers and 11 individual interviews. The results of the study concluded that the teachers indicated that there was a shortage in the cooperative process between the teacher and the supporting teacher and the lack of training in the leadership

aspects of the teacher. The study recommended a timeline and open dialogues with the supporting teacher, who can develop and improve the cooperative classroom. It also recommended focusing on motivation, privacy and control, which can be sensitive in both the educational and planning stages.

The study of Fitzgerald (2017) aimed at defining the role of leadership and management in inclusive private education in six middle schools in Ireland. The study explored the role of the special educational needs coordinator in addition to exploring the role of teachers who have daily executive responsibility for the policies of solidarity with teachers from the point of view of six special educational needs coordinators and their managers. The study followed the qualitative research design by developing a model explanatory approach that links individual and narrative stories. The results showed that the role of teacher-coordinator and coordinator is surrounded by human interactions, which further complicates their functions and increase their burdens. The results confirmed that the school context plays an important role in leadership roles in inclusive private education. The role of managers was also important in building a comprehensive, collaborative and effective culture. The study recommended more research to provide more ideas that may support the attitudes and expectations of others.

THE SAUDI CONTEXT

The emergence of the development of the education system in Saudi Arabia gave the space to focus on leadership among teachers. The development agenda recognizes the role of teachers in delivering a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness in achieving its goals and describes them as the true architects of change in the midst of development (Albrahim, 2014). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched its Vision 2030, which requires a strategy for the development of education in Saudi Arabia through effective initiatives to thoroughly modernize curriculum, teacher performance and improve the school environment (Vision 2030). The Vision 2030 was considered as a Royal initiative to achieve creativity, knowledge management and excellence in the learning environment.

Services for children with special needs in Saudi Arabia are provided in several forms. Some of these programs depends on integration and segregation programs implemented by the Ministry of Education. There are also special education centres for day care and internal accommodation, implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MLSD). King Salman Centre for Disability Research and Community-based rehabilitation and the private sector also provide these services (Al-ajami, 2016).

Since the declaration of the Salamanca Statement and Framework Action for Special Education in 1994, many countries have adopted inclusion practices for people with special needs

(Thousand, Nevin and Villa, 2007). Yeung (2012) stated that inclusive education can be successful when given strong leadership that fosters a collaborative school culture, supports professional partnerships, and facilitates learning for students with special needs. In Saudi Arabia, the first experiment to integrate students with special needs into general education programs was the experience of Al-Noor Institute in Al-Hofuf region in 1984, where the experiment achieved great success and led to the emergence of other similar experiences such as the General Secretariat for Special Education in 1987 (Saad Osman, 2015).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is a consensus in the literature that leadership among general education teachers and the leadership roles of special education teachers are rarely mentioned (Al-Zboon, 2016). This gap is particularly important, not only the educational restructuring changes the tasks and behaviour of education workers, but also changes the management of professional relationships. Our main challenge is not to identify who is the leader-teacher, but to change the school culture and create leaders from all teachers (Lambert, 2003). York Barr et al (2005) stated that the leadership and support to special education teachers help in improving the quality of educational services for students with special needs as well as other students. In addition, Humphreys (2010) mentioned that distributed leadership is the distribution of leadership tasks and responsibilities to all staff, teachers and administrators. Undoubtedly, the role of the school leader in caring for people with special needs is to help them overcome feelings of despondency and futility (Al-Agha, 2013).

Based on the above review and in line with the development of the educational system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which considers the teacher to be the centre of the educational process, the present study aims to explore the leadership experience of Saudi special education teachers by answering the following questions:

- 1- What leadership roles are preferred by special education teachers?
- 2- What are the constraints faced by special education teachers that prevent them from achieving leadership?
- 3- Are there any statistically significant differences in the perceptions of special education teachers towards their leadership role due to their gender, educational level, years of experience or type of school (regular school or special education school)?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Developing the educational system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia requires the improvement and development of the administrative environment in the Ministry and education departments as well as the adoption of decentralized administrative orientation. Moreover, giving powers to departments and schools to take decisions on the service of the educational system and to

identify the leadership roles of teachers in special education is very important to this development. Leadership in Saudi Arabia's special education teachers, which seems relatively limited and often absent from school reforms due to lack of understanding of their roles and functions, has not yet been assessed. There are also in Saudi Arabia institutions that cover the needs of teaching people with special needs and provide support to all groups. However, education needs to expand in those institutions (Abdul Wafi, 2017). The level of association between special education teachers and school affects the level of association between students with disabilities and their level of support and opportunity within the school. If teachers are isolated and marginalized, their students are likely to be so. Teachers-leaders must work collaboratively and expand their knowledge and skills to successfully manage and maintain students with special needs (Al-Zboon, 2016).

Therefore, this study is an initial step towards exploring the leadership roles of special education teachers in Saudi Arabia and will be an important addition to the theoretical literature on the roles of teachers as leaders in special education. This study will discuss the practical applications of leadership among teachers to support education development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is based on the correlative survey method by using the "Teachers' Conceptual Leadership Scale" and the "Personal Information Model". The data were analysed by using frequencies, mean scores, standard deviation, T-test, single variance analysis (ANOVA), correlation analysis and regression analysis methods of SPSS.

Sampling and Setting

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher contacted the Department of Education in Asir region in Saudi Arabia and asked to provide a list of teachers and schools that provide special education services. The study population consisted of 300 teachers. The sample was representative of all special education teachers in Asir region (50% of the total number of teachers). The sample of the study consisted of 200 special education teachers, who were randomly selected, and who held full-time teaching positions in various schools of the Department of Education in Asir region. Data were collected during the 2017-2018 school year. Table 1 shows the distribution of the study sample according to the levels of study variables.

Table 1: Distribution of the study sample according to gender, level of education and years of experience

-	Variable	Number (%)
Gender	Male	(%44.4) 80
	Female	(%55.6) 100
Level of education	Diploma	(%5.5) 10
	Graduate	(%83.3) 150
	Post-graduate	(%11.2) 20
Years of experience	1-2	(%2.7) 5
	3-10	(%55.6) 100
	More than 10	(%541.7) 75
Type of school	Regular school	(%94.5) 170
	Special education school	(%5.5) 10

All special education teachers in the schools of the Department of Education in Asir region were arranged in alphabetical order and then 200 teachers were randomly selected for this study. In order to request the participation of special education teachers, the questionnaire was distributed to 200 randomly selected participants. The questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher in a sealed envelope. Four weeks after the questionnaires were sent, 180 of the 200 questionnaires were returned to the researcher; the return rate was 90%.

Ethical Considerations

The official ethical consent was obtained from the Ministry of Education. Participants were first contacted and invited to participate in the study, and then were briefed on its objectives. Consent of the participants was obtained before conducting the study and they were assured that their identity and confidentiality would not to be revealed.

INSTRUMENTATION

Survey

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, teachers provided demographic information by checking and ticking the applicable. The second part consisted of (18) paragraphs designed to inquire about the leadership aspects of the teacher, and was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from [5] "always" to [1] "never" (Oxford, 1990) . To construct the

survey of the present study, the researcher developed the scale and identified items based on the literature review (Al-Natour, Al-Zboon, Alkhamra, Amr, 2015; Doğan & Aslan , 2016; Ngang, & Abdullah, 2015). The researcher then presented the questionnaire to ten of special education teachers.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of the scale means to investigate whether the scale measures the intended objectives from the questions of the study (Thorndike, Cunningham, Thorndike, & Hage 1991). The validity of the questionnaire was achieved by presenting it to ten experts working as educational leaders to be reviewed and to provide their feedback. Their suggestions, comments, and changes have been considered accordingly. Paragraphs have been revised until all reviewers have approved the words used and the correctness of the content. Based on the experts' suggestions. The validity indicators of the scale were verified by running a pilot study on a sample of (20) teachers similar to the population of the study. The paragraphs of the questionnaire were analysed and the coefficient of discrimination of each paragraph was calculated. The coefficient of discrimination is an indicator of validity for each paragraph in the form of a correlation coefficient between each paragraph and its associated dimension. The correlation coefficient was between (0.732-0.855), which represented a statistical significance at the level of (p) = 0.05, and therefore, the scale can be considered generally valid (see Table 2).

Table 2: correlation coefficients of the paragraphs to the overall score of the scale

paragraph	correlation coefficients	paragraph	correlation coefficients
1	**0.703	10	**0.755
2	**0.684	11	**0.855
3	**0.682	12	**0.704
4	**0.709	13	**0.790
5	**0.787	14	**0.802
6	**0.594	15	**0.613
7	**0.790	16	**0.765
8	**0.677	17	**0.740

9	**0.711	18	**0.761
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** Significant at (0.01)

The reliability of the scale was determined using the test-retest method by applying it to a pilot study of (20) special education teachers. Pearson correlation coefficient between scores was calculated on the two tests. Spearman correlation coefficient using the return method was for the scale as a whole (0.825 **). The stability coefficient was calculated using the Cronbach alpha, and the final internal consistency coefficient was (0.896), which indicated that the scale has an appropriate level of reliability.

DATA ANALYSIS

The returned questionnaire was recorded and tabulated with the assistance of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) of windows 17.0. Different statistical methods were used to achieve the main objectives of the present investigation. These methods included descriptive statistics, independent sample T-Test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Descriptive statistics included mean scores, standard deviation and frequencies, which were employed to calculate the demographic data of the special education teachers with regard to gender, Level of education and years of experience. An independent sample T-test is a statistical method employed to demonstrate the variations among the mean scores of two groups of a variable. In the current study, this statistical method was used in order to identify the significant differences between the levels of leadership in special education teachers and their gender. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a method of statistical analysis used to determine differences among the mean scores of more than two groups according to a variable (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2014). In the present study, this statistical method was used to determine the relationship between the levels of leadership in special education teachers in relation to two variables; years of experience and the level of education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the findings obtained from the present study. These findings are presented based on the research questions that guided the research.

Levels of leadership of special education teachers

To answer the first question of the study concerning the leadership roles exercised by special education teachers, the mean scores and standard deviations were extracted as shown in Table (3).

Table 3: Mean scores, standard deviations and ranking of the sample responses to paragraphs related to the leadership roles exercised by special education teachers

Paragraph	Mean score	St. dv	Ranking
Participate in resolving conflicts between colleagues	2.58	1.258	Low
Participate in the formulation of educational policies and rules	2.50	1.318	Low
Participate in mentoring, follow-up, training, or developing new teachers' performance	2.48	1.016	Low
Working as one team	2.46	1.133	Low
I use strategic educational management planning to improve student performance.	2.44	1.219	Low
Take leadership roles in an institute or organization (e.g. Teachers' Council, Teachers' Club or Teachers' Association)	2.39	1.011	Low
Participate in professional development activities that contribute to improving students' academic achievement.	2.35	0.998	Low
Work as a trainer in training courses	2.34	1.156	Low
Participate in finding innovative ways to develop school curricula.	2.32	1.052	Low
Participate in promoting curriculum, teaching and assessment of students at school level	2.27	1.086	Low
Using research as an important tool for solving educational and learning challenges.	2.24	1.000	Low
Participate in introducing new teaching and learning ideas based on school research	2.20	0.927	Low

Paragraph	Mean score	St. dv	Ranking
Participation in the development of school plans (long-term, middle-term and short-term)	2.16	1.062	Low
Participate in the establishment of effective cooperation between families, school and community.	2.03	0.969	Low
Participate in the performance evaluation to assess the quality of education in the school.	1.91	0.938	Low
Participate in designing a professional development plan based on the training needs of teachers.	1.85	0.942	Low
Participate in the decision-making process of the school.	1.82	0.961	Low
I encourage colleagues to express their different points of view more than before.	1.71	0.922	Very low
Total score	2.23	0.698	Low

Table (3) shows that the mean scores ranged from (1.71 - 2.58) for the paragraphs. The paragraph "Participate in resolving conflicts between colleagues" ranked first with the highest mean score of (2.58) and a low level while the paragraph "participation in the formulation of educational policies and rules" came at the second rank with a mean score of (2.50) and a low level.

The Impact of Variables on Teachers' Leadership

In order to check whether the gender of teachers affects their perceptions of leadership, T-test was performed for independent samples of teachers' responses the leadership scale (n = 180). The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between special education teachers, males and females, in their perceptions of leadership levels of teachers. Table (4) presents these results.

Table 4: Results of T-test to find differences in the perceptions on leadership among the sample according to gender variable

Gender	No.	Mean score	St. dv	T	F value	Sig.
Male	100	2.24	0.588	0.268	178	0.789
Female	80	2.22	0.571			

To verify whether the level of education of teachers affects their perceptions of leadership, T-test was conducted for independent samples of teachers' responses on the Leadership Scale (n = 180). The results indicated that the differences between the first level (diploma) and the second level (graduate) and between the third level of education (post-graduate) were great as shown in Table (5).

Table 5: The results of the Kruskal Wallis test to identify the significance of differences in perceptions about leadership according to the level of education variable

Level of education	No.	Rank average	Chi Square	F value	Sig.
Diploma	10	88.55	32.335	2	0.000
Graduate	150	82.33			
Post-graduate	20	152.73			

Table (5) shows that the value of the level of significance was (0.000), which is less than (0.05). This indicates that there are statistically significant differences in the perceptions of respondents about leadership due to the variable level of education, and the differences were in favor of post-graduate level. To find out the impact of years of experience of teachers on their perceptions of leadership, the Kruskal Wallis test was used, which revealed significant differences due to the years of experience in the total score of the scale of leadership for special education teachers. The results indicated that these differences were between the first level (1-2) and the second level (3-10), and between the second level (3-10) and the third level (more than 10) as shown in Table (6).

Table 6: The results of the Kruskal Wallis test to identify the significance of differences in perceptions about leadership according to the years of experience variable

Years of experience	No.	Rank average	Chi Square	F value	Sig.
1-2	5	3.00	28.453	2	0.000
From 3-10	100	80.31			
More than 10	75	109.93			

Table (6) shows that the value of the level of significance reached (0.000), which is less than (0.05) and indicates the existence of statistically significant differences in perceptions about leadership due to the variable of years of experience. The average ranks show that these differences were between those with (1 - 2) years and (3-10) years, and in favor of teachers with (3-10) years of experience, and between those with (3-10) and (more than 10) years and in favor of those with more than 10 years of experience. Finally, regarding the type of school, the Mann-Whitney test of independent samples was conducted. The results of the test showed that there were no statistically significant differences between teachers working in regular and special education schools with respect to leadership among teachers as shown in Table (7).

Table 7: Results of Mann Whitney Test to determine the differences in leadership perceptions according to school type variable

School Type	No.	Rank average	Ranks Sum	Mann Whitney U	Z value	Sig.
Regular school	170	88.79	15093.50	558.500	1.824-	0.068
Special needs school	10	119.65	1196.50			

It is clear from Table (7) that the value of the significance level was (0.068) which is greater than (0.05). This indicates the existence of significant differences in the perceptions of teachers on leadership due to the school type variable.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the levels of leadership among Saudi special education teachers. The results showed that special education teachers have a low level of leadership. This result agrees with the findings of Al-Zboon (2016), which found and confirmed that the perceived leadership roles of special education teachers were limited in scope and frequency. The results of this study disagree with the results of Ngang & Abdullah (2015), which stated that special education teachers play leadership roles at high levels, and the perception of special education teachers regarding the practice of classroom management has been positively correlated with the practice of teacher leadership. These results also contradict with Ngang (2012), who reported that special education teachers in China and Malaysia are taking leadership roles at high levels. Bruns, et al (2017) reported the need for competence and knowledge in people to become leaders in special education. Moreover, DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) stressed the need for the partnership between university preparation programs, professional organizations, educational researchers, educational institutions, and local communities to ensure the development of essential leadership in school principals. According to Bays and Crockett (2007), the following leadership aspects are the most important to be available in the leader, follow the educational vision, develop standards of trust and cooperation, academic journalism, teacher support and monitoring instructions and innovations.

The results of this study showed the effective role of practicing educational leadership in schools leaders' daily work. This finding is supported by the study of Rivera (2017), which highlighted the effect of poor training in teacher leadership aspects. The responses of special education teachers indicated that one of the most common constraints is the workload. This finding is supported by the Fitzgerald (2017), who noted that the role of teacher and coordinator is full with human interactions and further complicate their functions and increases their burden. His study also emphasized that the context of the school plays an important role in leadership in comprehensive special education. Male and female special education teachers did not differ significantly in their perception on leadership roles. This result agrees with Al-Zboon (2016), who indicated that there is no gender influence on the leadership roles of the special education teacher. This result could be contributed to the fact that males and females teachers in Saudi Arabia work in the same context and face the same conditions.

The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the total scores of perceptions toward leadership due to the years of experience of the special education teachers. The difference was in favor of teachers with more than 10 years of experience. This result could be explained by that experienced teachers provided useful information by developing teaching strategies, guiding and mentoring teachers, and providing the psychological and emotional

support other teachers need. These results suggest that there are statistically significant differences in perceptions about leadership attributable to the level of education level, and the ranks averages show that these differences were in favor of teacher with post-graduate level of education. This result is expected because teachers with higher education levels may have had more leadership experiences, making them more efficient in leadership roles. The results related to the school type variable showed that there were no statistically significant differences between teachers working in regular schools and special education schools concerning teachers' leadership. This result may be attributed to the similarity of conditions in these schools because they are all public government schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found that teachers working in special education in Saudi Arabia perceive themselves as taking low standard leadership roles and that there is a lack of training in the leadership aspects in relation to leadership in special education environments. The study emphasizes the need to fully reform the special education teachers' preparation programs to promote leadership among teachers. In addition, schools should give teachers opportunities to take leadership roles. The results of this study indicate the urgent need to include the topic of leadership of special education teachers in teacher preparation programs. This study encourages research into the issue of special education leadership and calls for changing the role of special education teachers from service providers to potential leaders in the educational process.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The generalization of the results of this study is closely related to the study sample and alternatives of special education in the Asir region. The current study is determined by the special education teachers who work in the schools of the Department of Education in Asir during the first semester of the academic year 2017-2018. The generalization of the results of the research is determined by the correct procedures of applying the research tools, and the extent of their sample representation to the research population.

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