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**Teachers' Perceptions about Parent Involvement
in The Education of Children with Mild Cognitive
Disabilities in Saudi Arabia**

إعداد

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ملخص الرسالة:

Parent involvement in the education of all children is crucial but more crucial for children with mild cognitive disabilities. Education practitioners over the past 25 years have recognized a strong link between parent involvement and children's success in school and this has led professionals in the field to establish a relationship between parent involvement and increased student achievement, enhanced self-esteem, improved behavior, and better school attendance. There is also evidence that parent involvement in children's education is based on factors such as parent socioeconomic status, parent educational level, school culture, and teacher-parent relationships (Christenson, Round, & Gorney, 1992 ; Epstein, 1991). But despite this evidence, family involvement in children's education, particularly those with mild cognitive disabilities in Saudi Arabia remains minimal. This study examined the perceptions among male

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teachers concerning parent involvement in the education of male children with mild cognitive disabilities in special institutes and integrated schools in Saudi Arabia. The study investigated the factors and activities that teachers identified to promote parental involvement. Recommendations for practice and future research are provided.

The results of this study indicated that Based on teachers' perceptions, most of the response variables were significantly correlated. Among those, highly significant positive correlation was observed between parenting and volunteering ($r = 0.319$), communication and learning ($r = 0.601$), communication and 52 collaboration ($r = 0.634$), learning and collaboration ($r = 0.627$), collaboration and decision ($r = 0.699$), and decision and communication ($r = 0.569$). Before proceeding with MANOVA, multivariate normality assumption was tested. The Henze-Zirkler T test was significant, $p < .001$, which means that the assumption of multivariate normality was not met. However, since there was a good sample size of $n = 132$, MANOVA is robust to this assumption violation. The overall multivariate test was significant at 5% level of significance (Wilks' Lambda value = 0.712, $F = 10.279$, $p < 0.001$). That means there exists a statistically significant difference between the response variables in terms of teachers' perceptions on promoting parental involvement, such that the participants rated the six parental involvement factors differently. In this study, the Mauchly's sphericity test was significant (Mauchly's W value = 0.285, $p < 0.001$, GreenhouseGeisser epsilon value = 0.676). That is, there were significant differences between the variance of the differences and thus the assumption of sphericity was not met. Therefore, the researcher looked into the test of within-subjects effects using the Greenhouse-Geisser correction method to correct for this assumption violation of the MANOVA. According to the sum of the five point Likert

items (1= strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = strongly agree, 5 = Not Applicable), teachers' mean perception on the parents communication was the highest (M=13.08, SD= 2.08). That is, on average, teachers' agree that parents like to communicate with the teachers on helping with classroom, school, or home activities when invited. On the other hand, teachers' average perception on the parents volunteering was the lowest (M=12.12, SD=2.13), meaning that on average, teachers' disagree that parents like to volunteer on serving with classroom, school, or home activities when invited. Similar to the analysis for research question 1, MANOVA were conducted to determine the differences of several demographics on six dependent variables (Likert sum for parenting, volunteering, communication, learning, collaboration, and decision) measured based on the response to questions in Section 3. The overall multivariate test was significant at 5% level of 57 significances (Wilks' Lambda value = 0.826, F value = 5.361, $p < 0.001$). That means, there existed a statistically significant difference between the response variables in terms of teachers' perceptions on parental involvement activities, meaning that the participants rated the six parental involvement activities differently. Mauchly's sphericity test was also significant in this case (Mauchly's W value = 0.532, $p < 0.001$, Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon value= 0.792). That is, there were significant differences between the variance of the differences and thus the assumption of sphericity was not met. Hence, the researcher looked into the test of within-subjects effects considering Greenhouse Geisser correction. In this case, the Greenhouse-Geisser test indicated that activities (teachers' perceptions) were significant, which led to the need to conduct pairwise comparisons among the types of perceptions' of the teachers. The tests showed that differences existed in the ratings of the following pairs: parenting and communication.

However, there were no statistically significant differences between parenting and learning at home, parenting and collaboration, and parenting and decision-making. Pairwise comparisons with volunteering showed statistically significant differences between volunteering and communication, volunteering and learning at home, volunteering and collaboration, and volunteering and decision-making. In addition, the following pairwise comparisons did not produce any statistically significant differences: communication and learning at home, communication and collaboration, communication and decision-making, learning at home and collaboration, learning at home and decision-making, and collaboration and decision-making. To evaluate the research question, cross-tabulation and chi-square tests of association were used to obtain differences in the ratings of respondents. Survey questions 61 and 63 indicated statistically significant results. Results showed that teachers believed that parents who sent their children to special institutes sometimes or often got involved in their children's education while parents who sent their children to the integrated schools often or always got involved in their children's education. Survey question 63 regarding parents checking child's notes and assignments from school was also significant (Pearson chi-square =7.95, p-value = 0.046). This implies that the ratings were independent of the school of the respondent. This conforms to the null hypothesis of cross-tabulation. Other than these two, no other associations were found.

Implications for Practice:

The findings implied that authorities in charge of preparing school programs as well as researchers interested in parent involvement practices particularly in the education of children with mild cognitive disabilities in Saudi Arabia have to work together. Collaboration is key to the success of

parent involvement practices. There is need for partnership between school staff and parents, families, and the community. This study provided numerous practical applications of the diverse levels drawn from both the conclusions of the research as well as the literature review. First, as the study's outcomes showed that collaboration was rated the highest factor by teachers schools and educational entities should raise more opportunities to encourage the parents to be involved in schools' activities. Parents may not participate simply because the schools do not invite them to any activity. The educational agencies, especially special institutions, should take the initiative and reach out to parents. The results suggested that parents of students with mild cognitive disabilities in the special institutes might be perceived by teachers as not motivated to be involved in their child's education. In addition, the teachers who participated in the current study may be optimistic about the parent's involvement but they may not organize events or invite parents to visit the schools. Ninety two percent of the respondents agreed that parents who visited the school without invitation reflected higher willingness to be involved in their child's education. This number indicates that the teachers may expect parents to take the initiative to be involved in school activities. It is crucial that schools increase the teachers' knowledge regarding the significance of reaching out to the parents rather than waiting them to visit without invitation. This also can be included in pre-teachers training programs. In addition, the significant difference in the perception of teachers in special institutions versus integrated ones may suggest the urgent need to increase the integrated programs for students with mild cognitive disabilities. It seems that parents may perceive the special institutions as a shelter for their children rather than an educational place and hence they do not visit the schools as long as their child is safe. Second, another significant

implication revealed by the findings was the critical role of volunteering. Epstein (2001) stated that volunteering can be a great method to involve parents in schools activities. However, the findings showed that volunteering was rated the least important factor by the study's participants. The education system in Saudi Arabia does not include any items concerning volunteering in schools. Therefore, neither teachers nor parents expect to volunteer in the schools and parents' presence in the classroom may be perceived very unusual. Thus, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia should convey the educational experience of developed countries such as the United States of America and enact new policies that provide parents the chance to volunteer in the classroom activities. Third, the factor of parenting was rated very low by the teachers. This could be due to many reasons. One of these reasons is that Saudi Arabia does not have co-education. Girls attend their separate schools and are taught only by female teachers and the boys go to schools and are taught only by male teachers. Therefore, as some of the parents may be single it will be very difficult for them to be involved in their opposite-sex child's education. With this in mind, schools need to be very creative. One solution for such difficulties is to use the virtual classroom's activities. The findings showed that cultural and social issues were changing to the better and more communication was facilitated between parents and schools.

Implications for Future Research:

Because some areas of parent involvement factors were rated by respondents differently, varying from very low, low, to high, there might be a need to review the existing parent involvement practices in the special and integrated schools in the city of Riyadh in particular and Saudi Arabia in general. It is crucial that students with mild cognitive disabilities

acquired the required parental support to promote their self-worth, adolescent development, academic progress, and their overall development and social acceptance. The professional literature findings from Algozzine and Thurlow (2000), Dyson (1997), Turnbull and Turnbull (2001), Summers, Behr, and Turnbull (1989), and Gallagher, Rhodes, and Darling (2004), indicated that parental involvement in the education of children with disabilities is a critical and effective means of improving special education programs so it is necessary that authorities in Saudi Arabia emphasize parent involvement activities in the special and integrated schools for the total development of students with mild cognitive disabilities. The teachers also need to undergo quality professional development pre-service and inservice programs to help them work collaboratively with parents. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), parent involvement practices impact positively on students' achievements, attendance and behavior. It is therefore important that all the professionals working for and on behalf of students with mild cognitive disabilities be introduced to Epstein's six parent involvement phases namely, parenting, volunteering, communicating, learning at home, collaboration, and decision-making. Through these activities, parents can monitor the homework needs of their child at home, and encourage the child to listen and learn. Through parent involvement activities parents and teachers can work together both in the school and also in the community as partners in development to promote the social acceptance of the learners with mild cognitive disabilities.