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“School for all”: teachers’ perspective of inclusive education for hearing-impaired learners in Dubai, UAE

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Abstract

The “School for All” policy implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Dubai states that all learners, regardless of their developmental delays or disabilities, have the same right to equal education as children with no difficulties. The MOE and the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) have therefore implemented the inclusive education policy within all private schools in Dubai. The private schools in Dubai are thus referred to as ‘inclusive schools’ as per the definition of the policy implemented. Teachers are mandated to teach all children within the Dubai inclusive school setting regardless of any additional required support and special needs. As the majority of teacher training in private Dubai inclusive schools has focussed on autism, there is a dearth of information surrounding teacher training for auditory impairments. The possible lack of training in assisting children with hearing impairments in private Dubai inclusive schools, may often leave the teachers feeling inexperienced when supporting the hearing-impaired learners within the inclusive setting which has been implemented under the “School for All” policy. Hearing-impaired learners are often moved to another classroom in order to have one-on-one support, and learners may begin to feel frustrated and inadequate as they are taken away from their peers, which contradict the definition and framework of inclusive education. The current research investigated the teachers’ perspectives of teaching the hearing-impaired learner within the private English-speaking regular schools in Dubai, that are governed by KHDA and implementing the “School for All” policy. A qualitative approach was used in this study. The participant schools were conveniently sampled and selected due accessibility for the researcher. The participants were required to read, write and speak English fluently as this was the primary language medium of the participant schools. The perspective of the

participants regarding inclusion of hearing-impaired learners was explored through observations within the classrooms and school, teacher questionnaires and a focus group discussion. The combination of the results added to the richness of the data and through triangulation enhanced the reliability and validity of the study, and then analysed through a thematic content, providing the researcher with constructive information regarding the perspectives of teachers within private regular Dubai schools regarding inclusion of hearing-impaired learners.

The results of this research indicate that although the teachers in the three schools agree with inclusion of hearing-impaired learners through the implementation of the "School for All" policy, further training and knowledge acquisition in effectively assisting hearing-impaired learners, would benefit in their academic and social development. The participants believed that the curriculum of the school could be adapted to accommodate hearing-impaired learners needs, enhancing their ability to learn within inclusive classrooms. Further domains included financial burdens on parents and schools, the teachers' role with limited resources and the school management role. External therapists, including speech-language therapist, occupational therapist, psychologists, behavioural therapists and physiotherapists, assist the hearing-impaired learners within the classroom setting; however, at an additional cost to hearing-impaired learners' parents. School and classroom infrastructure would require adaptations to assist the hearing-impaired learners effectively in their academic and social development, thus requiring increased financial costs to the school. Further research on the perspective of teachers within government schools, and a larger number of private regular Dubai schools, and the comparison between female and male teacher perspectives is required. This further research would assist in gaining a broader number of teacher perspectives of inclusive

education of the hearing-impaired learner. The perspective of hearing-impaired learners' in higher grade levels where academic demands are greater would be necessary to fully understand the implications and effects of inclusion of the hearing-impaired learners. By combining research under different perspectives, the effectiveness and implications of the "School for All" policy for the hearing-impaired learners would be established. The findings of this study could serve as a baseline research into the perspective of teachers within regular Dubai schools, regarding the implications for the implementation of the "School for All" policy for the hearing-impaired learner.

Key words*: School for All, inclusion, private regular Dubai schools, hearing-impaired learners*