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The Influence of Teacher Preparation Programmes on Bahraini Teacher Attitudes and Challenges with Inclusive Education

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Abstract

For decades, studies investigated the attitudes of pre-service and in-service teachers towards inclusive education. Several studies indicated that positive teacher attitudes could lead to successful implementation of an inclusive classroom. This study explored in-service teacher attitudes and challenges through a qualitative research design by utilising semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the experiences of teachers with inclusion. The responses of the participants were compared between teachers who have been through initial teacher education and have fewer years of experience with teachers who have not been through initial teacher education and have many years of experience. The responses showed that teachers who graduated from an initial teacher education programme had very similar perceptions and attitudes towards inclusion as teachers who have not been through initial teacher education. The teachers indicated the different levels of support required for effective implementation of inclusion and identified the benefits of inclusive education. The study provided important implications for the new initial teacher education programme in Bahrain to better prepare teachers for the challenges of inclusion.

Keywords: Attitudes, Challenges, Inclusive Education, In-service Teachers, Qualitative

1. Introduction

For many years researchers have explored pre-service and in-service teacher attitudes towards inclusive education and identified the essential role positive teacher attitudes play for the successful implementation of inclusion (e.g. Astha & Bhargav, 2012; Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Gaad & Lavina, 2007; Dias & Cadime, 2016; Hsien, Brown, & Bortoli, 2009; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005; Niemeyer & Proctor, 2002; Seçer, 2010; Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Weiner, 2003). Jobling and Moni (2003) indicated that teacher attitudes are crucial for effective implementation of inclusion since teacher attitudes could

influence teachers' perceptions of their abilities, which could then determine the learning opportunities available to the students.

Foreman (2005, as quoted in Hsien, Brown & Bortoli, 2015) defined inclusion as 'the philosophy that schools should, without question, provide for the needs of all the children in their communities, whatever the level of their ability or disability' (12). Over the years researchers argued on the components of the inclusive classroom. Shyman (2015, p.361) defined inclusive education as 'a dynamic process by which students with and without exceptionalities receive their primary modes of service delivery in the general education environment'. Thus, the author suggested that an inclusive classroom does not discriminate between students based on disability, cultural background, and gender. Despite Shyman's more 'inclusive' definition of inclusion, Messiou (2017) said that the most common view of inclusive education is the one that revolved around the inclusion of special educational needs in a regular classroom.

Many teacher factors are associated with positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion such as teachers' years of experience (Stanovich & Jordan, 2002), educational backgrounds (Seçer, 2010), previous exposure and experience with disability (Dias & Cadime, 2016; Male, 2011), and teachers' gender (Astha, Sushma & Smrity, 2012; Vaz, Wilson, Falkmer, Sim, Scott, Cordier, & Falkmer, 2015).

According to Kim (2011) teacher education programmes have transformed in order to include inclusive education as part of their qualifications and accordingly prepare their students to teach diverse learners. Research in the area of teacher attitudes towards inclusion in relation to teachers' educational backgrounds, qualifications, or teacher training is scarce. Kim (2011) also explored the attitudes of pre-service teachers in teacher preparation programmes and found that teachers showed positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities and towards making the relevant adaptations to their teaching for students with and without disabilities. The study indicated that the positive attitudes of pre-service teachers could not be directly influenced through the teacher preparation programmes and could actually be the result of previous experiences of the teachers with disabled students.

Seçer (2010) indicated that generally Turkish teachers who have not received teacher training tended to have more negative attitudes towards inclusion. Additionally, Lambe and Bones (2006) found participant responses that are contradictory where the majority of student teachers in the initial teacher education programme support inclusion yet still would like to teach in a traditional system. Their research is ongoing and intends to explore student teacher attitudes towards inclusion after teaching experience with the belief that students are likely to have less than positive views

of inclusion after their confrontation with reality. Other studies have also explored the relationship between teachers' educational backgrounds and their attitudes towards inclusive education. For instance, Stoler (1992) indicated that depending on teachers' education level, teachers had varied levels of understanding of inclusion. Interestingly, teachers with a higher level of education tended to show more negative attitudes towards inclusion.

1.1. Initial teacher education in Bahrain

In 2008, a Teachers College (TC) was established by the Ministry of Education to provide initial teacher education programmes as well as postgraduate programmes for educational administrators in order to improve state primary level education. Since then, over 1000 students have graduated from the college and started teaching in primary state schools. The academic programmes in the college were specifically created to cater for teaching shortages in state primary education in the following subject areas; English, Arabic and Islamic Studies, Mathematics and Science education, and Cycle one education (Years 1-3) (Teachers College, 2016). The Bachelor in Education programme, in its current format, offers one inclusive education course at the second year where students are introduced to learning disabilities, learning styles, multicultural education, and physical disabilities they are likely to encounter in the classroom. The course also offers in depth information on differentiated instruction and lesson planning for an inclusive classroom. Given that the college was only established in 2008, the first cohort of graduates who are now teachers have less than six years teaching experience. Therefore, the study seeks to investigate the differences in teacher challenges and attitudes towards inclusive education between graduates of this initial teacher preparation programme at TC who have less than six years of teaching experience, compared to teachers in primary education who have substantially more years of experience and have not been through formal teacher training.

2. Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the differences between in-service teacher challenges and attitudes towards inclusion by comparing the beliefs of teachers who have studied in a teacher preparation programme (TC graduates) and teachers who have not been through official teacher training (Non TC graduates). The results should

provide an indication of the success of the new teacher preparation programme in preparing teachers for inclusive education and equipping them with the appropriate tools that facilitate for an inclusive classroom for diverse learners. In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative method was utilised to gain insight into the experiences of the participants.

The research questions that pertain to the study were:

1. What are teacher challenges with inclusion and attitudes towards inclusive education?

2. Is there a difference in the attitudes, challenges, and implementation of inclusive education between TC graduates and Non TC graduates?

2.1. Participants

The total participants included in this study were 12 in-service primary state school teachers. The participants included seven female and five male teachers. Nine were English teachers, one was an Arabic teacher, and one was a Cycle one teacher (years 1-3). The participants were chosen randomly based on convenience as long as both groups of TC graduates and Non TC graduates were represented. Of the 12 participants, eight taught in boys' schools, while the remaining four taught in girls' schools (state education is gender segregated). Additionally, seven of the interviewed participants were TC graduates with less than 6 years teaching experience, and five were Non-TC graduates who had more than 6 years teaching experience.

2.2. Procedure

The data collection was established with the assistance of student teachers from the second year inclusive education course. The 19 students were divided to six teams, with three to four students in each team to conduct the interviews. Each team was given the responsibility to interview one participants who has graduated from the TC, and another participant who has not graduated from the TC. The course instructor first conducted a brainstorming session with the students of the inclusive education course, who were the pre-service teachers, in order to determine the interview questions to be asked whilst interviewing the participating in-service teachers. The interview questions were finalised in accordance with the aims of the research which was to explore the attitudes and challenges of in-service teachers with inclusive education.

The student teams visited the participants in the schools where they obtained the participants' consent to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted in each of the participants' school in a private classroom and was voice recorded with the approval of the participants. All participants were informed of the purposes of the research and their anonymity was ensured. After the interviews were concluded, the student teachers transcribed the recorded interviews under close supervision of their instructor (author of this paper) and submitted them as part of an assignment to fulfil the requirements of their inclusive education course. The students also signed consent forms to participate in this research. Ethics approval was gained from the teachers college research and ethics committee to conduct this research.

2.3. Instrument and data analysis

The study employed semi-structured interviews with questions to provide insight into the experiences and attitudes of in-service teachers towards inclusion. The interview questions pertained to three main categories; knowledge of inclusive education, skills in applying inclusion, and teacher attitudes and values related to inclusion. The first section examined teachers' knowledge of inclusion where teachers were asked to define their perspectives and views of inclusive education and state the education and training they have received in the area. Secondly, participating teachers were asked about their skills in applying inclusive education, their past experiences with special needs students, and the type of assessment modifications and accommodations they have used. Thirdly, the teachers were asked questions to determine their attitudes and values towards inclusion, and whether they support inclusive education as opposed to a traditional class. The semi-structured interviews comprised some or all of the following interview questions depending on the flow and length of the interviewees' responses.

- What do you know about Inclusive Education?
- What education and/or training have you received in the area of inclusive education? Where did you receive this training or education?
- Who do you think inclusive education is for?
- What were your expectations of inclusive classrooms, versus the reality of it?
- What kind of support do you need to have in an inclusive classroom?
- Did you, at any point of your teaching career; have students with learning disabilities or special needs in your classrooms? Explain.

- What are parents' perspectives on inclusive classrooms?

- How do you assess students with special needs?

- What is your view of inclusive education?

- If given a choice, would you accept a special needs student in your classroom? Why? Why not?

The data were examined and categorised according to the common themes that emerged in the interview transcripts. The responses within the themes were then categorised for TC graduates and non TC graduates for comparison. The themes will be discussed next.

3. Results

The results revealed a number of common themes and topics identified amongst the participant responses, the responses will be categorized in two groups, the first were the responses of (TC graduates), those who have been through initial teacher education; while the second group were the responses from participating teachers who were (Non TC graduates) and did not undergo initial teacher education. A number of themes were identified through the data and they were: (1) teachers' perceptions and definitions of inclusive education; (2) teachers' attitudes and opinions of inclusive education; (3) support required for inclusion; (4) assessment in an inclusive classroom; (5) benefits of inclusion; and (6) multicultural education. These themes are supported with individual teachers' statements.

3.1. Perceptions of inclusive education

At the onset of the interviews, the teachers were asked how they defined inclusive education. TC teachers generally defined inclusive education as a class that incorporates different students such as students who are low achievers, gifted students, students' cultural backgrounds, students with learning disabilities, and other special needs students.

I think it's about integrating most of the students in the learning process and especially the one with the special needs.

An inclusive class, meaning, different levels of students, in culture, in abilities... they made it for all students, it has weak students... students with disabilities.

A lot of types of students in one class... students are not the same... I have students who need more support and attention and I also have students who are excellent.

As for teachers who are non TC graduates, they had very similar perspectives of inclusive education to TC graduates.

You mean mixing the students in one class? We have different individual cases here in our school. We have... hearing cases... low level cases... autisms.

Everyone should be included, because everyone has the right to be taught, equally... even those who have... physical disability, even the one they have they are coming from outside to our Bahrain to live here, they have the right also to be taught equally as a Bahraini... in our school there are different ethnics, they are different, we can say, abilities and some of them are visuals, some of them they can't hear properly.

Inclusive education is when we have different types of students within the class-room. It could be different races, non-Bahraini students... it could be different abilities, students with physical disabilities, students with mental disabilities, students with kinesthetic abilities.

3.2. Teachers attitudes and opinions of inclusive education

In order to examine teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, teachers were asked that if given a choice, would they support the idea of inclusive education. Most of the TC graduates indicated negative attitudes towards inclusion and suggested that extreme cases of special needs should be in special education classes. The teachers explained and said that special needs students represent a challenge with communication and need a specific form of instruction by a special needs expert who assists the teacher.

I think that those students who can't participate in some activities in the class-room, we can't join them in... but those students who are unable to...like they have cognitive problems... they need special classes.

When I started teaching everything was really different, I feel like it's hard to deal with special need students, I think that they are in another world.

This is a hard question... three years ago, I wanted to have special need student in my classroom, I always wanted to teach a special need student, but when

I came here in the school and I see the real facts I think no, they should be separated... because they need more attention, they need more activities... you need to keep your focus on the student the whole period.

Before I enter the school I was with the idea, but when I came here to the school and I saw the way they implemented this idea now I'm fully against... our Bahraini school need more guidance, more workshops about this idea.

I'm against because... I feel like they are alone and they are not really integrated with the others, and I feel personally I feel difficult to deal with them, I can't really, sometimes when they get angry or something, I can't deal with them.

Against, why? Because we... not provided with the right tools, the right knowledge and no facilities in the school.

Other TC graduates have shown more positive attitudes towards inclusion and said that with the sufficient support of a special needs expert, inclusion can be implemented. Another reason was that it is vital for special needs students to have equal rights for education and to be integrated into society.

Some extent with it... it need help if its only one the teacher she can't do it by herself... if you have 30-35 students in the class, each one is different, each one is considered special need, either it was a disability, or a gifted student, they both have a special need so the teacher alone cannot do it.

With, because these students are part of society, they have the right to learn and participate, if you want him to change then you don't isolate him, so I will include him and he will gradually change.

I'm with inclusive classroom, where all the students have the right to receive learning, this environment helps all of us, us as teachers and the students, to adjust with change and difference and learn socially from special needs who are different than the rest of us.

One TC graduate provided an interesting response. He designated that his attitude and acceptance of an inclusive classroom depends on the extent of the disability, and that he is more willing to accept students with learning disabilities than students with mental disabilities.

It depends on the type of this special need. For example, hyperactive students, we can manage this type of special needs, learning disabilities, we can work more on their disabilities. But mental disabilities or mental disorders, I guess I will refuse because they will sit in the class and they will waste their time and I have to give them more support in addition to the other students.

Non TC graduates generally displayed negative attitudes towards inclusion and justified their refusal of inclusive education for reasons it being time consuming for the teacher who needs to provide special needs students more attention as well as feeling concerned for special needs students who seem out of place.

They (other teachers) complain, they always complain... because if affects the lesson...affect the concentration of the rest of the students.

Those who are very weak, cause a problem for us... even in the class, you need special time, extra time for them, because you have a problem with also... curriculum with books, and they can't reach with students.

I think I am against it because the student sometimes feel disappointed, they don't know what's going on in the class, they can't participate because they don't know actually what's going on, they need somebody to sit with them, translate for them... I don't think I will accept them (special needs students), it's a really big responsibility.

Other non TC graduates exhibited somewhat positive perspectives of inclusion on the condition of the provision of a special needs teacher for support, as well as acknowledged the social benefits of inclusion for students with and without disabilities.

With for sure, if they (the school) get us a special needs teacher, and against, if they hold me accountable and I don't have any experience.

It's better for the normal students to accept these cases because after when they are grown up and they meet those people, at least they know how to deal with them, but those who have special needs also better for them.

3.3. Support required for inclusion

The teachers indicated the administrative support they needed in order to implement inclusive education from the Ministry of Education, the school administration, and special education teachers. TC graduates said:

I think they (the ministry) need to do a couple of tests before... to test the student are able to join these classes or not, not only just based on their (students) parents' wishes or the students themselves.

Give us more workshops on how to deal with these special needs students when we teach an inclusive classroom, and we need more support and more teachers that are experts in this specialization.

We need more time, we need more facilities, we need more education and information about special students.

As for non TC graduates, the teachers indicated the lack of support for effective implementation of inclusion. Some teachers suggested more guidance on how to assess special needs students and a request for more involvement from parents and the school leadership.

Parents, they should also be involved, and as well as the school here, the management they should also support us with what we want to do.

Think that if we give the teacher... many workshops or many lessons about how to deal with them (special needs students) better... about how can I deal with them, how can I assess them... they have to give us criteria to assess the students.

3.4. Assessment in an inclusive classroom

When teachers were asked about how they tackled assessment in an inclusive classrooms, both TC graduates and non TC graduates indicated similar approaches to modifications and accommodations for students.

We stay with them during the test... we provide them with the help so they can follow up with the other students.

Depends on their disability or their special needs, sometimes like if it's just learning disability, we give them extra materials, extra activities... but if they are autistic or hyperactive, they need special education.

I give them more time so they can finish the test as the regular students.

Non TC graduates had comparable responses.

By exams or tests, same as with other students, but with help... read the question for them, explain exercises.

I sit beside them... sit next to her and make my voice loud and slowly.

This boy, he can't write on the line... so everybody is writing dictation but he's not writing, so he is frustrated and I can see it in his eyes. So I magnify, I make a special notebook, big one. I modify things so they can work out with...my students.

3.5. Benefits of inclusion

Some of the participating teachers, particularly from the TC graduates group, demonstrated some positivity when they acknowledged the benefits of an inclusive classroom, particularly the social benefits that special needs students are exposed to.

Special needs students to get involved in the community... and to be... more sociable.

They (special needs students) will see themselves as normal students.

However, a non TC graduate pointed out an essential point, which was the possibility of exposing special needs students to ridicule and even bullying when included in a classroom with other students.

Because he's bigger than the other students, age and body shape, some of them (students) are bullying him, some had words like 'crazy'.

3.6. Multicultural education

Interestingly, only two of the participating teachers have mentioned multicultural education as part of inclusive education.

You can't imagine the number of Pakistani students I have in my class, those students are like half of the class so I need to deal with them and teach them.

There are some here (immigrant students), also, I have taught some, and they feel very comfortable and we never point to them as different.

4. Discussion

4.1. Perceptions of inclusive education

The results showed that both TC and non TC graduates had a similar definition and perspective of inclusive education and identified inclusion as a class that incorporates students with giftedness, low achievement, learning disabilities, mental disabilities, physical disabilities, and ethnic minorities. Even though non TC teachers did not go through official teacher preparation, perhaps their teaching experience has given them a clear perspective of inclusion. A number studies have revealed that despite some teachers undertaking official teacher training, they were still hesitant about their knowledge in inclusive education. Abdelhameed (2015) stated that teachers who had general education training reported that they were not qualified enough to teach students with special needs. In addition, Jobling and Moni (2003) said that teachers indicated that their teacher education programme did not prepare them with sufficient knowledge, understanding and experience to be able to teach students with special needs. Their results showed that teachers felt unprepared because they did not expect to teach students with special needs. The findings of these studies reveal that despite teachers' preparation programmes, teachers still did not feel they had the sufficient knowledge to teach in an inclusive classroom. This could be consistent with the results of the study where the experience gained by Non TC teachers could have equipped them with the same level of knowledge that TC teachers have gained from their degree.

4.2. Teachers' attitudes and opinions of inclusive education

Most of the TC graduates indicated negative attitudes towards inclusion and suggested that extreme cases of special needs should be in special education classes. The teachers said that generally special education students were hard to communicate with, needed more attention, more specific instruction, consume teacher time, and that teachers needed more education and guidance on special education. The participating teachers said they would accept special needs students only if given the appropriate support through a special education teacher or teacher aid. This is inconsistent with the findings of Male (2011) who found that teacher attitudes towards inclusion are negatively related to their years of experience. Meaning, teachers with fewer years of experience tended to have more positive attitudes towards inclusion. In this case, TC graduates had less than six years of teaching experience yet still displayed

negative attitudes towards inclusion. In addition, Kim (2011) explored how different initial teacher education programmes can largely influence positive attitudes of pre-service teachers towards inclusive education since teachers were more prepared for this challenge through their education. Hsien, Brown, and Bortoli (2009) suggest that varied levels of teacher attitudes and differences in confidence and efficacy in teaching in an inclusive classroom could be attributed to the pre-service training they acquired. According to their findings, teachers who went through formal teacher preparation programmes were more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusion. This shows another inconsistency with the results of the study since the majority of TC graduates showed negative perceptions of inclusion.

One TC graduate provided an interesting response. He designated that his/her attitude and acceptance of an inclusive classroom depends on the extent of the disability, and that he/she is more willing to accept students with learning disabilities than students with mental disabilities. This is compatible with the findings of Donohue and Bornman (2015) who found that teachers preferred not to include students with severe or multiple disabilities. Teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusion typically originated from the idea that they did not believe that students with severe disabilities could actually benefit from an inclusive classroom and in turn only make it more difficult for the teacher to teach them and manage the classroom. Moreover, the participants in Gaad and Lavina's (2007) study were also less willing to teach students with severe disabilities because they were not highly confident in their abilities to teach them.

Non TC graduates generally displayed negative attitudes towards inclusion and justified their refusal of inclusive education for reasons of it being time consuming for the teacher who needs to give special needs students more attention as well as the teachers feeling concerned for special needs students who seem out of place. Other non TC graduates exhibited somewhat positive perspectives of inclusion on the condition of the provision of a special needs teacher for support, as well as acknowledged the social benefits of inclusion for students with and without disabilities. The mixed findings from non TC graduates did not reveal either positive or negative attitudes which was inconsistent with Vaz, Wilson, Falkmer, Sim, Scott, Cordier, and Falkmer. (2015) who found that older teachers consistently had more negative attitudes towards inclusion.

In the interviews, several teachers have indicated their interest in receiving in-service training on special and inclusive education. Male (2011) along with Sari (2007) advocated that a professional development programme and in-service training helped

change teacher attitudes to be significantly more positive towards inclusion. Interestingly, Stoler (1992) as well as MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) revealed that teachers who have received more in-service training on inclusion tended to hold more positive attitudes toward inclusion than teachers who did not receive in-service training. Seçer (2010) also found that professional development programmes for teachers can have a huge impact on their attitudes towards inclusion and that staff development is key to the success of inclusion. Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) agree and say that more training teachers receive in inclusion encourages them to prepare individualized education programmes in order to meet the different student needs in the classroom, which eventually has a positive influence on teachers' self-confidence in being able to meet the needs of their students.

4.3. Support required for inclusion

Administrative support for teachers in an inclusive environment is an essential component of success. TC graduates specified the need for administrative support in order to implement inclusive education particularly from the Ministry of Education, the school administration, and the need for special education teachers. This is mirrored in the findings of Urton, Wilbert, and Hennemann (2014) who revealed an alignment between teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and attitudes of school leadership. Consistently, Forlin (2004) as well as Gaad and Lavina (2007) reported negative teacher attitudes towards inclusion as a result of the lack of administrative support. This shows the importance of administrative support to improve teacher attitudes towards inclusion as well as their classroom practices. Non TC graduates had comparable feedback and required specific guidance on assessment of special needs students and more involvement from parents and school leadership. This is consistent with the findings of Donohue and Bornman (2015) where participating teachers reported that successful implementation of inclusion depends on the availability of the following; personal assistants, teaching materials, instructional technology, and more training in inclusion. The authors indicated that the availably of the appropriate support could shift teachers' attitudes towards more positive perspectives of inclusive education. As for more parental involvement, Leatherman and Niemeyer (2005) and Gaad and Lavina (2007) proposed that teachers' collaboration with parents was an important aspect of their classroom and they encourage parent involvement. Positive relationships with families are essential for a successful inclusive classroom and teachers generally demonstrated positive attitudes towards working with families.

4.4. Assessment in an inclusive classroom

Interestingly, TC graduates and non TC graduates had a similar view of accommodations and modifications used to assist students during assessments. As indicated earlier, both groups of teachers need more guidance and possibly follow up professional development on how to assess students with special needs. Bourke and Mentis (2014) proposed an assessment framework of narrative assessment for inclusive education. The framework proposed facilitates for choice and integration which begins with normative assessment with a diagnostic purpose of students' abilities. This allows the teachers to focus on the learning goals of an individual child which then informs instruction. Teachers need an assessment framework that is contextualized and responds to the nature of learners for the successful application of inclusion.

4.5. Benefits of inclusion

Furthermore, TC graduates indicated the importance of inclusive education in benefiting special needs students particularly in the social domain. This is consistent with the findings of Odom and Diamond (1998) who recognised the advantages of inclusion of special needs students' developmental benefits, social competence, improved social skills and enhanced peer relationships. Although the non TC graduates supported the benefits of inclusive education, they have voiced some concerns as well regarding the exposure of some special needs students to bullying by their classmates. A study that examined students' perspectives of inclusive education found that students tended to experience bullying in areas that are less supervised such as the bathroom and playground. However, the disabled students insisted on their preference for inclusion saying that they acquired skills from their non-disabled friends such as defending themselves in a bullying situation (Satter & Hill, 2015). This reveals contradictory findings of the social benefits of inclusion from the perspective of teachers and students.

4.6. Multicultural education

As previously designated, only two teachers referred to the idea that ethnic minority students are part of inclusive education. This result agrees with that of Shyman (2015) that the majority of research in inclusive education does not regard ethnic minorities or multicultural education an essential element of an inclusive classroom and instead

focuses on the inclusion of students with disabilities. The need for multicultural education to be part of teacher education programmes is crucial given the great increase in Bahrain's immigrant population in recent years.

4.7. Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the small number of participants limits the ability to generalize the results. The reliability of the data is also uncertain given that the interviews were conducted by pre-service teachers at the TC teacher preparation programme. Although the interview process was monitored and the interviews were accurately transcribed and checked by their instructor, the pre-service teachers have little or no experience in regulating the interview environment, the depth of the interview questions, and asking to follow up questions for clarification. Additionally, given that the interview was conducted by pre-service teachers to in-service teachers, the nature of the interviewee responses could have been moderated by the participants to meet the experience level of the interviewers who are the pre-service teachers. The interviewees may have also provided socially desirable responses as to not disappoint or overwhelm the pre-service teachers interviewing them.

4.8. Implications of the study

One of the most important implications of this study is a necessary revision of the requirements of the TC teacher preparation programme to either review the current inclusive education course, or consider the addition of more courses related to inclusive education. This is an essential step in order to better prepare student teachers to perform at an inclusive classroom who would then provide better opportunities for all their students to learn and prosper. Additionally, follow up professional development courses are a necessity for both TC graduates and non TC graduates to keep teachers informed about the developments in the inclusive education field. One vital adjustment recommended for the Teachers College is to have more authentic assessment. For instance, practicum supervisors need to have higher expectations of their student teachers to provide an inclusive environment in their teaching practice, and that this should be formalized in the practicum assessment criteria for the consistency of standards regarding inclusion. Furthermore, the college needs to offer a special education programme alongside the general education programme to have more qualified locals that can provide the necessary support for general education teachers in schools.

4.9. Suggestions for future research

This study was possibly the first to explore the attitudes and challenges of in-service primary school teachers with inclusive education in Bahrain using a qualitative research method. A large number of studies are required in order to explore the effects of the TC teacher preparation programme in schools particularly relating to inclusive education. Studies can explore the different practices of teachers in an inclusive classroom, the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards inclusive education, the attitudes of in-service teachers towards inclusion and its relationship to their instructional practices, the nature of challenges faced by in-service teachers in inclusion, and the role of school leadership in supporting inclusion as well as its influence on teacher attitudes towards inclusion.

Although this study did not specifically address the usefulness of the TC programme, it does provide an indication of its effectiveness to prepare teachers to teach in an inclusive setting. The results generally revealed that there is minimal difference in the knowledge and attitudes towards inclusion for TC graduates and non TC graduates, which was contrary to the expectations. This could be attributed to a number of factors. For instance, the results could indicate that either the TC teacher preparation programme did not fully equip the teachers with the tools and instructional skills necessary to perform in an inclusive classroom which influenced their overall negative attitudes, or it could suggest that non TC graduates have become more aware of inclusion and its instructional practices as a result of their vast years of teaching experience compared to their novice colleagues.

In conclusion, the study revealed that there are no major differences in teachers' perspective and approach to inclusive education despite their education backgrounds. Overall, the teachers showed negative attitudes towards inclusion particularly for students with severe disabilities. It is hopeful that most teachers agreed that inclusive education is achievable with the appropriate administrative support, parental involvement, and consistent education and training for the teachers. Most of the participants agreed on the social benefits of inclusion for students but some were fearful of the possibility of subjecting special needs students to ridicule and bullying from their peers, which is important to consider. It is vital that teachers are educated on the appropriate assessment modifications and accommodation to implement for a successful inclusive environment. It is also essential for inclusive education to be defined locally by the ministry of education and the necessity to include multicultural education as a component due to the increased ethnic minority representation in schools. These means

could empower teachers with the necessary tools for a more effective and inclusive education system that provides learning opportunities for diverse learners to thrive.

Acknowledgments

Author's Bio

Hanin Bukamal works as an instructor in Bahrain Teachers College at the University of Bahrain. She teaches in an initial teacher education programme for pre-service teachers and a professional development programme for in-service teachers. Her research interests are in problem based learning, inclusive education, student centred learning, and teacher expectations.

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