



Teacher Assistants in the General Education Classroom

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Building Leadership for Change Through School Immersion



Author Information

Badriah Suwailem Al-Johani teaches English for first and second intermediate grades at the Eleventh Intermediate School located in Tabouk, northwest region, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She has a bachelor’s degree from the College of Education in Taif. Ms. Al-Johani participated in the Kansas State University Khbrat 2 SUMMIT program. As part of her experience in the immersion phase of the program, she spent three months at Ogden Elementary School and Marlatt Elementary School. Ms. Al-Johani observed, worked alongside a resource teacher and a social studies teacher, assisted students, and gained a better understanding of the U.S. educational system.

Abstract

The primary goal of special education is to help students with individualized needs to thrive and find success in the school environment. Research evidence from over the last 30 years in education has consistently demonstrated that students who are mainstreamed, or who are allowed to attend the general classroom with their peers, are more successful. However, there currently is not an infrastructure for supporting these students in the Saudi classroom. This is why increased implementation of paraprofessionals and teacher aides are critical to the realization of Saudi Arabia’s goals, as they relate to education. Paraprofessionals are an important part of the team that works to help students with special needs achieve success, and they are uniquely qualified to ensure that learners’ individual needs are met as they work toward the primary objectives in the general classroom. The current study will consider the best way to increase the number of teacher aides in the system.

Statement of Need

There is a clear need to adopt the practice of using assistants or aides in the educational system in Saudi Arabia. Currently, there is only one teacher in the classroom who is not able to focus on the larger learning needs of the class full of students while simultaneously meeting the individual needs of those students with disabilities or learning exceptions. As Saudi Arabia increasingly moves to mainstream these students, allowing them to be included in the primary classroom with their peers, there will be increased need for in-classroom support, which can be provided by para-professionals. Inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom enhances the social and academic outcomes for students with learning exceptions (Madden & Slavin, 1983). However, outcomes can be enhanced if assistants, or teacher aides, are present who can both support the main teacher’s goals and objectives and focus on the specialized needs of students with disabilities. In addition, assistant teachers can help in solving the problem of educational delay for students with specialized learning needs in Saudi schools.



Review of the Literature

Benefits

Mainstreaming students with special needs with the support of paraprofessionals has provided education that is socially equitable. Paraprofessionals perform multiple roles, and assisting teachers is central to their responsibilities. Battal (2015) reinforces that the special education curriculum is expansive and sometimes the teacher needs support. The aide can act on behalf of the teacher to facilitate progress with the curriculum and better ensure that students’ needs are met. Paraprofessionals can:

- Ensure that the students are doing their in-class work independently.
- Respond to questions or forward them to the classroom teacher for further support.
- Complete student records and documentation.

Challenges

It should be noted, however, that not all literature is equally supportive of the use of paraprofessionals (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005; Stetson, 2015). Precautions must be taken to avoid issues such as:

- Social isolation or stigma
- Dependence on the paraprofessional vs. access to teacher instruction
- Reductions in peer-to-peer interaction
- Loss of personal identity (Giangreco et al., 2005)

Paraprofessionals should function as a classroom assistant, rather than as a personal assistant (Stetson, 2015).

Implementation Plan

The project goal is to incorporate paraprofessionals in two elementary schools in the city of Tabuk. The overall plan will be achieved through the accomplishment of the following three steps.

1. Gain initial approval of the project and adoption by the Ministry of Education.
2. Employ and pay paraprofessionals.
 - ❖ Qualifications: High school degree, undergraduate education coursework, or bachelor’s degree in education.
3. Mentor and train the paraprofessionals.

This project focuses on step 3, due to its relevance to the researcher’s current work in the schools.

Objective	Activities	Target Audience	Period	Timeline	Responsible Entity/Individual(s)
To provide paraprofessionals with special training due to the natural of students with special needs.	Intensive Training Program	Paraprofessionals	1 month	During summer before starting the school year 2019-2020	School district in Tabuk
To train main teachers on knowledge and skills that are important for working with paraprofessionals in the classrooms.	Workshops	Classroom teachers	One week	Before the first day of school	School district in Tabuk
To introduce paraprofessionals to the students and staff with whom they will work and provide information about the school, rules, and so forth.	Initial Orientation	Paraprofessionals	2 days	The first two days of starting school	School

Evaluation Plan

The table summarizes the objectives, activities, tools, timeline, and entity/individuals responsible for evaluating the success of the project.

Objective	Activities	Tool	Timeline	Responsible Entity/ Individual
1. To evaluate the overall performance and outcomes of the students with whom the paraprofessionals worked in the classroom.	Collect and analyze the students’ pre and post scores.	Final Exams	Beginning of school year; end of each semester	School district
2. To determine the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students about the effectiveness of paraprofessionals in the classroom.	Survey the supervising teachers, students with whom paraprofessionals worked, and their parents to gather their perceptions of the paraprofessional support.	Survey	End of school year	Supervisor’s principal
3. To evaluate the degree to which the paraprofessionals successfully supported student learning under the direction of the classroom teacher.	Gather input from the principal and supervisor about the paraprofessional’s job performance.	Paraprofessional Evaluation Form	Monthly progress monitoring	Principal and supervisor

If all the experiences in the two schools result in positive outcomes and successful attainment of the objectives of this plan, then the program should be continued and applied to other schools in Saudi Arabia. Even if the initiative negatively impacts the learning experience, it must not come to an end. Rather, the Ministry of Education should find out the causes of the program failure and determine how to address them.



References

References are available upon request.

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خبرات

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