The Effect of in-Service Training Program in Improving Performance Competencies for Learning Disabilities Resource Room Teachers in Jordan

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Introduction

One of the most important factors that influence a country’s abilities to be economically competitive is the quality of its human resources, and therefore, of its education and training system, which is central to the development of its human resources. In every educational system, the availability of abundant, qualified and dedicated teachers constitutes a significant resource to which educational planners and administrators devote considerable efforts. The concern for teacher supply in the right quality and quantity is largely due to the well-accepted maxim that teachers are the kingpins of the educational program, for it is they who determine the direction of the system and ensure its success.

Hence, a competent and effective teacher is one of the key elements in the success of the teaching and learning process (Aromolaran, 2005; Cheng & Tsui, 1996). One of the most pressing concerns surrounding the field of special education is to ensure there are highly qualified teachers for students with special needs (Bouck, 2005). Thus, it is essential to continuously evaluate the process that leads to teacher preparation in order to prepare teachers who are able to conduct the duties dependent on them towards handling the challenges imposed by the present era (Voorhees, 2001). Teachers’ training programs are necessary in order to upgrade their skills, knowledge and performance, to enable them to be more effective. According to Davis and Davis (1998), a teacher-training program is a process through which skills are developed, information is provided, and attitudes are nurtured, in order to help teachers to be more efficient in their work. Thus, training comes in as a solution to the lack of performance of the teachers or when there is need to effect change in the way things have been done (Koch, 2007). Most fundamental, is the need for strong teachers preparation programs to provide training in the knowledge and skills necessary for working with students with special needs (Heng & Tam, 2006).

Obiakor and Utley (1996) argues that training program can be perceived as a systematic development of certain necessary skill patterns in order to reach a certain level of competency in their execution of day-to-day tasks. Therefore, training is about identifying, assuring and helping planned learning in the key areas that enable teachers to perform current or future jobs (Wigle & Wilcox, 2002). It is aimed at both improving performance and capacity (Bursey, 1997). Thus, training programs have to equip teachers with valuable skills acquired through training that they deem necessary at their various schools (Kennedy, 1991). Furthermore, training programs play a pivotal role, as it is through training that teacher’s skills and attitudes
can be changed for their own betterment. Therefore, training programs are of vital importance to teachers and to governments to pass on the latest innovations in teaching methods/strategies and new curricula (David, 2001).

**Special Education Training Program in Jordan**

Special education teacher training programs urgently need development since the field of special education still suffers from a lack of qualified educational staff with professional competencies (Renitta, Jerry & Ann, 2004). The quality of educational service for students with special needs depends upon the abilities, qualification, and competencies of the educators who provide services to such individuals (Wilcox, Putnam, & Wigle, 2002).

Jordan has tried to find proper solutions for the problem of training special education teachers, and these solutions were represented in establishing special programs for training special education teachers. Jordan paid special attention to developing the skills of special education teachers and enhancing their instructional competencies. In Jordan, there are two programs for training special education teachers: pre-service and in-service. In pre-service training program (PSTP), teachers often have to attend compulsory courses according to rules established by curricular to obtain a diploma or BA or MA or PhD degree. Such training is provided by formal education institutes, which prepare future professional for job. The pre-service training programs fail to equip special educators with practical skills necessary for effectively teaching students with special needs (Carroll, Jobling & Forline, 2003; D’Alonzo et al, 1996). However, in all universities in Jordan, general and special education teacher training programs operate under a dual system. Teacher training curricula do not include compulsory units of work on special education and general educators (Al Khatib, 2007).

Indeed, the field of special education in Jordan is still short of well-trained educational staff that possesses the necessary teaching skills and competencies. The majority of teachers working with children with special needs in Jordan have indeed never received the appropriate training in special education during PSTPs (Hadidi, 1990; 1993). The theoretical side of these programs is still more prominent than the practical side. Besides, lecturing is still the prevailing method in these conventional training programs. The special educator training programs in Jordan is an over-emphasis on knowledge acquisition and theoretical issues (Al Khatib, 2007). Although this has been indicated as a limitation in Western Universities as well (Carroll, Jobling & Forline, 2003), it is more pronounced in Jordan. There are no indications of any in-service training programs being designed based on teachers’ training needs for special education resource room teachers. Yet, there is a great need for skilled and qualified staff to help children with learning disabilities, and to keep up with the fast pace of development in the field of special education, especially with the increasing numbers of children joining the various special education centers, and the increasing demand on special education services for students of learning disabilities, using the resource room as an educational alternative.
In one study carried out in 1984 by the Queen Alia Fund for Social and Voluntary Work, it was found that 80% of special education teachers in Jordan had never received any type of pre-service training in instructional planning and student evaluation in relation to teaching children with special needs. Furthermore, several studies in Jordan mentioned that special education graduates and those working in the schools of special education expressed their unhappiness with the content of the pre-service training programs (Hadidi, 1993). On the other hand, Al-Weher and Abu-Jaber (2007) recommended continuing in pre-service teachers training programs in Jordan, but with some modifications of its components to include a greater percentage of academic and practicum courses.

Hadidi’s studies (1990; 1993) show that the field of special education in Jordan is short of teachers with experience and appropriate professional training. Consequently, Hadidi recommends in-service training programs to enhance and develop the skills and the competencies of teachers. However, Khuzai (2001) mentions the differences in the level of resource room teachers’ mastery of effective teaching skills such as planning, instruction, classroom management, behavior modification, and evaluation.

The In-service training programs (ISTP) are any vocational training acquired during employment, and undertaking to engage in such training is usually part of appointment agreement between trainer and trainee. Traditionally, teacher development was confined to in-service courses; however, a range of activities relating to both the formal and informal school process should be included in teacher development. Moreover, much of conventional ISTP was unsuccessful. This led to the recognition that development should begin with teachers’ evaluation of their own practice and the identification of their training needs (Schofield, 1994). Malone, Straka, and Logan (2000) are of the opinion that ISTP is a necessary extension of PSTP with the aim of enhancing awareness, knowledge, skills and competencies.

Method

Participants
The population of the study composes all female and male teachers working in the resource room in Irbid governorate, Jordan. They are distributed within seven Educational Director-
ates. The sample of the study consisted of fifty (50) male and female teachers working in the resource room in Irbid governorate, Jordan and they are distributed within seven Educational Directorates. All fifty teachers were chosen according to the stratified random sampling. Therefore, the sample in this study was divided into equal groups with 25 teachers in each group. After these procedures, one group was randomly chosen to be the experimental and the second as the control group. The resource room teachers in the experimental group have gone the specially designed training program module for five weeks; while the teachers in the control group were exposed into conventional training program which adopted by Jordanian Ministry of Education. The nonequivalent (pretest and posttest) control-group design, which is a popular approach to the quasi-experimental research, is used in this study. This design is used to measure the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables.

The Training Program Module

The training program module was developed in order to upgrade skills, knowledge, and understanding and enhance the instructional competencies of resource room teachers. The training program was conducted with the participants of the study for five (5) weeks of the period between July 5 and August 13, 2006. The training was conducted for two days a week, for a period of three hours a day with a half hour break in between. This training program module consists of three domains/competencies:

i) Planning for instruction. This domain consists of three training units: instructional planning, Instructional objectives, and the individualized educational program;

ii) Instructional and classroom management. This domain consists of five training units which are classroom management; Instructional aids used with students with learning disabilities, Instructional strategies in special education, cooperative learning and motivation; and

iii) Evaluation. This domain consists of two training units: evaluation and formal and informal evaluation in special education.

Data Collection and Analysis
Results

Note. a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: pre-OS= 111.54

In order to examine if there are statistically significant differences at p<.05 between the control and the experimental groups on the post-classroom observation scale (post-OS), the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) technique was conducted. Table 2 illustrates the results of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) between adjusted mean scores on the post-OS. The results of ANCOVA revealed that there are significant differences between the adjusted means of the control and the experimental groups. In addition, significant differences favored the experimental group. This shows the effects of the training program in improving performance competencies for resource room teachers.

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Note. a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: pre-OS= 111.54

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Discussion


