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## Investigating the Role of School Principals in Promoting Inclusive Schools: A Teachers' Perspective

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United Arab Emirates University

College of Education

Department of Foundation of Education

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN  
PROMOTING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS: A TEACHERS'  
PERSPECTIVE

Nid'a Saleem Khaleel

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education (Educational Leadership)

Under the Supervision of Dr. Mohamed Al Hosani

April 2020

### Declaration of Original Work

I, Nid'a Saleem Khaleel, the undersigned, a graduate student at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), and the author of this thesis entitled "*Investigating the Role of School Principals in Promoting Inclusive Schools: A Teachers' Perspective*", hereby, solemnly declare that this thesis is my own original research work that has been done and prepared by me under the supervision of Dr. Mohamed Al Hosani, in the College of Education at UAEU. This work has not previously been presented or published or formed the basis for the award of any academic degree, diploma or a similar title at this or any other university. Any materials borrowed from other sources (whether published or unpublished) and relied upon or included in my thesis have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with appropriate academic conventions. I further declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, data collection, authorship, presentation and/or publication of this thesis.

Student's Signature: *Nida Khaleel*

Date: 10/5/2020

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## Abstract

After the implementation of inclusion in the education field in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and worldwide, a group of challenges have accompanied this system. Some studies in the literature were conducted concerning inclusion to indicate such challenges and the central role players in schools who apply this system (i.e. inclusive schools.) This study focuses on the role of school principals in promoting inclusion in their inclusive schools. Thus, this study aims to investigate the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in the city of Al Ain in the UAE. The factors which affect the SODs' (Students of Determination) inclusion in Al Ain schools, and which school principals should consider, were examined to achieve this aim. And then, the school reforms which should be implemented in these schools by principals were explored and determined. Therefore, a qualitative research was employed in this study with a phenomenological approach to gather and analyse data on the current state in Al Ain inclusive schools. The instrument was a semi-structured interview; a total of 10 interviews were conducted to collect data. Two groups of 10 special education and general education teachers, five from public schools and five from private schools, participated in the study. The researcher then refined and analysed the collected data using thematic analysis. The overall study finding implies that a school principal has the key role in promoting an inclusive school when considering the factors which affect SODs' inclusion and when implementing effective reforms in the school. Accordingly, the major contribution of this study was spreading awareness among teachers in schools, where the investigation took place, to re-consider the factors which affect SODs in their schools. The study also contributed to the relevant literature on the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in the UAE context. Finally, this study recommended that school principals need intensive professional development and high-level of awareness in the area of inclusion. It also highlighted that the school principals must consider the SODs' needs similarly as other typical students' in their inclusive schools.

**Keywords:** School principal, inclusive school, students of determination (SODs), factors, general education teachers, special education teachers, Al Ain schools.

## Title and Abstract (in Arabic)

### تقصي دور مدراء المدارس في تعزيز المدارس الشاملة: وجهة نظر المعلمين

#### الملخص

بعد تطبيق نظام الدمج في مجال التعليم في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، صاحبت هذا النظام مجموعة من التحديات. وقد أُجريت بعض الدراسات الأدبية المتعلقة بالدمج للإشارة إلى هذه التحديات ودور الأشخاص في المدارس لتطبيق هذا النظام (المدارس الشاملة). تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي دور مدراء المدارس في تعزيز التعليم الشامل في مدارس مدينة العين في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، فقد تم فحص العوامل المؤثرة على تكيف الطلاب ذوي الهمم في المدارس في مدينة العين. بالإضافة إلى تقصي الإصلاحات المدرسية التي يقع تطبيقها في هذه المدارس على عاتق المدراء. من أجل ذلك، وظفت هذه الدراسة بحثاً كميّاً (qualitative research) مع اتباع منهجية دراسة الظواهر (phenomenological approach) لجمع وتحليل البيانات المتعلقة بالوضع الراهن. وُظفت المقابلة شبه المنظمة (semi-structured interview) أداة لجمع البيانات؛ لذلك تم إجراء ما مجموعه 10 مقابلات لجمع بيانات الدراسة. شارك في الدراسة ما مجموعه 10 معلمين وقد تم تقسيمهم إلى مجموعتين وهما معلمو التربية الخاصة ومعلمو التعليم العام بحيث يضم هؤلاء كل من مدارس القطاع الحكومي والقطاع الخاص. قامت الباحثة بتصفية وتحليل البيانات بعد جمعها بالتحليل الموضوعي (thematic analysis). تضمنت نتائج الدراسة أن مدير المدرسة له الدور الرئيسي الأكبر في تعزيز المدرسة الشاملة عندما يراعي العوامل المؤثرة على دمج الطلاب ذوي الهمم وعندما يطبق إصلاحات مدرسية فعالة في المدرسة. ساهمت هذه الدراسة بتوعية مدراء ومعلمين المدارس التي تم إجراء البحث فيها إلى ضرورة اعتبار هذه العوامل التي تؤدي إلى نجاح الدمج في المدارس. علاوة على ذلك، فقد أضافت هذه الأطروحة دراسة جديدة عن دور مدراء المدارس في تعزيز وإنجاح عملية الدمج في المدارس الشاملة، إلى الدراسات في الأدب في دولة الإمارات والمتعلقة بالموضوع. أخيراً، توصي هذه الدراسة بأن مدراء المدارس بحاجة إلى التطوير المهني المكثف والتوعية عالية المستوى في مجال الدمج. كما أنها تؤكد على مدراء المدارس ضرورة اعتبار الطلاب ذوي الهمم واحتياجاتهم كسائر الطلاب في مدارسهم الشاملة.

**مفاهيم البحث الرئيسية:** مدير المدرسة، التعليم الشامل، الطلاب ذوي الهمم، عوامل، معلمين التعليم العام، معلمين التعليم الخاص، مدارس مدينة العين.



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## Dedication

*To my beloved parents, brothers, sisters and best friend*

*To my late grandmother (May her soul rest in peace)*

*To all my friends and beloved ones*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| ADEK   | Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge                  |
| ADHD   | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder                         |
| EHC    | Education, Health and Care                                       |
| GE     | General Education  |
| PIS    | Principal and Inclusion Survey                                   |
| SE     | Special Education  |
| SEN    | Special Educational Needs  |
| SOD    | Student of Determination   |
| UAE    | United Arab Emirates   |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview**

It is commonly known that principals are considered the essence which determines whether institutions are operated and directed successfully or not. Therefore, school principals are held responsible for the success or failure of their schools. In other words, school principals have a significant responsibility towards the school system in and outside the premises, and they are the ones to implement educational systems and policies throughout the school. They can be as role models who lead either successful professional teachers and employees or those with low qualifications and poor performance. Ultimately, school principals have an indirect but significant impact on students' learning by fulfilling their diverse needs and abilities, as they are the ones to legislate and establish school systems and policies which are built to serve this ultimate goal.

Dyal, Flynt and Bennett-Walker (1996), confirmed that a school principal plays a vital role in forming an educational climate, which provides learning opportunities for all students with disabilities and the other typical ones. The researchers further explained that a principal could build a community of learners or can allow classrooms, students, and teachers to continue to act autonomously. Moreover, they reported that school principals' attitudes and roles, their relationship and vision are all found to be active parts of an inclusive school environment. Additionally, they reported that principals need several steps to facilitate the creation of inclusive schools, writing a strong statement of mission and of vision for the success of all children, which lies on the principal responsibility, is an initial step towards an inclusive school. Furthermore, Cohen (2015) agreed that the principal is considered

the most crucial change agent in the school; the principal is the central factor which contributes to a successful inclusion program.

Schools with inclusion or inclusive education refer to schools which allow the integration of learners with disabilities with other typical learners. It is a process or system which incorporates children with special needs in the general classrooms where they can socialise and can get the chance to be accepted by others. (Hussain, 2017; Jackson, Ryndak & Billingsley, 2000). According to Jackson, Ryndak and Billingsley (2000), inclusive education refers to the usage of the inclusion method in education to generate a new type of education which is characterised by getting students with disabilities incorporated in classes of regular schools. Consideration perceives that all of them are students who profit by significant, challenging, and appropriate educational elements, and separated teaching methods that address their unique abilities and necessities.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) government initiated the inclusion school program “School for all” in 2006 under Federal Law No. 29, which adopted the concept of inclusive education to ensure that all learners with disabilities, students of determination (SODs), have access to educational opportunities in both public and private schools and educational institutions in the UAE (Hussain, 2017). The Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) considers the education right for all members of society, including people of determination. The department strives to enforce legislation and policies and to present initiatives that guarantee those people full inclusion in the system of regular schools, and to ensure that their social skills and linguistic development start from early childhood levels (ADEK, 2020). Mariam Al Qubaisi, the head of special needs, reported that the ultimate goal to have inclusion in a percentage of 100 in 2015 in the UAE. Besides, she pointed out that inclusion is all



people's responsibility, and she emphasised the significance of integrating SODs in schools, and the opportunities can be given to them (Bell, 2015).

Nevertheless, it remains a significant challenge worldwide to ensure that each individual obtains an equal opportunity for educational progress (UNESCO, 2019). SODs might confront many obstacles during the transition and adaptation processes in regular schools' settings, as they need special care and treatment, and modified curriculum and instruction according to their levels or needs. The lack of these needs results in many obstacles to SODs in regular schools. Such obstacles initially exist due to the school principals' unawareness and lack of attention to these students' needs. This unawareness can lead many challenges and obstacles to appear, such as the lack of qualified special and general educators, the absence of policies and laws which protect those learners' rights, and many other challenges. Thus, in inclusive schools who integrate SODs with other typical students, the role of school principals is more critical and challenging.

Consequently, the inclusive schools' ultimate goal, which is providing students learning, might be more complicated and challenging for principals to achieve. To work toward that goal, school principals have to be aware of the challenges which SODs might face and to promote their learning. Therefore, school principals should first raise their awareness regarding their roles and responsibilities toward all learners in their inclusive schools, including the SODs. Also, principals need to be aware of the inclusive school settings' requirements, which should be effectively set up considering a group of factors that affect SODs' inclusion in regular schools. Finally, principals have to consider a group of school reforms and changes in order to prepare their inclusive schools before inclusion is practically applied.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Inclusion has several benefits, for all SODs, along with the typical students in inclusive schools. It is a righteous and humane school system which can help in relieving the intensity of the distress and struggle of SODs and their families, once they feel that they are integrated into the society. However, due to a variety of reasons, inclusion has become a significant challenge which confronts school systems worldwide (Ainscow, 2005a; UNESCO, 2019). As Konza (2008) stated, although the inclusive model of education has unlimited benefits for students with disabilities, a group of critical issues are still unsolved. Such issues can be hindering the success of the implementation of full inclusion. The most challenging issue is the vast differences in school members' attitudes toward inclusion.

Numerous troublesome issues and challenges arose in schools who largely integrate SODs without determining school preparations. The appearance of such challenges demands the commitment of authoritative individuals who can defend these student's rights through their power and influence on others. Nevertheless, the actual situation reflects that most principals are not entirely prepared and do not consider these students (SODs) and their rights. As a result, once a school principal integrates those students without affording the education services they need, it will be inconvenient to call it an effective or successful inclusive school. Consequently, once the principal disregards SODs, it can be reflected in the school community and their misconceptions regarding inclusion and the SODs. Accordingly, the essential role of school principals in introducing and integrating a successful inclusion program in schools was documented in many research studies (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Cohen, 2015; Dyal, Flynt & Bennett-Walker, 1996; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Horn, 2011; Macmillan & Edmunds, 2010; Mthethwa, 2008; Riehl, 2000).

Nevertheless, the role of school principals is not explicitly highlighted in research in regard to the ways employed for promoting inclusive schools' settings and practices. Riehl (2000), stressing on this fact, claimed that a limited number of research studies explored thoroughly what the school administrators can apply to promote fully inclusive schools and to well-serve diverse students. Likewise, the literature in the UAE lacks the topics in this respect. Moreover, the researcher, as a general education teacher, experienced the problem which any general education teacher would experience when teaching SODs without the required training and preparations. In several situations, the researcher could become more aware of the lack of school principals' attention to this matter and their reliance on special education departments to deal with issues concerning SODs.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in Al Ain from teachers' perspectives. In order to fulfil this purpose, the researcher explored the factors which affect the SODs' inclusion and their adaptation in Al Ain schools, and whether they are considered by principals. And then she examined the school reforms required for better inclusive schools which are to be applied by school principals in Al Ain. Considering the factors affecting SODs together with the required school reforms can lead principals to facilitate and promote their inclusive schools; this, in return, will enhance the SODs' inclusion in regular schools. Therefore, the researcher reviewed the literature concerning the role of school principals in relation to these two perspectives and then conducted this qualitative research to collect data on the current situation in Al Ain schools.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

This study answers the main question, which is: “How can a school principal promote an inclusive school?” There are three sub-questions used to answer this question:

1. What is the role of school principals in inclusive schools?
2. What are the main factors to be considered when including SODs in inclusive schools?
3. What are the school reforms needed to promote inclusive schools?

#### **1.5 Significance of the study**

The increasing awareness of inclusion in schools worldwide raised many related studies in the literature. However, no research studies were conducted in the UAE to examine the role of school principals in inclusive schools. This study is considered as an attempt to fill the gap in the literature by collecting data on the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in Al Ain. The collected data can highlight the main factors which affect SODs’ inclusion in regular schools in Al Ain. Moreover, the findings can emphasise a group of school reforms which can be effective and helpful for school principals to promote inclusive schools. All in all, the current study findings can be beneficial to all inclusive school community members, especially to principals, teachers, typical students, SODs, and their parents.

#### **1.6 Definition of terms**

- ADEK: the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge was established as the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) in 2005. The department is destined to develop and promote the education system in educational organisations in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (Edarabia, 2013).

- Federal Law No. 29/2006 “School For All”: A law was enacted in 2006 by the UAE Federal Government and which was targeted to protect the rights of people of determination in the UAE. This law guarantees those people equal educational opportunities and rights along with health, training and rehabilitation to get a decent life and comprehensive care (Gaad, 2004).
- General education teachers: Qualified individuals who teach a standard curriculum for typically healthy, developing children (Hussain, 2017).
- Inclusion: The practice of getting learners with disabilities included in regular school classes (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Others defined it as a philosophy that integrates diverse individuals like students, educators, families, and community members to form schools and social institutions on the basis of acceptance and belonging (Bakken & Obiakor, 2016).
- Inclusive education: this term suggests that students with special education needs should be integrated into classrooms prepared for the majority of students. It states that inclusive schools are required to identify and respond to learners’ diverse needs, different styles and rates of learning should be accommodated, and the quality education to be ensured to all through suitable curricula, teaching strategies, organisational operations, community partnerships and resource use (Hussain, 2017; UNESCO, 2019).
- SEN: A child has 'SEN' if he or she is unable to learn in comparison to other typical children, then a special education program is to be devoted to him or her (Snapcymru, 2020).
- Special education teachers: Individuals who are charged with all duties connected with general education teachers, and who are specialised to instruct and teach

students who have disabilities including mental and physical disabilities and others (Bos & Vaughn, 2005).

- Students Of Determination (SODs): Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, launched a national strategy in 2017 in order to empower “people with disabilities” and he decided that they will be called as “people of determination” instead (Khaleej Times, 2017).
- Students with special needs: Students who are influenced by or at risk for long-lasting physical, behavioural, developmental, or emotional conditions, and those who need health and related services beyond those required by other children (Russo, 2006).
- Typical student: Describing a student who does not have any kind of disability as typical is the adequate way rather than “normal” which can refer to students with disabilities as “abnormal” (Webster, 2019).

### **1.7 Limitations and delimitations**

The study was limited to eight schools in the city of Al Ain, in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Also, circumstances of participants and school environments made it difficult to directly apply the interviews one on one, which restricted the researcher to conduct some interviews through phone calls. All teachers were females who volunteered to participate, and of whom they met the criteria of the purposeful sample. Besides, the authenticity of the collected data depended on the interviewed participants' honesty and degree of openness towards the researcher. Besides, some participants could not show their actual attitudes while providing data about their schools. Therefore, the analysis showed that their answers were not compatible with other teachers from the same sector (public or private), which showed that their

answers could not be considered completely genuine and authentic. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study findings relied on the ability of the researcher to gain quality descriptions from the collected data.

According to these limitations, the researcher had to delimit the boundaries, like time and place of the interviews. The researcher selected the time and the place or the methods of communication which best suited the participants' circumstances and which, at the same time, could help the researcher accomplish the data collection procedure on time. Moreover, regarding the participants who offered wrong or unauthentic data about their schools, the researcher had to rely on others' responses which seemed more realistic and convenient, here the rest of the nine interviewed participants could help the researcher get the desired data. Besides, the researcher translated some of the special education and Arabic teachers' responses in the interviews when they could not express their ideas clearly in English to help accomplish the data collection and analysis procedures from a variety of subject teachers.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This study is aimed to investigate the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in Al Ain. This chapter presents a wide-ranging review from the literature, which is mainly about inclusion and inclusive schools, and the principals' significant role and practices in these schools. The structure of this chapter is divided into six main sections. The first section introduces an overview of the role of school principals in inclusive schools and the challenges they face in leading schools while applying inclusion. The second section defines inclusion and gives detailed explanations of related concepts, essential benefits of inclusion, and crucial demands. The third section presents a leadership framework which is designed for inclusive schools, and it presents the required settings and designs in these schools. The fourth section explains the principals' primary responsibilities in inclusive schools and the principles they should consider. The fifth section clarifies the principals' main obligations and practices which are substantial when applying inclusion. Sixth and last section presents the previous local and global research studies, of which the researcher reviewed, and which provided direct benefit to the current study topic and design.

### **2.1 School leadership and inclusion**

#### **2.1.1 School principals' challenges**

Principals', as school leaders, responsibilities play a crucial role in making schools succeed or fail in reaching the ultimate goal, which is the learning of all students. Generally, not all school principals succeed in providing the necessities and the required arrangements to ensure the learning of diverse students with different abilities as it is considered a challenging task. This could be driven from the abundant



responsibilities which principals are accountable for or caused by own beliefs and attitudes toward the learning and the inclusion of SODs in their schools.

The role of school principals in education, as Sood, Peart and Mistry (2018) demonstrated, is represented in their responsibility towards students' achievement of their potential, by creating the environment which allows them to reach that goal. Sood and his fellows (2018) also considered the need for a strong, morally driven leadership in creating a vision. This vision enables education settings to achieve positive change based on ethical values in order to meet present and future needs of communities, through positive staff engagement.

School principals have different challenges compared with other institutions' leaders. The school principal has the school building responsibility, along with the educational aim's fulfilment in teaching and learning (Hurley & O'Connor, 2016). Moreover, as it has been proved in research, it is the school principals' responsibility to create the difference in schools and students' performance if they have their autonomy in making decisions. However, autonomy cannot lead to improved leadership alone in schools, except if it is well-supported. Furthermore, the main responsibilities of principals are essential to be identified (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008).

In the twenty-first century, new challenges appeared which might delay the inclusion fulfilment, and which the school principals have to cope with and manage by working with a diverse professional workforce to support a greater range of educational needs. Furthermore, in order to foster and enhance the inclusion of learners and workers in such a quickly changing situation, principals will have to evolve a vision which is coherent and persuasive to ensure the support of internal and external communities (Sood, Peart and Mistry, 2018).

### **2.1.2 Leadership for effective school management**

School management is a part of school leadership. Schools nowadays in need of a principal as a leader rather than a manager. As Ainscow (2005b) confirmed, in many countries, there were changes in legislation which have changed the role of school management. Therefore, many schools started to pay more attention to management structures, processes and roles. However, this could lead to an overreliance on systems and an identical decrease in the given attention to those aspects of school life, which might unite and inspire human effort. Thus, under the term 'leadership', such aspects can be grouped to refer to the processes used to influence groups of staff towards everyday purposes' achievement. The school effectiveness studies give a piece of evidence to suggest that school principals' leadership is a fundamental element in identifying school success.

More recent studies moved this function away from being only for the headteacher to the way leadership can be available all over the management structure and at all school community's levels. The main consequence here is the realisation that management arrangements need to modify so the leadership can be widely exercised. Consequently, as leadership and management remain interrelated, it is with great importance during any changes in a school to have positive strategies to develop leadership approaches and reflect them in management structure (Ainscow, 2005b). Eventually, school principals, as leaders, need to own the responsibility of the school as a building, a community, an organisation, and a group of procedures which are all managed and directed to produce well-educated learners by utilising and supervising professional teaching staff.

### **2.1.3 The initiatives of inclusion and leadership**

The inclusion of SODs has gone through many phases and stages throughout the years, and school principals have responded to it differently. Clough (1998) stated that there is a necessity to place the focus attentively with greater openness on how learning occurs in ways which allow all students to be included and to stress more on the given curriculum and used pedagogy. Moreover, Riehl (2000) stated that principals conquer positions in schools that convey various responsibilities and opportunities, which work in a specific tradition of practices which has individualised strengths and weaknesses.

In the twentieth century, inclusion carried a notable growth in the educational services and facilities around the world. Thus, the special education system has expanded, and this growth included exceptional learners with learning difficulties. In other words, access to educational opportunity has been given to all children, and inclusive education increased. However, from 1981 to the late nineties, a new framework generated in the field for managing special education assessment and decision-making. For example, 'handicap' categories have been revoked, and instead, there was the 'special educational needs' concept (Clough, 1998).

The purpose of the identification of 'special educational needs' was a lead to a flexible procedure for managing intervention and resources instead of life-long labelling. The word 'inclusion' means the accessing of educational opportunities which are a support to the claim that the systems of special education were not only evolved to manage difference but to extend opportunities. Besides, there are several pressures within this system which promote the use of special education procedures to exclude the annoying, demanding children and special schools from managing those children once they are excluded (Clough, 1998).

## **2.2 Inclusion**

### **2.2.1 Definitions of inclusion**

Inclusion has many definitions which all implicate the same meaning from different perspectives. Konza (2008) defined inclusion as the removal of the discrepancy between special education and general education ultimately, as well as the delivery of appropriate education to all learners regardless of the differences in their abilities. Inclusion indicates a comprehensive restructuring and reorganising of the system of education so as to ensure that schools are responsible for the resources, services and proper curricula provided to all students regardless of their abilities. After reviewing many studies, Konza (2008) defined inclusion also as a move of philosophy further than the students with disabilities' accommodation into regular schools towards a model of full inclusion where every individual is viewed typical, and all students' needs are met. This movement is arranged inside a broad social equity motivation, which contends that equity for all should include that all students have access to the nearby school.

Inclusion program can benefit learners by providing the suitable, inspiring, and meaningful curriculum, and the teaching strategies which are based on differentiation, and which can point out their strengths and needs individually (Salend, 2005). Nevertheless, Ainscow (2005a) acknowledged that there is a lack of clear definitions for inclusion as it appeared in much national supervision that the idea of inclusive education is connected with each individual's right who is characterised of having special educational needs to be learning in mainstream schools when the time is conceivable. Ofsted, an inspection agency, initiated the conception 'educational inclusion' and referred that inclusive schools are effective schools.

However, four essential elements were produced to be the best featured and developed by the school system. The first element indicates that inclusion is an ongoing process of a search for better ways utilised in response to diversity. The second element refers to the primary concern in inclusion which is identifying and eliminating the barriers to inclusion and planning for practice and policy improvements. The third element is regarding the presence, where those children will obtain their education, the participation, their experiences' quality and their views, and achievement, their outcomes and results of learning. The fourth element emphasises the danger of these learners' exclusion, minimisation or underachievement, and indicates the significance of moral responsibility in assuring that these learners are monitored carefully and taking the steps needed toward ensuring their achievement, participation and achievement (Ainscow, 2005a).

### **2.2.2 Inclusion for children and young people of determination**

Ekins and Grimes (2009) brought into attention about the responsibilities towards students with SEN, which was made clear by 2015 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice. This Code has strengthened all the children and young people with disabilities in terms of provision and care. Which then will lead to raising their standards in return. According to the Code, a student with SEN must get covered up in terms of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan and also if they need 'additional or different educational provision', it should be provided too. The EHC plan overruled SEN statements.

The school principals should know the history of an organisation to implement and carry on the ideas in both internal and external communities. They should have a clear picture of the initiatives that were previously tried and how these were received, were the schemes implemented before got successful or were there any stumbling

block? Principals should not hesitate to try new ideas which might be culturally incompatible, but still, by bearing the tradition in mind and by respecting the customs they have to develop a morally supportive vision that has the best probability of yielding success. Staff, student and community groups are the critical factors in this venture (Ekins & Grimes, 2009).

There were so many questions arising regarding the causes of the staff showing resistance, what could the principals do differently in order to overcome the fear and diminish concerns? How could principals get through the worries and have fruitful discussions to have tough conversations about the new vision that has to be implemented? How the principals overcome the challenges that are beyond the organisational limit and put forth the effort to set up a path and unveiling the plans which were opposed? Principals should associate and make use of all the available supporters to help them in promoting their ideas, and by bearing in mind the vital role students and local community members have in providing support (Ekins & Grimes, 2009).

In order to enhance the practice, the principals should be ready to analyse ideas by holding a shared vision. Staff members should be given the responsibility towards the plan so that they work on it with full spirit. It might bring a fuss if the ideas are not supported in the way it should be. It is inevitable from the principals' part that they should go through the evaluation strategies in order to expand it further, succession or exit planning. Whenever a change is imperative, the principals should take a sensible step towards implementing it rather than sticking onto the old strategies, which is no longer serving a good result. A competitive principal should be open to all the possible data methods and ideas and utilise them, to harvest a fruitful outcome (Ekins & Grimes, 2009).

Horn (2011) also emphasised that the role of school principal begins when he or she creates the school vision and sets an example for the school staff on how to treat each student in the school. Principals can decide whether to choose to lead in an inclusive direction or not. Without this direction, it is not expected to have an extensive, inclusive movement. The principal can be a motivator and promoter for such a type of change. Once the teachers are destined to help create the vision and stick to it, then, they can follow the principal's steps to an extended inclusive model. Finally, inclusion should be applied to all subcategories of students in the school.

As per others' perspective, inclusive learning cultures that are supported by strong and effective leadership is an ingredient that brings in the impact on both the environment and the community outside the school premises that will serve a better future and a productive society for change. Which, in turn, leads to propagating mutual respect among children and young people (Ekins & Grimes, 2009).

#### *Model of inclusion in action*

Inclusion, on the other hand, will only be successful, when everyone works together hand in hand and execute what is required to implement by understanding and possessing a clear vision that, each child in the school has the right to take part in all the learning activities and perceive everything that is rendered successfully. Each child's overall development is not solely the responsibility of a single individual. However, it is a result of productive teamwork starting from the headteacher, followed by the senior leadership team, teachers, teaching assistants and governors who play a vital role in the school developmental affairs (Ekins & Grimes, 2009). All in all, collaboration and teamwork can best help school members in delivering an effective form of inclusion.

### **2.2.3 Crucial demands to create inclusion**

It is the responsibility of the school principal to make a successful connection with all the desired needs in the school. Clough (1998) reported that schools which are working on inculcating inclusion would see different needs from the participants. Firstly, the issues the institution will confront will be regarding the values and social questions and not resources or technical side. The management must think thoroughly about the type of questions that should be needed to stir up. Secondly, awareness is required and not expect perfect execution in this matter because it is necessary to bear in mind that 'to err is human' and the required assistance should be given. Thirdly, there will be hiccups regarding this matter, but they need to seek the methods to grip the factors effectively.

Fourthly, Clough (1998) added, a properly scrutinised scheme which is planned and designed should be developed in order to track the employees' development policy. Without this, there is no way of achieving or developing a persistent inclusion. Fifthly, there should be a vision towards the inclusion, and a counteragent is required to maintain the exceedingly individualised system of debarring mindset. The value of 'collaboration' and 'support' should be the indispensable factors in the learning journey of all the participants. Sixthly, bearing high expectations based on the nature of their social relationship will remain as an enduring botheration to the management system that practises inclusion.

Finally, there should be a give and take policy among the institutions in order to rectify and uplift themselves and make a powerful impact on the system of inclusion. In short, it can be explained that these views are not under any prime concern nor any critics towards this concept which is the reason for all the problems arising. It is suggested that, if the government positively accept this and not clinging to the old rules



and barriers, there will not be any space for complication. Because of the negative attitude, the citizens' welfare is at risk (Clough, 1998).

### **2.3 Leadership framework in inclusive schools**

The principal's role is crucial in bringing a practical scheme for inclusion into action by building a strong bond of trust and accountability with the teachers. Macmillan and Edmunds (2010) reported that for twenty years, there had been a better knowledge about the better practices and skills the principals should work on in schools, and this was the main focus. The view of other people regarding this is that they divided this into four broader categories: setting directions; developing people; redesigning the organisation; and managing the instructional program. These classifications also serve the evidence for the framework.

#### *Setting direction*

In order to set up inclusion in schools, principals must pervade in all the factors concerning inclusion and should formulate and reformulate the steps that have to be taken. Such guidelines are to be well-examined to integrate philosophy and scheme. Some of these guidelines have given the philosophy and policies to be followed by principals in practising inclusion. Nevertheless, still, there is a vast space in between what is familiar about it and how to put it into effect. So by taking this into concern, principals have to guide and give assistance to the teachers by having faith and belief in them (Macmillan & Edmunds, 2010).

The rapport and acquaintance between the teachers and the principal plays a vital role in promoting effective inclusive leadership management. They also gave revelation regarding the faith that the principal should withhold on teachers, in order to work towards raising a team to build a positive environment at school (Macmillan

& Edmunds, 2010). Consequently, this can ensure the smooth functioning of the school system and can avoid any pitfalls that might arise because of the insecurities between principals and teachers.

### *Developing people*

After implementing the scheme, the next step is to make the employees understand that once the school's direction has been set, the next task is to help them understand the connection of inclusion with the teaching practice that may affect their credence by the way those children learn something or nothing. In addition, some referred to the ways to inculcate a positive acceptance in children towards the abilities of the others. Moreover, if the teacher possesses excellent knowledge and understanding about the scenario, it is easy to embed the understanding between the students. There should maintain a record of the students' performance and needs of the students through precise school subject assessment methods. This procedure is a way of informing the heads and parents regarding the student's performance. Others have given an outlook about the recent changes in assessment practices in inclusion that the principals should be aware of, which are tailored to support student learning (Macmillan & Edmunds, 2010).

Such assessment practices the principals can use in supporting teachers to bring the changes wherever needed in terms of teaching and grading according to the needs of every single student. A change in teaching method should be developed within the community to support such students. Other researchers believe that people should have a clear understanding of the concept of inclusion which can be achieved only through professional development. This understanding should not only emphasise that teachers need to perform inclusive practices and instruction, but also that they should understand the basic concepts regarding inclusive practices. Furthermore, by

acknowledging inclusion practices, the principals can boost the teachers' day to day practices. Other researchers have a different opinion about inclusion, that is, they think that it will be more effective if the inclusion practice is focused on community (group) effort than it is just isolated with the teacher's effort which can be more productive in making inclusive schools (Macmillan & Edmunds, 2010).

### *Redesigning the organisation*

If the long-term goal is to succour an inclusive environment than setting scheme of directions and advancing people will not be sufficient, along with that, the beliefs, values, actions and expectations have to change as well. In limited occasions, it will be questioned whether the curriculum is changed to suit the needs of the students with exceptionalities where it has not been practised in most schools. It has been indicated by others that, if the inclusion should last for a long term, it is necessary to break the barriers and beliefs of what inclusion is all about, in order to implement and plan, if it is not sustainable, then it will turn out to be a whim both in spirit and practice (Macmillan & Edmunds, 2010).

People must reciprocate on those schools that are running within the rules set up by the school district who are helpless in going out of the box. However, there are schools which have utilised their power in the district to remould the structure in dealing inclusion. Some researchers have shown instances of such practice. They explained about a school that has executed the inclusive education and the effect it has brought on the administrators and teachers. They also are willing to give assistance and give valuable feedback to those who would like to implement the same. Others explained about the principals who had utilised inclusion in anchorage the strengths and needs by scrutinising the school's organisational approaches and bringing changes

needed based on strong opinions rather than weak criticisms (Macmillan & Edmunds, 2010).

This framework of leadership can be vital in setting up the schemes and providing proper guidance about the required effort and results expected. Besides, it can participate in building a sensible approach that benefits the students and also bringing awareness to the community as a whole. This framework can be fulfilled, as well, by providing an idea about inclusion and redesigning the school curriculum accordingly to attain positive results and create a better place for the students learning.

#### **2.4 Inclusive school responsibility**

Principals should hold the key to learners' success by knowing the significance of bringing a difference in the lives of students. Clough (1998) explained that children's rights in and to education could not be understood unless and until teachers and management understand their role and responsibility for students and their huge impact on them. The responsibilities of allowing learning and thriving them for the future is obligatory to each individual involved in the business of learning. The policymakers, headteachers and teachers need to evaluate their work all the time, to have a close look at them to gain thorough knowledge about their organisation, curriculum, resources, security, relationships with parents, making use of the support staff and the assessment processes, as the list goes on.

Teaching is not a simple procedure; it needs experience, recognition, knowledge and passion towards the work and the students. Teachers are taking a huge responsibility on their shoulders which has to be acknowledged and appreciated by the government, principals, headteachers, teachers themselves and parents, and by providing support whenever required (Clough, 1998). Accordingly, it is necessary to clarify and evaluate the overall performance of all involved people by acknowledging

the overall performance of the staffs and fulfilling their needs for their improvement and growth.

#### **2.4.1 Key principles in developing inclusive approaches within schools**

Developing inclusion within the school requires following well examined and planned procedures based on principles that support the structure of this school system. Ekins and Grimes (2009) explained the development of an inclusive school which should be solely sustained by focusing on the expansion of a curriculum and a course of study that includes the culture by acknowledging the multiplicity of all learners, where all of the stakeholders, staff, pupils, parents and the local community should play their part.

##### *Developing inclusive school cultures*

The experience that Ekins and Grimes (2009) had while working with schools showed that there was a considerable gap between the inclusive policies in schools and the real practices happening in classrooms and around the school. Due to this, inclusion should not be only about developing inclusive policies but also on developing inclusive cultures. The policies, practices and school culture are inseparably linked with the whole school community. Thus, the principals should inevitably be vigilant about the policies, and the implementation of it in teaching and learning processes.

##### *Responding to pupil diversity*

Schools are motivated by the index for inclusion to take their school community's practice, culture, curriculum and policy into consideration and to concentrate on initiatives of school development which foster learner's diversity. The implying of this opinion is that inclusive schools are ones which neglect the achievement of certain groups in any way that takes the plunge of raising their social

exclusion by providing segregated differentiated support. Besides, inclusive schools are ones which are highly concentrating on learning experience and good quality teaching for all students (Ekins & Grimes, 2009).

#### *Developing principals who are committed to inclusive values*

Principals are the key factor and the initiative to have a successful inclusive system because their commitment to inclusive values can make a remarkable difference in the whole system. Ekins and Grimes (2009) stated that inclusive values are essential in inclusive schools which will tend to have principals who embrace and take on inclusive values. Additionally, in the school community, there are likely to be a group of individuals who are engaged in leadership functions or roles. They added that this practice is a model of distributive leadership which its main goal is to facilitate the learning of all students. This type of leadership is not just limited to adults, but students should also be involved by undertaking some portions of the leadership role. Research indicates the significance of the role of school principals or head teachers in committing to a particular vision for the school which integrates inclusive values and ideas. The importance of such commitment underlines the disadvantages of rhetoric or conforming an agenda made and determined by others at local levels.

#### *Evolving shared inclusive values*

Both shared leadership and sustainability rely partly on a group of factors, which are the nature of the school's teacher group, their relations with one another and their commitment to the school's inclusive values and the school's shared vision. It also seems evident that a 'critical mass' of teachers is needed who have a commitment to these values, which will maintain good working relationships between one another within the staff groups and the school community as a whole (Ekins & Grimes, 2009).

Teachers' commitment to the school's shared vision and inclusive values is critical and as crucial as principals' commitment.

#### *Developing collaborative problem solving*

A commitment toward collaborative problem solving is needed to be undertaken and visible by the spirit of the schools. The medical model of disability is an application, which was used in educational settings. This model has been a misconception, that intervention and specialist support are needed for pupils with special educational needs. The review of recent research studied teachers' perceptions of SWN detected that specialist skills and knowledge were viewed as so remarkable. Furthermore, in English schools, there was a general conception that all teachers necessarily need more training (Ekins & Grimes, 2009).

Whereas teachers have an ultimate need to develop and cultivate key skills and a broader understanding of particular challenges and disabilities the pupils face in schools, the concept of a specialised pedagogy for SEN drives our attentions away from the substantial need to concentrate on approaches and methods in which the school learning and teaching context can be explored to come up with solutions to challenges. It confirmed that the value gained of collaborative problem-solving methods in which parents and professionals are brought together and assembled in a non-hierarchical reflective structure. This structure allows the professionals and parents to explore different views to identify ways forward with no professionalised expertise is being imposed onto their discussions (Ekins & Grimes, 2009).

#### *Individual inclusive school development*

It is thought that inclusive practices and processes of a typical inclusive school can be possibly copied by other schools who are attempting to turn to be inclusive, but

the inclusive outcomes cannot be identical. Ekins and Grimes (2009) addressed that research points out to the fact that there is no 'blueprint' model can be typically followed to establish inclusive schools. It does not seem it is possible to implement the procedures followed by successful inclusive schools to those trying to create an inclusive practice and then expect a replication of their successful inclusive system. This conception is attributed to the complexity of school communities since two schools cannot be identical. The key factors behind this fact are the different contexts, agendas and circumstances at personal, school, national and local level.

#### **2.4.2 Creating a culture of respect**

It is considered essential to create, develop and sustain a culture of respect which is considered the foundation of successful learning in an inclusive environment in which all students are given the same respect and value. Clough (1998) stressed on this matter, explaining that respect is not limited to being gentle with others, but it wraps more integrity than that. Showing respect means being honest, transparent, diligent, consistent and courteous. Adults, including parent, teachers, psychologists, doctors, inspectors, researchers, local policymakers and government ministers, play a crucial role in showing respect to children which will help support their learning through nurturing their potentials and capabilities. Besides, respect is considered a disposition which allows adults to accomplish their duties and responsibilities towards children.

Clough (1998) further emphasised that for a culture of respect to be established in education, it is required to value children for who they are. To accomplish this, adults need to accept and respect what children's have and bring, nurture and foster what they can do, expect their potential needs and then offer and provide their best as possible. This step will help foster new thinking, new practising and new learning.



Furthermore, respect for students gives teachers the courage to confirm that they intend the type of education for all learners, which allows them to endeavour their objectives and to realise their distinctive accomplishments.

### **2.4.3 The index for inclusion**

Determining whether a school is moving towards inclusion and becoming an inclusive school is not that easy. There are three significant aspects of inclusive education, which are generating inclusive policies, establishing inclusive cultures and cultivating inclusive practices. Index for Inclusion is a systematic tool for educators created to answer this question in the situation and condition of their school. This tool was created and developed by Mel Ainscow and his colleague Tony Booth in 2002. Several schools around the globe have embraced and followed this instrument, which was imposed by the kingdom's National Education Department on every special school and mainstream in Wales and England. Besides, many other countries, including Latin and African American countries, were interested in this instrument and adopted it (Armstrong, A., Armstrong, D. & Spandagou, 2010).

### **2.4.4 Managing the instructional program**

The school principals' role in inspiring teachers in maintaining inclusive values and their role of participating practically in inclusive processes and practices are critically useful in the implementation of an inclusive school system. Macmillan and Edmunds (2010) commented on that teachers need to be inspired, motivated and supported by the school principal in their crucial efforts to have inclusive practices developed, and provided in classrooms effectively. The principal's supporting role here is remarkably crucial, and it can be demonstrated by ensuring that the school is physically and psychologically safe.

Macmillan and Edmunds (2010) added that the instructional leadership of schools is their principals' responsibility. They added that principals could undertake this critical role in many techniques, such as supporting timely and suitable psycho-educational assessment practices. Additionally, principals can support teachers' instruction by ensuring that teachers have conducted an accurate assessment of student's needs and strengths and by assisting teachers through different methods to create appropriate instructional programs based on that assessment. Moreover, the researchers highlighted that principals can be provided with a comprehensive overview of all dimensions of assessment and explains how these understandings can be applied to benefit their schools.

### **2.5 Principals' obligations in applying inclusion**

School principals are responsible for providing all the tangible resources needed in the workplace to ensure that inclusion is applied successfully. Macmillan and Edmunds (2010) stated that there are legal, ethical and moral obligations the school principals have to provide for the education of students with difficulties alongside their non-disabled peers. To fulfil this, sometimes, additional resources are required to be allocated to ensure that the environment is physically adapted. Thus, all pupils will be able to participate in meaningful and useful ways. On occasion, an intentional focus on grouping and regrouping pupils is required so a mutually responsible and advantageous social interaction will be fostered and advocated. Sometimes, some adjustments in learning objectives and goals are entailed. If adjustment of the workplace is cost-effective, school principals must conduct an appropriate budget allocation for the task to produce an inclusive learning environment for all pupils.

At times, the unfavourable negative implications of dominant discussions that the duty appears to be overwhelming may cause the teachers to be so paralysed. To ensure that the well-being and learning of pupils are promoted and reinforced by the use of inclusion, it requires that school principals always embrace and foster an understanding of alternative. On the other hand, rights discourse demonstrates a growing framework for producing education and environment, which is more inclusive, humane, respectful, and engaging. The values and beliefs that go with exclusionary discourses, such as the medical, charity and lay discourses, need to be realised, conquered and switched with more inclusionary models. Most significantly, however, is the educators' obligation to ensuring that the human rights of every pupil are fulfilled and maintained in the educational environment, procedures and practices to which they are fully entitled (Macmillan & Edmunds, 2010).

## **2.6 Relevant studies**

The researcher collected a variety of previous studies; each study could benefit the researcher, either in the investigation of the role of school principals in inclusive schools and other issues related to inclusion or because they followed the same research design and methods as the current study. Those studies are presented and summarised, starting from the most current studies and ending with some deep-rooted ones as follows:

Ng (2015) conducted his study in order to examine shadow teachers' experiences as well as to investigate some factors which affect the inclusive practices' implementation in schools in Singapore. The study employed a qualitative research approach which relied on semi-structured interviews. The participants were six shadow teachers, and the data analysis were applied using a hermeneutic approach. The study findings showed that inadequate teamwork (specifically among mainstream

teachers and the school) affected the success of inclusive practices negatively. The lack of knowledge and awareness was found to be the primary factor with a considerable impact. In order to fulfil the moving towards more inclusive schools, the study recommended raising awareness and giving training to teachers. Moreover, it suggested an increase in teachers and special needs personnel numbers and a decrease in class sizes.

Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) conducted qualitative research which investigated the role of school principals in supporting changes and school improvement in the current era of high-stakes accountability. The researchers used a case study design; thus, they collected data through ethnographic methods from the case, who was a successful principal named Tom Smith in Florida, who proved to be succeeded in applying an inclusive school system as it was revealed in his record. For one school year, the researchers were using phenomenological interviews, participant observations, and informal or dialogical conversational interviews with the case to collect data. The results showed that the significant role of the principal is evident through providing an inclusive setting to support teachers and help them do their best in their work.

Anati (2012) conducted her study in the UAE. She described the practices which could structure the nature of inclusive education in UAE schools from teachers' perspective. The researcher collected questionnaires from 26 participants who were teachers from private and public schools. The study revealed that the participant teachers were concerned with the situation of the inclusive settings in their schools. Findings of the study showed the reasons behind teachers' dissatisfaction with the inclusion system. First, it was because of the lack of qualified special education teachers who can teach students with disabilities and deal with them. Second, the

absence of proper training for teachers in mainstream classrooms. Third, a shortage of administrators' knowledge about inclusion. Fourth, a lack of financial support allocated for services and resources, most remarkably, in private schools. And finally, the absence of awareness in schools about the inclusion issues that students with disabilities and non-disabled students confront in inclusive schools.

Praisner (2003) relied on qualitative research to examine the relationship between principals' attitudes and inclusion. The main variables in his study were training, experience, and placement perceptions. The participants, 408 principals from elementary schools, were selected randomly from 750 principals from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The researcher used the Principal and Inclusion Survey (PIS) to identify the extent of the relationship between the principal's attitude and the variables like training, experience, and program factors. And then to measure the impact of the principals' attitudes on the availability of proper engagements for students with disabilities. Finally, the results indicated that the principals' positive attitudes were 1 to 5 toward inclusion, whereas the other principals' attitudes were not definite. Therefore, the results in this study underlined the significance of inclusionary practices which give a positive experience for principals with all types of disabled students and provide the principals with specific types of training they need.

Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) conducted a quantitative study to examine the school principals' knowledge and attitudes toward an inclusive system in the state of Illinois. The participants were 115 principals who were selected randomly. Surveys were used to collect data regarding definitions, leadership styles, and effectiveness of implementing educational practices which were connected with the successful inclusion system. Data in the survey were analysed by descriptive statistics, analyses of variance, T-tests and correlations. Researchers' results showed that teachers were

not sufficiently prepared to perform any inclusion practices. Also, they found substantial differences between the range of use and acquired effectiveness of 13 educational practices.

Dyal, Flynt, and Bennett-Walker (1996) conducted a study to determine the principals' perceptions of the inclusive system in the state of Alabama. The researchers selected 143 participants randomly who were principals of public schools in the state during one school year. The data was collected using a questionnaire which was sent through mails. The results showed that the principal participants preferred the inclusive schools which provide all the required services, but yet they do not defend the full inclusion system. However, participants were opposed to significant changes, and they believe that some services have to remain like the pull-out programs.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in Al Ain from teachers' perspectives. In order to fulfil this purpose, the researcher investigated the main factors which affect SODs in inclusive schools and then presented the suggested school reforms by teachers which school principals can apply in their schools to help them promote successful inclusive schools. This study answered the main question, which was: "How can a school principal promote an inclusive school?". There were three sub-questions used to answer this question:

1. What is the role of school principals in inclusive schools?
2. What are the main factors to be considered when including SODs in inclusive schools?
3. What are the school reforms needed to promote inclusive schools?

### **3.1 Method and instrument**

This study aims to investigate the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in Al Ain from the teachers' perspective. The study gave a detailed and clear understanding of the role of school principals in managing and promoting educational systems and reforms in inclusive schools from the literature. The study then identified and explored a group of factors which existed in the field of the inclusive schools and which affected SODs' learning and adaptation in the schools. Finally, the study presented a group of effective school reforms and practices suggested by special and general education teachers, which they believe can help principals promote their inclusive schools.

The researcher employed a qualitative research design, as qualitative research focuses mainly on the human experience through exploring their beliefs and lived experiences to interpret them and give meaning to them (Byrne, 2001). This feature of qualitative research permitted the researcher to use the collected narrative materials to analyse and better understand and describe (Byrne, 2001) the experiences of general and special education teachers with their principals in inclusive schools, considering the settings and the surroundings. Creswell (2012) clarified that qualitative research could provide the researcher with more flexibility in exploring topics as they arise, and it can allow participants to form the research direction and to share their opinions freely. Which, as a result, gives a chance for the researcher to develop a more detailed understanding to form a complete picture from the gathered data (Creswell, 2009).

Based on the above, the researcher employed a qualitative design in this study to collect and analyse data to examine and interpret the current state and experience of inclusive schools in-depth and the role of school principals in promoting them. The researcher then implied a phenomenological method in this qualitative research to best explore and describe the lived experiences of teachers which can lead to the interpretation of the facts related to the principals' practices in schools (Byrne, 2001).

Participants in this study were both general and special education teachers from Al Ain schools, who were selected purposely from both private and public schools, and of those who met the required criteria and the desired requirements and experiences to serve the study purpose. Data was gathered in this study from participants using semi-structured interviews. Numerous researchers have employed the interview as the primary tool for data collection in their qualitative studies which were concerned with inclusive leadership area (Horn, 2011). A semi-structured interview was chosen as it allows the researcher to have the structural element and,



simultaneously, the participants will have the chance to provide additional details regarding topics which interest them (Bryman, 2004). It allows a chance of flexibility and to explore things with a significant number of details (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The researcher prepared a printed interview sample which included the introduction and the questions of the interview. That could help the researcher assign and manage the time productively to bring out the required information. Also, the printed interview questions could help the researcher in keeping track of the discussed topics and the ones yet to be discussed.

To answer the main research question, which is “How can a school principal promote an inclusive school?” The researcher listed three sub-questions, which their answers could provide the overall answer for the main question after analysing them. The three sub-questions were classified according to three main categories: 1) School principals’ role and inclusion, 2) Factors which affect the success of SODs in inclusive schools, and 3) School reforms for promoting inclusive schools.

To answer the first part of the interview questions, regarding the school principals’ role and inclusion, which was under the sub-question: “What is the role of school principals in inclusive schools?”, the researcher used more detailed questions like:

- What was your first impression when you heard about the implementation of inclusion in your school?
- To what extent do you believe that your principal regard or disregard the needs of SODs? How can you judge?
- Do you think that your school principal has a major role in making this program successful?

To answer the second part of the interview questions, regarding the factors which affect the SODs in inclusive schools, which were under the sub-question: “What are the main factors to be considered when including SODs in inclusive schools?”, the researcher used more detailed questions like:

- What knowledge do you have about students of determination?
- What are the main factors which you believe affect students of determination inside your classroom/school?
- What are the other factors which might affect students of determination outside your classroom/school?
- Who are the people involved in dealing with students of determination in your school?
- What do you think are the internal and external factors which your school principal should consider in your classroom/school to ensure the success of inclusion?

Finally, to answer the third part of the interview questions, regarding school reforms for promoting inclusive schools, which were under the sub-question: “How can a school principal promote an inclusive school?”, the researcher used more detailed questions like:

- What do you think are the steps which your school principal should consider to support inclusion before applying it?
- What facilities and needs do students of determination require and which are available in your school?
- From your own experience, what are your suggestions for principals in order to well-equip and prepare their schools before including those students in regular classrooms?

### **3.2 Trustworthiness**

To ensure that the interview questions were applicable and precise for the participants, the researcher reviewed the questions with the supervisor and other instructors before conducting the interviews to get more authentic and reliable answers from the participants. While conducting the interview, the researcher clarified and gave more explanations to any vague or misunderstood points to the interviewees and paused the recording when they asked for it and needed extra time to think of the answers. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews with the help of some experienced English teachers to ensure that they were accurate and parallel between the transcripts and the recordings.

Moreover, a pilot interview was conducted before the actual data collection to assure that the interview questions were applicable and suitable, and to serve the researcher in determining the estimated length of the interview. Pilot studies can carry out an initial investigation (Gall, M., Gall, J. & Borg, 2007), which can help the researcher in ensuring the quality and organisation of the instrument.

### **3.3 Ethical consideration**

To apply the ethical considerations, the researcher had to follow a group of steps and procedures. First, the researcher informed the participants of the ethics of the interview and confidentiality before the interviews started. Second, the participants had the right to withdraw during the interviews or before starting. Third, the participants were given the freedom to answer or skip any question which they do not have a background about, or they cannot answer. Fourth, the participants were free to drop out of the study anytime in case they were not feeling comfortable. Fifth and last, the collected data and information from the participants were saved and kept

confidential considering the ethical conditions were given from the beginning and were used for the study only.

### **3.4 Sample and population**

The sample of the study was purposely selected. This method implicates selecting participants of the study according to the study primary needs (Morse, 1991), moreover, to get rich information from those participants who can provide it and who are suitable for detailed research (Patton, 2002). The participants were sampled from the population of both private and public schools' teachers in Al Ain city whom the researcher could reach them and who fulfilled the requirements of the study. The selected teachers were five special education teachers and five general education teachers from eight public and private schools in Al Ain, who volunteered to participate and who have dealt with and taught SODs in regular inclusive schools.

In qualitative studies, samples usually are small and relied on information needs (Maxwell, 2005). Therefore, the total number of participants in this study was ten teachers who volunteered to participate and who met the requirements of the study. The researcher chose a small sample size here because of the possible detailed and in-depth data which each participant could provide. Criterion sampling was employed, as well, to select only the participants who fulfilled the researcher's criteria and which were relevant to the study (Gall, M., Gall, J. & Borg, 2007).

The researcher selected teachers from eight public and private schools since the system of inclusion is applied in all education sectors in the UAE. Basically, the researcher decided to collect data from teachers as they deal with SODs directly, and they are typically aware of the factors which affect these students in their schools. Furthermore, as teachers work within schools, they will give more realistic and precise data about their school principals' role and the school reforms required in their schools.

The participants in this study were selected based on the following criteria:

- they are general or special education teachers who dealt with SODs,
- they have more than one year of experience in teaching SODs,
- they are teachers of different subjects and from different grade levels, if they are general education teachers, and
- they are teachers from Al Ain schools.

The researcher represented the participant teachers, who were classified into four groups, into abbreviations of coded letters and numbers. General education teachers were named as GE, while special education teachers as SE. Those abbreviations were followed by the first letter of each participant's name and then a number, where number 1 referred to public schools and number 2 referred to private schools. For example, the code GE.N.1 refers to a general education teacher from a public school, while GE.A.2, refers to a general education teacher from a private school. The same was applied to special education teachers' codes. The following descriptions display brief biographies of the ten participants in the study.

GE.N.1 is a Social Studies subject teacher for grade 3. She has five years of experience, and she works in a public school in Al Ain. She has students with learning disabilities in her classrooms like mild to moderate learning difficulties, autism, hyperactivity, attention deficit and others.

GE.O.1 is an English subject teacher with four years of experience in public schools in Al Ain. She teaches grade 5 and currently has cases like two students with down syndrome and 1 with physical and speech impairments. She works in a school which has one special education teacher only and which the inclusion was applied only within the current academic year 2019-2020.

GE.A.2 is a KG 1 homeroom teacher who works in a private school in Al Ain and who has two years of experience. Currently, she has a student who is registered as a student with ADHD in her classroom. The student has a shadow teacher assigned by the parents, and the school has only a special education coordinator. The school includes k-12 grades.

GE.E.2 is an Arabic teacher for non-Arab students from grades 1 to 5. She works in a private school in Al Ain and has ten years of experience. She had a student with dyslexia from grade 3 last year, and they have one special education teacher in her school, which includes k-12 grades.

GE.S.2 is a KG 2 homeroom teacher who works in a private school in Al Ain and who has six years of experience, four years abroad and two years here in Al Ain. She had a case of a student with autism in her classroom last year. Her school contains k-12 grades, and they only have one special education coordinator.

SE.A.1 is a special education teacher for grades 1 to 4 in a public school in Al Ain, she has five years of experience, and she has dealt with students with down syndrome, learning difficulties and several cases of disabilities even with the severe ones throughout the last years. She is a member of the learning support team, and there are other three special education teachers in her school.

SE.N.1 is a special education teacher for grades (KG to 4) in a public school in Al Ain, she has five years of experience, and she has dealt with several cases of disabilities like down syndrome, mental retardation, ADHD, attention disorder, autism, hyperactivity, learning difficulties and others throughout the last years. She is a member of the learning support team, and there are other two special education teachers in her school.

SE.H.1 is a special education teacher for grades 5 to 8 in a public school in Al Ain, she has three years of experience, and she has dealt with several cases of disabilities like autism, ADHD, attention disorder and other cases throughout the last years. She is a member of the learning support team, and she is the only special education teacher in her school.

SE.M.2 is a special education teacher for grades 1 to 5 in a private school, she has two years of experience, and she has dealt with cases of disabilities like learning difficulties, speech delay, mental disorders and others. She is the only special education teacher in her school which includes (KG to 12) grades.

SE.S.2 is a special education teacher for grades (KG to 7) in a private school. She has seven years of experience, and she has dealt with several cases of disabilities in her school like learning difficulties, physical impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment, ADHD and attention deficit throughout the last years. They have 14 SODs in her school, she is the only special education teacher, and there are one special education coordinator and one social worker.

### **3.5 Data collection**

The data collection procedure started by applying for the ethical approval letter from the research department at UAE University. Then, an application was sent for obtaining the Department of Education and Knowledge in Abu Dhabi (ADEK) approval to access schools and conduct interviews. After getting the approval letters, the researcher got access to schools and then asked schools administrations to give names of teachers who can meet the required criteria to sit for the interview. Finally, the interviews were conducted according to the participants' convenience and free schedule, whether it was inside the school building or outside. Each interview took

from 20 to 30 minutes. Besides, to record the conducted interviews, a voice recorder was used to facilitate the data collection and analysis procedures.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Qualitative research is consisted of a group of data collection and analysis approaches which can provide a detailed and thorough description and understanding of the research topic. These approaches can contribute to the interpretation and description of complex phenomena. They can be employed in revising and developing deep understanding instead of confirming old theories' inferences (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016). Therefore, the data analysis procedure was done by the researcher in the present study to check the collected data and to examine them thoroughly, then to achieve an accurate and deep understanding of the participants' responses from the interviews' transcripts. Thus, after the data collection and transcription, the researcher read the transcripts thoroughly and checked their validity, trustworthiness and completeness to determine whether they were sufficient and enough to answer the study questions and to obtain the study findings or not.

After determining that the collected data were applicable, and they were answering the main study questions, the researcher used a thematic analysis method to analyse these data. Thematic analysis, as Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2014) suggested, can be the most convenient method used in seizing complexity of the underlying meaning in texts. Furthermore, it can be considered the most common method used in qualitative data analysis.

Thematic analysis is one of the qualitative descriptive design. It can be defined as a set of techniques and methods utilised in analysing textual data and illustrating themes. This method is known as a systematic process, which begins with coding, examining meanings and the description's provision of social realities which



contribute to creating a theme. Some of the main features of qualitative approaches are specified in describing and interpreting the perspective of participants (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

Accordingly, the researcher first made an initial coding and conceptualising for the mutual answers and the remarkable and crucial points given by the participants under each question of the interview questions. Second, the coded data from all participants were gathered and organised in tables. Third, a group of common statements or themes were generated under each of the study questions, relied on the gathered codes and which reflected and summarised the main findings. Fourth and last, the researcher wrote and narrated the main findings and themes in a report which were classified and arranged into three sections according to the three sub-questions of the study. The report included the main findings under each question supported by some of the participants' responses and claims, and finally, each section was concluded by narrating the main themes were found (as it is shown in the findings chapter below.)

## Chapter 4: Findings of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in Al Ain. This investigation was done based on the collected data from teachers' perspectives, and which was achieved by answering the following main question and sub-questions:

- How can a school principal promote an inclusive school?
  1. What is the role of school principals in inclusive schools?
  2. What are the main factors to be considered when including SODs in inclusive schools?
  3. What are the school reforms needed to promote inclusive schools?

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings based on the collected data from participant teachers. The collected data then were identified and analysed using thematic analysis method. Thus, the analysed data were presented, and a group of themes were generated under each sub-question. After collecting the data, the researcher went through a group of phases to generate those themes, like familiarisation with data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally producing the report of the results and main findings.

### 4.1 Findings of question one

The first sub-question was "What is the role of school principals in inclusive schools?". A number of detailed questions under this question were concerned generally with the attitude of teachers towards inclusion, the role of their principals and whether they regard or disregard the SODs. These questions were answered by the participant teachers, and then a thematic analysis was conducted for their answers and

responses. As the 10 participant teachers' responses revealed, they agreed on some points and disagreed on others, which generated a variety of main themes under the first question findings. The followings are the main findings related to the first question illustrated and supported by quotations from the participant teachers' responses. Finally, the section is concluded by the main themes were generated from these findings.

Before directing the central question in the interview regarding the role of school principals in inclusive schools, the researcher examined the participant teachers' attitudes and impressions towards inclusion. The researcher aimed here to identify teachers' perception of the inclusion system, which could be considered later as one of the main factors affecting the inclusive school system. Five of the general and special education teachers gave a neutral feeling about inclusion, unable to determine whether they were ready to include SODs in regular classrooms or not. Other four teachers were positive about the idea of inclusion, believing it is for the SODs' own good to be included with their typical fellows. However, one participant expressed her negative attitude toward the negative consequences of inclusion like the additional work and planning, and the extra responsibilities.

According to general education teachers, three teachers could not determine their actual feeling regarding inclusion being implemented in their schools, one teacher had a positive attitude about it, and the last had a negative attitude. The three general teachers, who could not determine their feeling precisely, claimed that it was not easy for them to determine an accurate view about inclusion yet. Thus, they could not decide whether they were ready to have inclusive education in their schools or not. GE.E.2 expressed her mixed feelings regarding inclusion, explaining that she was not aware of the benefits of this system or why it will be applied, she expressed:

I don't have a specific feeling about this, because I don't know how it works or how I will deal with it, so it is a mixed feeling, between excited to have it or like afraid how I will deal with this situation.

GE.O.1 also could not confirm her attitude as she believed that inclusion system could be acceptable in regular schools, and it gives chances for the SODs to communicate with other people. However, she specified that inclusion could be implemented in schools on one condition that specifies the kind of cases of SODs to be included. In her situation, she does not consider the included cases in her school to fit in in regular classrooms. She said:

Students with special needs, ... if they have mild problems, I think it is okay, they can communicate with other students. But ... according to my experience, I saw that some students have from mild to severe problems, I think it is hard to include them in a normal classroom ... they need special classes for them.

On the other hand, GE.S.2 expressed contradicted feelings between the beginning and the end of her experience with a student with autism. She was stressed and nervous about the idea of having a SOD in her classroom. Nevertheless, she further explained that she learned a lot from that experience, and it added more benefits to her. She excessively expressed her feeling at the beginning of the year, saying:

Actually, in the beginning, I felt like it's so tough ... it's so hard because it's not an easy case ... autistic kids need a specific way to deal with them ... I tried to read more about his case then I went to ask the teacher ... and everyone who dealt with him the year before to have a clear idea about him before he comes.

She ended up with a contradictory feeling saying: "so, I take it like ... it's a positive thing (inclusion) ... I'll learn many things from this experience, I can help him (the student with autism), and he also will help me." This can reflect that some teachers can have better experiences and practices with a positive feeling about having SODs in their classrooms only after dealing with one successfully.

GE.N.1 is the other general education teacher who was entirely positive about inclusion. As some special education teachers, she believed that inclusion could help a SOD in communication with other students and be blended in normal life. She explained: "I feel good about it because it helps students with disabilities ... to communicate with other students and to know how normal life with other students is." In contrary, GE.A.2 was the only participant teacher who showed a negative attitude regarding inclusion and having a SOD inside her classroom thinking of the preparations needed and communication with people who can help her in dealing with him, as she expressed:

it didn't give me that feeling of relaxation to have a child with special needs in my class, because I know that it needs a lot of preparation and work and communication with many people to treat the child or to deal with him in general.

According to special education teachers, three teachers confirmed the positive impact of inclusion on SODs, which makes them sided with those who have a positive attitude toward this program. However, the other two teachers shared their neutral feelings, like the majority of general education teachers. The teachers who were positive with the perception of inclusion believed that it is the best system which could guarantee the SODs' rights in learning and being blended in the society. SE.A.1 confirmed that inclusion could be considered by the SODs' side by providing them with the social life they deserve. She said:

It is a good idea ... it is very good for our students (SODs) because it will help them feel comfortable with the other students (typical students) ... also, when they play sports in the playground, they take (acquire) social skills with their peers, in addition to that, in art lessons, in Arabic, in English, and all subjects. They feel that they have communication between themselves and between others.

The participant made it clear that her only concern was about the SOD's rights in socialising without thinking of the other consequences of integrating SODs in the regular schools. SE.N.1 also agreed to the same point, saying: "for me, the inclusion is positive. Because the most important thing in inclusion is social inclusion." SE.M.2, also, agreed to the same point regarding the social right and added other reason which is the academic improvement for SODs after inclusion:

It is a good idea, of course, because students of special needs need inclusion, in private or public schools. And it will benefit them in social communication, or ... building a relationship with other students in their age ... they suffer from that in special needs organisations ... they can improve their academic level with the students.

The other two special education teachers showed their neutral feelings about the implementation of inclusion in regular schools turning this back to their concern regarding whether this program will work in their schools or not, which cases of disabilities will be included, and whether their schools are ready for it or not. SE.H.1 made those worries and confusions clear when she commented:

I was surprised, actually, of how the process is going to be and to what extent of disability is acceptable in the schools, is it the severe cases? Or mild cases? Who is going to be responsible for caring for these children? ... and how they will learn? Are they able to learn the same as others with the same curriculum and the same strategies? So many questions appear in my mind.

SE.S.1 also expressed her neutral feeling when she heard about the implementation of inclusion in her school considering it a big challenge, and she stated: "it is very challenging ... It took me a long time to search and think of ways of how to provide awareness and training so that we can implement the procedures suggested by ADEK." And then she added: "I was neutral at that time."

Based on the general and special education teachers' responses, it is evident that there are various circumstance and conditions in schools, which somehow can be

related to the school principals, that could affect the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and having SODs. Indirectly, those circumstances and conditions can show the role of school principals in propagating the attitude to their teachers. This propagation was pretty apparent from the teachers' responses in the followed questions regarding how far their school principals regard or disregard the needs of SODs in their schools, and whether their principals have a significant role in making this program successful or not.

The role of school principals, in the participant teachers' schools, was discussed concerning the success of SODs' inclusion in their schools and whether their principals regard or disregard the SODs' needs. All teachers' responses here, both general and special education teachers, showed the relationship between teachers' attitudes and the success of their school principals in regarding the SODs in the school. Thus, five teachers of those who expressed their negative impressions or confusions about inclusion in their schools responded negatively saying that their principals accept those cases and welcome them in their schools, however, they do not provide their educational needs in the school. GE.S.2, who had a confused attitude toward inclusion, supported this claim by emphasising the importance of the initial planning for SODs and locating the areas of support to be provided to them. She explained:

it should be more than this ... as a principal, to accept this case in my school ... I should know in the beginning, what I'm going to add to him (SOD) ... If I have the needed support to him or not, if this case will gain benefit from my school or not, if I have a good program or not ... for this case, I felt they didn't understand well what was wrong with him (SOD) ... they don't have a specific plan. That's why I felt that he didn't learn anything from the previous year.

Also, when the researcher asked GE.O.1, who had the same attitude of confusion toward inclusion, whether her school principal regards or disregards the SODs' needs, she claimed that the principal in her school does not have any role

concerning the SODs and that the special and general education teachers are only asked to prepare individualised planning for these students. She replied:

according to my school, it is the first time they include students of determination in our school, and I think the principal depends on the special needs' teacher and the other teachers ... to make individual lesson plans for them only, so, I don't see any role of our principal.

SE.M.2 highlighted the significant role of principals in supporting different school activities for SODs. She mentioned that her school principal does not pay attention to her plans for SODs and does not support her with the needed budget to afford activities outside the classroom for them. She, as the only special education teacher in her school, does the work independently and put plans for the SODs and prepare activities for them inside her classroom. She said:

if I plan anything ... any activities for my students, he (the principal) doesn't get my point of view of this activity which I want to make for them. But anyway ... I try my best to do an activity in my class only ... not outside the class ... because ... the principal says it will affect other students ... he doesn't see any of my work or ask me anything about them (SODs).

This response showed a clear picture of the lack of some school principals' attention in some areas when it comes to providing support to the SODs, which, as a result, affects the teachers' attitude toward inclusion and the idea of having a SOD in their classrooms.

The other five teachers, however, experienced a positive attitude with this matter. They expressed how their school principals cared for SODs and provided them (the teachers) with all the needed requirements to support SODs as other typical students. GE.N.1 expressed how her principal is engaged with the SODs and cared for them; she visits them in their classrooms and asks the teachers if they needed any type of support. She clarified:



I think my principal likes this type of students and care for them, from the beginning of the year, she enters each classroom to meet those students, and to know how they act in the classroom, she participates with other special needs teacher to help these students more.

She added an essential aspect of principal support formed in the regular meetings held by him or her with the special education teachers to discuss the SODs and their needs. She stated: “she (the principal) holds meetings with special education teachers and assistants to talk about this and how to improve this type of students. So, she focuses more on students of determination.” She emphasised the critical role which a school principal can play, if caring for SODs, saying: “if the principal cares, all staff in the school, like special and general education teachers and assistants, will work cooperatively to help these students (SODs).”

SE.A.1 and SE.N.1 also, who had positive attitudes about inclusion in their schools, had positive feedback on their school principals’ practices which reflected the crucial role their principals play in supporting inclusion and providing the needs for those SODs. SE.A.1 said:

for example, every Tuesday, we have activity lessons, our principal says that let this student with determination go change between activities, sometimes in art, sometimes in music, according to their needs. This is an example of a caring principal for those students of determination. Also, we have a programme for them in our school ... for example, some autistic child like to draw, or like to make a programme in IT, the principal let them go to IT lesson; she cares about them.

SE.N.1 also expressed her school principal’s role in following up and assuring the provided requirements for SODs by facilitating the school environment and enacting rules which protect them. She claimed:

the role of the principal is very important in schools. In our school, the principal manages the procedure (inclusion), she always tells us to take care of the special education students, she manages the rules ... and she follows up ... by facilitating the ground in the classrooms and the school, and make the school environment suitable for them.

SE.N.1 added a crucial point here; she suggested that the school principal is the one to put the rules and facilitate the school environment to prepare the school to welcome those students according to their needs. In other words, the principal role is considered as the first foundation to ensure the success of this program. She added that they have a special team in her school led by the principal to support SODs, which is the learning support team when she said: “she (the principal) takes good care of them (SODs). And she is the leader of our support team in the school ... So, every meeting or anything that happened, we put her in the picture.”

SE.H.1 and SE.S.2 also shared the positive role of their school principals.

SE.H.1 described the story of her new school principal saying:

our school principal was assigned lately ... From the first day, she was so excited to meet the learning support team to listen to the cases about the students, each student ... she was very patient to know each student’s case, her (the student) social status, her medical status, her academic performance, and what are the difficulties she might face in the school ... and what we did and what are the solutions to solve the problems or needs (of SODs).

When the researcher asked SE.H.1 about the learning support team in her school, she described it saying: “it is led by the principal ... there is the vice-principal ... the special education teacher or coordinator in the school, the psychologist, the social worker ... the teachers who teach the students, the nurse also, and sometimes the parents.” After exploring the other teachers’ responses from public schools, the researcher realised that this team is initiated in most public schools in Al Ain, but not applied by all. The main purpose of this team is to support the learning of SODs, and it should be led and created by the school principal. However, the participant teachers from private schools did not have any idea about this team when the researcher asked them about it.

SE.S.2 also shared her positive experience with her school principal who regards and supports the SODs and their needs, even though she works in a private school and they lack the budget and facilities for SODs. She explained that saying:

She accepts the idea of inclusion, although, we have problems in the budget in private schools, so, this is the main concern for principals, in how to provide the facilities and services for these students. So, they are considering mild disabilities so that we can offer them a good service ... she is accepting the idea, and she is also spreading awareness to parents about this issue, and she joins me in many parents meetings to explain how important, for example, the early intervention is ... So, she is, to some extent, regarding it and ... supportive.

The main point which SE.S.2 highlighted here is that some private schools in Al Ain lack the budget allocated for the special education department and which school principals can use to provide services and facilities for SODs. This lack of budget, to some extent, can explain why principals in some private schools confront difficulties in promoting this system financially. However, the principal can overcome this problem by limiting the number of the included cases and the types of SODs of those who need fewer requirements and needs, as SE.S.2's principal has done as she claimed above.

In summary, three primary themes could be generated based on the previous findings, which are related to the role of school principals in supporting and promoting inclusive schools in Al Ain. The first theme was: School principals' perception and attitudes toward inclusion can affect the school members' attitudes. The second theme was: School principals in some private schools in Al Ain accept increasing numbers of SODs, regardless of their rights and basic needs in regular schools' settings. The third theme was: Most principals in public schools in Al Ain promote inclusion by assigning support teams and programs to support SODs' learning.

## 4.2 Findings of question two

The second sub-question was “What are the main factors to be considered when including SODs in inclusive schools?”. This question included detailed questions in the interview about the factors which influence the success of inclusive schools in Al Ain. The participants’ responses on their attitudes differed according to their school sector, whether it is public or private, and whether they were general education teachers or special education teachers. However, the majority of participant teachers agreed on some factors affecting SODs and inclusion inside and outside the school premises. The participants’ answers were analysed through thematic analysis. The followings are the main findings related to the second question illustrated and supported by quotations from the participant teachers’ responses. Finally, the section is concluded by the main themes were generated from these findings.

Before directing the main question about the factors that affect SODs and the types of these factors, the researcher initially investigated the knowledge and the background of the interviewed teachers who dealt with SODs. Therefore, the researcher collected data about the teachers’ knowledge first by asking the teachers directly about their studies, their experiences, and their knowledge about SODs.

The collected data showed that general education teachers did not have any knowledge or training before teaching SODs in both public and private schools. GE.O.1 from a public school expressed that her first experience in teaching SODs was so hard as she did not own the knowledge which could help her deal with SODs, she explained: “as a general education teacher, I don’t have any experience how to deal with them (SODs), because for me it is the first time I deal with those students.”

According to private schools as well, GE.A.2 stated the same issue when she mentioned the few knowledge she had, which she gained back from one of the university courses. She clarified:

The knowledge of students of determination cannot be acquired in one course ... I had one course in my bachelor study about teaching diverse students, but that was so general ... like a drop in the ocean ... because there are many cases and they need many years to learn how to deal with them.

GE.S.2 agreed to what the other teachers explained and added the importance of training and being knowledgeable about SODs before including them in the classroom. She explained: “this was missing ... if they gave me more information ... a PD in the beginning, this would help me ... instead of depending on myself and wasting my time and wasting the child time ... you put the right base from the beginning.”

This claim summarised the point that the school principal is held responsible for preparing the general education teachers with the required training. This will, in return, get them ready to deal with the SODs and provide them with the best instructional strategies and differentiation they can use in the classroom. This training, if provided, can give the teachers a positive impression about their experience with SODs, then it can shape a solid basis for better inclusive classrooms.

Special education teachers, however, showed their complete knowledge and awareness of the SODs’ different cases and types and the strategies they use in dealing with them as they have the degree of special education. SE.A.1 clarified her knowledge about SODs and the steps she follows in getting the required information needed about them, she claimed:

I’m a special education teacher; of course, I know about students of determination inside and outside the school. Before I take any case of students of determination, I meet their parents, I make a case study about the student,

so I can know all the information ... the second step, I meet the learning support team... I let them know all the information about the student ... so, all our members in the learning support team know all the information about this student and what is his case.

Collaboration and teamwork could appear here as another main factor, as SE.A.1 clarified above, which can raise the awareness and knowledge among all people about the case of the SOD they deal with. Consequently, if that would be implemented in schools which apply inclusive system, the general education teachers will no longer be in the dark when it comes to SODs. It is with great importance to mention here the role of the school principal in promoting teamwork and collaboration, along with training, between general teachers and the specialised people in special education (i.e. special education teachers). Which, as a result, can avoid any misunderstanding or ambiguity which the general teacher might have at the beginning.

SE.S.2 also confirmed that the general and special education teachers should work together to enhance the SODs' learning by preparing their plan and following up with them collaboratively. She said that if the students need extra support, then they should have pull-out lessons to support their learning outside the general classroom. She clarified:

when we come to their learning, first of all, we, special education teachers, have to meet the general education teachers in a weekly basis to arrange the planning with them and what they need and what activities they can cope with. Sometimes, they need external assistance outside the classroom. Also, we can provide that for them. This will enhance their learning abilities or performance.

Other substantial factors and conditions were confirmed by the participant teachers to be considered and which influence the success of SODs' inclusion. The researcher here classified those factors into internal and external school-based factors according to the place their variables or causes exist or take place, like inside or outside the school premise. According to the internal school-based factors, the researcher

grouped them to summarise and categorise them into five main categories, according to the type or source of each factor. The five categories are displayed in Table 1 below and followed by explanations of each group of the internal school-based factors.

Table 1: Internal school-based factors affecting SODs' inclusion

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Environmental factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- school building safety</li> <li>- classroom environment</li> <li>- availability of resources and facilities</li> <li>- class size</li> </ul>  |
| 2. Social factors        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SODs' relationship with their peers</li> <li>- SODs' relationship with their teachers</li> <li>- principals' level of attention and awareness</li> <li>- peers and teachers' levels of cooperation and awareness</li> </ul> |
| 3. Academic factors      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- teachers' knowledge and experience with SODs</li> <li>- teachers and staff training</li> <li>- teachers' levels of collaboration and teamwork</li> <li>- curriculum and instruction levels</li> </ul>                       |
| 4. Cultural factors      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- levels of moral education among school communities</li> <li>- school communities' awareness and values</li> </ul>   |
| 5. Emotional factors     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SODs' emotions and feelings</li> <li>- others' acceptance of the SODs</li> </ul>  |

Many participants confirmed and stressed on the importance of the environmental and the social factors on SODs. Those included the SODs' relationships with others and the levels of perception and awareness of their peers and teachers. For example, SE.H.1, as an expert special education teacher, addressed excellent examples of these internal factors inside the classroom and the school premise suggesting:

there is the safety inside the classroom; there is the environment, how it is set. Starting from the brightness, the colour, and so on and the safety of the classroom settings ... Outside the classroom, there is the level of cooperation or the welcoming of the teachers of having students with special needs in the general classroom. There is also the peers' level of cooperation, their

understanding and awareness of having disabled student next to them ... the awareness of the school members, the teachers, the administrators, the peers.

This concluded some of the environmental and social factors that might affect SODs. Environmental factors included the school and classroom settings and safety. Social factors were the level of cooperation and awareness the SOD's peers, and teachers have, and the level of awareness in the whole school. SE.N.1 also emphasised the importance of the general classroom environment and the provided instruction and the level of cooperation and relationship between SODs and their peers saying:

in general classroom, I think many of the students are affected by their peers ... In the classroom, some of the cases, they get lost, and they don't follow up with the teacher, it is very difficult for them. So, we take them to the resource room; we teach them the basic learning ... But the good thing in the classroom for them that they can work together in a group with their peers ... So, for me, the students of determination need to work inside their general classroom and in the resource room as well.

Other teachers mentioned the negative social impact that could affect the SODs in the regular classroom. GE.E.2 clarified that the SOD was being bullied from other students because of their lack of awareness and acceptance. She said: "the main thing that affects this student is bullying when other students don't accept him. So, they start laughing at him or making a joke about him ... so, the student will feel that he doesn't want to come to school anymore." This issue, again, would happen in the absence of the school principal's role in spreading awareness and training among the school staff. Such awareness and training include practices on how to make typical students accept, respect and understand those SODs and their disabilities.

At this point, the importance of regular training and professional development for staff, and especially for teachers, raised. Other participants, as was mentioned at the beginning of this section, highlighted the importance of the teacher's awareness and knowledge about SODs, which school principal has a major role in providing it in



the school. Other factors could be summarised from SE.N.1 response above, that the level of curriculum and instruction can be crucial factors which affect the SOD's learning in the general classroom.

SE.M.2 also mentioned that the school curriculum's high level does not suite SODs' level, which makes it harder for them to adapt in the regular classroom. She clarified: "The Curriculum is hard for them ... Because their grades are low, we put them in a special class during the exam so we can read for them and explain each question individually." This issue proves the fact that SODs are included in the regular classrooms without preparation, without applying differentiation in instruction or modification for the curriculum or the assessment tools.

In her turn, GE.O.1 emphasised the importance of other factors which affected the SODs in her classroom. She clarified that the absence of consideration of these factors could impact the teacher and complicate the situation for her. Those factors are the class size and the availability of facilities. She stated:

the class number, if the class is very big, for one teacher, it is very difficult to deal with the students, because they need special attention and even the other students, they also need special attention ... So, I think the class number has a huge impact on how we can deal with students of determination inside the classroom. Even the facilities, if teachers need special devices or they need special things for them ... it is not available ... it is very difficult for the teacher to deal with those students.

SE.A.1 also mentioned a group of factors which she believed are very important for the SOD inside the classroom when she clarified: "the first important factor is the emotional factor. Because, when the students feel comfortable with their peers, they will succeed in their goals inside the classrooms, with me, as a special education teacher, or with the general education teacher." And then she added, "we have social factors, academic factors, and as I said, the most important factor is

emotional because the emotional factor will affect other factors.” She referred to the importance of the SODs’ emotions and feelings in the classroom, which might convey their feelings towards the general classroom environment, students, and teachers, whether they feel happy and settled in the general classroom with their non-disabled classmates, or afraid or uncomfortable. The social and academic factors also were other affecting factors as she mentioned, and which could be affected by the emotional factor.

GE.N.1 gave a great example of the importance of both the principals’ and teachers’ levels of acceptance and care for the SODs in the school which could also affect the other typical students’ acceptance for them. She excessively replied when she was asked about the main factors affecting SODs in her school saying:

I think ... If the principal accepts those students and believe in them, the students will be successful, and they will love school. Like in my school, all the students with special needs they know the principal, they love her ... If anything happens to them, they go to her office and talk to her ... Also ... some teachers don’t like to have students with disabilities in their classroom, because they think they cause more work and troubles, and maybe they cannot conduct lessons as usual. If teachers like the students and accept them ... they will feel comfortable, but if they don’t ... the students will feel the unlikeness ... If principals and teachers accept these students, I think the other students ... will do so.

The factor of principals’ and teachers’ levels of acceptance and care can affect the SODs’ emotional factor as mentioned earlier; once the SOD is feeling welcomed and accepted in the general classroom, this will finally be affecting his or her adaptation, performance and learning inside the classroom.

According to the other factors, which are coming from external variables and sources out of the school building, and which most teachers agreed they indirectly affect the SODs’ inclusion in inclusive schools. There were three external school-

based factors which could affect the inclusion categorised as follows: parents' impact, the external centres, and the school districts policies and legislations.

GE.E.2 mentioned one main external factor, which is related to the parents' impact, is the level of SODs' families of care and follow up and the attention paid for their children's improvement. She stated:

I think the first ... affect this student is his family ... if his family doesn't support him or give him ... all the attention and take him to the centres to help him improve his level, this will help him. But, if they ignore his needs ... this will be a problem for this kid.

SE.N.1 emphasised too on the importance of parents' communication and their follow up with her about their children, and she added the role of external centres that, in some cases, SODs regularly attend after school. She clarified that it is with great importance that those centres should follow up with the schools and work together to help the SODs and participate in successful inclusive schools. She explained:

Also, we have some factors that affect students of determination outside the classroom, such as the parents, communication with the parents is very important ... in addition to that, there are centres for students of determination. For example, sometimes we have students of determination who go to school in the morning, and in the afternoon, they go to the centres ... this is important ... communication between the school and home, and centres as well.

GE.S.2 also suggested some critical issues regarding the parents' role and the external centres from her own experience. She highlighted the importance of the parents' attention to follow up with the external learning centres to provide and support the same learning materials given in the school. Moreover, she referred to the importance of the parents' cooperation with the school, when they send their children with disability to external centres outside the school to get extra support, to follow the school plan, not a different plan which might confuse the SOD and does not end up well for the student's outcomes. She clarified:

last year, I suffered from this problem, the school is following a plan and outside the parents are following a plan with another centre ... this will put the student by the end in a problem, that's why the parents' role is very important ... Also, if the school is asking the parents for a meeting or something ... they should be supportive and cooperative all the time ...

The participants above approved on the importance of parents' role; their level of cooperation and follow up with the school. As well as the external centres, which the SOD attends after school. Centres are like the rehabilitation and learning centres for SODs. SE.H.1 also agreed on these factors and added another crucial external factor, which is the role of school districts in implementing decisions and policies related to SODs (i.e. the permitted cases for admission, the percentage of SODs included, etc.). She said:

parents' level of cooperation has a great role ...the ministry of education's decisions also impacts the student of determination learning... whenever they make a new decision ... Recently, they took out students with hearing impairment, and they said no students with hearing disabilities would be included in the regular schools ... they will be placed in centres ... where they can learn sign language ... their decision has an impact, the parents level of cooperation, the centres ... that provide diagnosing process ... and support them.

Eventually, three primary themes could be generated based on the previous findings, which are related to the factors that affect SODs' inclusion in regular schools. The first theme was: General education teachers who teach SODs do not have the sufficient knowledge and experience about SODs and the cases they teach in regular classrooms. The second theme was: The internal school-based factors, which are with direct impact on SODs inside the inclusive schools, can be classified into social, emotional, academic, environmental, and cultural factors. The third theme was: The external school-based factors, which can affect SODs and inclusive schools indirectly from outside, can be mainly the parents' impact, the external centres and the school district's policies and legislations.

### **4.3 Findings of question three**

The third and last sub-question in the study was “What are the school reforms needed to promote inclusive schools?”. The last part of the interview included detailed questions asking the teachers to provide some suggestions for school reforms which can help their principals in promoting their inclusive schools’ practices. The 10 participant teachers’ responses provided the researcher with numerous school reforms which can be useful to promote inclusive schools. The participants’ answers were analysed through thematic analysis. The followings are the main findings related to the third question, illustrated and supported by quotations from the participant teachers’ responses. Finally, the section is concluded by the main themes were generated from these findings.

The researcher started the third part of the interview, asking the participant teachers about the available facilities and needs for SODs in their schools. The researcher then asked them to suggest some steps and reforms be followed by their principals and which can enhance and promote their inclusive schools. The participant teachers’ responses varied at the beginning, according to each teacher’s school and the availability of facilities and practices in each school. However, some of them suggested mutual ideas of school reforms and practices which they believed can be essential to any inclusive schools.

The collected data about the available facilities and needs for SODs in regular schools were discussed in the first part of this section. Teachers responses varied according to the provided facilities in each school, whether they were from private or public schools. Even though teachers were from the same school sector, whether public or private, they had different responses. That indicates that school principals,

regardless of their school sector, are not providing facilities or requirements in their inclusive schools at the same level.

GE.A.2, GE.E.2, GE.S.2, SE.S.2, and SE.M.2, agreed on the lack of qualified people who are involved in dealing with SODs in their private schools. Along with the lack of the provided resources and services for SODs. GE.A.2 confirmed that saying: “we lack those teachers who are qualified in dealing with those students ... So, those shadow teachers are just protecting the child, not teaching.” She also mentioned that the plans which are provided by her special education coordinator are not useful for the student at all, she said: “I feel like he needs more effective planning so that he can learn or improve ... his behaviour is still the same because of the plan, which is not working well with his needs.”

GE.E.2 also provided an example of the absence of resources and qualified special education specialists in her school when she explained:

I think that there are no facilities for these students, so they need to prepare the school to accept these cases ... if I take myself as an example with my student ... I didn't know exactly how to deal with him because I don't have the resources ... especially with his case ... it was dyslexia.

When the researcher asked GE.E.2 about the special education coordinator in her school and the role or the help she could provide, she claimed that even the coordinator could not provide her with the help needed. She replied: “I asked the SENCO to help ... she gave me papers only, but what she offered was not helpful, so I tried to find out a solution myself.”

Besides, GE.S.2 exemplified the absence of the resource rooms in her school, where the special education teachers are supposed to take the SODs when needed to get extra personalised support. She clarified:

we should have a resource room outside the classroom ... especially for these cases, so they can go from time to time ... the shadow teacher can take him for

some time to the resource room ... to do an activity, and then, they can come back to the classroom ... this thing can help him more to achieve more progress inside the school.

The participant then emphasised the lack of facilities in her school building which are necessary for some students, but the school did not provide. She stated: “we need elevators ... because some students have problems to go upstairs ... we have some students who have physical issues ... also, the bathrooms, they have to afford special bathrooms for them.”

SE.S.2, also from a private school, provided some of the lack of facilities and needs in her school. She focused on the importance of assistive technology as a needed resource which is not provided in her school yet. She said:

assistive technology ... will enhance their learning ... but of course, this needs a budget. So, most of the time we have the manual things ... so we need to introduce this assistive technology because it will be very helpful for people of determination, and also it will help the special education and general teachers.

From public schools, GE.O.1 also added: “they need devices depending on their disability ... and to provide resources for them so we can teach these students in the classroom. And to provide extra special education teachers ... especially for English, Science and Maths teachers.” GE.O.1 here confirmed that they lack special education teachers who teach core subjects in English along with the lack of resources and facilities for SODs.

GE.S.2 also added the need for extra special education teachers, because they have only one special education coordinator for the whole school (she mentioned that earlier during the biography recording as well). She explained:

instead of keeping them (SODs) with teachers who don't have the needed experience to deal with them ... we have to hire more special education teachers to meet their needs and to know exactly what they are going to do with these cases. If we cannot afford those teachers, so all the teachers who

deal with those cases should have PDs (professional development) according to the cases they are going to teach.

On the other hand, the other participant teachers referred to a group of facilities and services which are available for SODs, with mild cases, in their schools. (i.e. GE.N.1, SE.A.1, SE.N.1, SE.M.2 and SE.H.1). First, SE.A.1 mentioned an amazing example of the provided resources and facilities for the SODs in her school. Her principal provides the resources and facilities needed by communicating with the specialised institutions or ADEK. She brings in some specialists who check up and follow up with those SODs' in her school. She replied:

In my school, we have a student with physical impairment ... needs good equipment (wheelchair) to sit inside the classroom and outside ... So, our school principal communicates with the centres or with ADEK to require these tools for them, chairs ... furniture ... etc. Also, we have specialists for hearing and visual impairments ... the principal communicates with them to bring them and to follow up or to check up those students ... And also, we have specialists in learning disabilities.

SE.N.1 also mentioned another exemplary example of the provided resources and facilities in her public school. The school includes facilities for the SODs, such as a lift, three resource rooms, teaching assistants, etc. She emphasised:

we have a new building, it facilitates their (SODs) movement, for example, we have a lift for the students who cannot walk ... we have three resource rooms and three special education teachers, and we also have teacher assistants for special needs, they enter with the students in a normal classroom ... they can help the teacher ... because we have many severe cases, these teaching assistants ... help general education teachers with these students ... they can control the student's movement, the teacher gives them work to do, and she can focus on other students.

The previous examples of the facilities and services provided in schools could show the differences between public and private schools. These services and facilities which are provided for SODs and other students as well can best serve inclusive schools' practices and settings. However, these alone cannot fulfil the inclusive school



goals, as these facilities should be managed and utilised by professional and qualified people. Consequently, school reforms are required in all inclusive schools which were part of this study. Such reforms should be tailored by the principal according to the missing or absent practices or services in their schools.

Therefore, by reaching the last part of the third question of the interview, a significant number of suggested school reforms appeared by the participant teachers. The researcher had to refine these reforms based upon the availability of facilities and services in the schools, as well as the degree of benefits they can provide for SODs. Ultimately, the researcher classified and grouped these reforms into seven main reforms, as mentioned in Table 2 below.

Table 2: School reforms for better inclusive schools

|  |
|--|
| 1. Holding regular professional development and training courses           |
| 2. Encouraging peer coaching and rewarding best practices                  |
| 3. Allocating budget for providing SODs' needs of facilities and resources |
| 4. Limiting both the number and the types of accepted cases of SODs        |
| 5. Reducing class size   |
| 6. Introducing and encouraging co-teaching in inclusive schools            |
| 7. Adding more special education teachers in inclusive schools             |

The first school reform, which can be an excellent basis to prepare schools for inclusion, as suggested by the participant teachers, is holding regular professional development and training. Each participant teacher highlighted a group of people to get this training, including principals, teachers, students, and parents to raise awareness and enhance the general view about SODs. SE.N.1 suggested that professional

development should be provided for teachers and parents. She said: “we need professional training for parents and teachers, so they can best deal with these students,” GE.E.2 also emphasised that it is required to be provided for teachers so that they can prepare typical students, she stated: “to give the teachers workshops ... and the teachers have to prepare the students ... to know how to deal with these special students.”

SE.H.1 suggested this reform as the first step which school principals should provide before applying inclusion in their schools. She clarified: “they need PDs ... raising awareness among the staff ... and students ... PDs about differentiation, about inclusion, and what the characteristics of the types of disabilities ... and about the best services teachers can afford.” GE.N.1 also added a fundamental reason to provide workshops for teachers stressing that they help teachers improve their knowledge and instruction methods without the reliance on special education teachers; she suggested:

the general education teachers need more workshops ... about how to deal with these types of disabilities ... if the principal ... send the teachers to workshops to know more about these types of disabilities ... then, teachers will know how to deal with it without the help of a special education teacher.

SE.S.2 also when she was asked about the school reforms she explained, excessively, about the importance of PDs for school staff and specifically for administrators, from a special education teacher viewpoint she clarified: “I think the reform should start by providing school principals with regular training ... to acquire sufficient knowledge about these students with disabilities ... also, they can share this knowledge with teachers ... how to teach, how to deal with those students.” She confirmed the role of school principals in providing this school reform to all school staff explaining: “principal should play an important role by educating all staff, it is

not only the general teachers but all the staff also need to be educated to contribute to the success of the people of determination.”

The second reform suggests encouraging peer coaching and rewarding best practices. SE.S.2 paved the way towards this school reform when she added: “Plus, of course, sharing of best practices across the school.” She referred to the importance of encouraging and sharing best practices as another school reform. SE.N.2 mentioned this reform as well as one of the reforms which her school principal could apply, she stated:

she can do rewards’ system or can share with other teachers if some of the teachers have good strategies, good teaching ... if she (the teacher) has best practice, she (the principal) can tell the other teachers to visit that teacher and learn from her ... So, we can share information, share ideas, share useful things, they (teachers) apply with the students (SODs) ... So, we can do like peer coaching.

SE.S.2 also discussed the importance of networking and sharing best practices among teachers, as well as among schools. She suggested: “The principal should consider ... networking and sharing practices with others, this will benefit the school. Because sharing and networking are not that much promoted in private schools ... we have to share practices to improve ourselves.”

The third school reform, which the majority of participant teachers suggested was, allocating budget for providing SODs’ needs of facilities and resources in the school. SE.A.1, for example, recommended that the principals should be aware of the required resources for their SODs. She claimed: “principals need to know what the required resources for those students, and who to be in the resource room.” SE.H.1 also mentioned that providing resources in inclusive schools can be ranked as a second reform after preparing the staff, she clarified:

we need to make sure that the building and facilities are ready and safe, and well-prepared, in terms of the environment of the school or the classroom, to have new or the previous students with disabilities. Also, the principal needs to assure that teachers are aware of these strategies as I said and the resources, to provide the resources that need to be there for them.

GE.O.1 mentioned the importance of providing resources and special education teachers in her school according to the cases of SODs in her school. She said: “it depends on their cases ... if they have a physical impairment, so, I think they need special devices for them ... and provide resources for them so we can teach these students in the classroom, and provide special needs teachers.”

SE.M.2 explained the situation of the lack of resources and the allocated budget for that purpose in her school. She claimed that most of the resources are provided by some public schools. She stated: “we need many resources for learning. Because we don’t have resources ... we have the resources from government school which they provided for us ... with these resources, they (the school) gave us a little bit, not even pay anything for that.” GE.S.2 mentioned previously about the missing resources in her school. Thus, she recommended that principals should provide the required facilities according to the cases of SODs they have in their schools. She emphasised: “to afford elevators ... for the students who have physical impairments ... and the bathrooms, not all students can use the same normal bathroom, so ... we should afford special bathrooms for them.”

The fourth reform indicates limiting both the number and the types of accepted cases of SODs in regular schools. When was asked about the main steps which school principals should apply to improve inclusive schools, GE.A.2 suggested that principals have to limit the accepted cases in their schools and to conduct detailed interviews with them (SODs) to be aware of their disabilities and be clear with their background from the beginning. She claimed:

First, he (the principal) should only choose those whom we can deal with inside the school ... we should have an interview, a clear interview about the child, about his history, ... his life, how he lived, and where he was living. Because most of these kids are not even used to go out with other people, so when you bring them to school, they never behave as you wish.

SE.A.1 also recommended this reform for school principals believing that determining the accepted cases can help in limiting the behavioural issues and specifying the accepted cases to those who have the capabilities to learn and develop. She claimed: “knowing which cases that go to the normal classroom. Because sometimes we have students of determination who can’t apply the IEPs (Individualised Educational Plans) even inside the classroom, this is very difficult, as the severe learning disabilities.” She gave examples of the cases of SODs who cannot be included in the regular classroom saying: “for example, who have mental retardations, they can’t sit inside the classroom to teach them; there is a special centre for them to learn ... we must know who is exactly included in the inclusive classrooms.”

SE.M.2 highlighted specific steps to be taken during the SODs’ admission procedure to diagnose the accepted cases of SODs appropriately and to exclude the severe cases. She stated: “we must do an exam for this student, we do an interview, and we need his medical report ... some of them will do another interview, to make sure he is eligible and ... does not fall into the severe case category.”

The fifth reform included reducing class size. As the participants clarified, it is not with the SOD’s advantage to be included in a crowded class with a big number of students. GE.O.1 confirmed the importance of reducing class size as she experiences teaching a large class size along with the SODs in her classroom. She mentioned: “to reduce the number of students in each class if we have special needs students.” SE.S.2 also mentioned the importance of applying this school reform in inclusive classrooms explaining: “to look at the class size, the number of students, ... because in private

schools ... thirty students in a class with one teacher ... this can be ineffective for the students, and also, we are harming the people of determination.”

The sixth school reform indicates introducing and encouraging co-teaching in inclusive schools. SE.S.2 carried on her suggestion after she talked about the reform of class size, clarifying that in order to have big class size the principals need to assign two homeroom teachers in each classroom, or what is known as co-teaching. She clarified: “we should encourage co-teaching strategies ... it is mentioned in the evidence base, that it can work in inclusive education ... So, the principal has to either reduce the class number or introduce this co-teaching strategy.”

The seventh and last school reform suggested by teachers was adding more special education teachers in inclusive schools. SE.H.1 mentioned the lack of special education teachers who can help her in her school, so, she stressed on the importance of this reform, stating: “The principal should assure that there is a sufficient number of employees, like special education teachers ... aligned with the number of students (SODs), to assure that every student has the allocated services he or she needs.” GE.S.2, who does not have special education teachers in her school except one special education coordinator, emphasised the significance of this reform to general education teachers who do not have any experience in dealing with SODs saying:

The principal should hire the needed number of special education teachers. They will make a difference. Because, sometimes we enter some classrooms and we find a teacher, who is teaching students with disabilities, learning disabilities or other cases, who don't know exactly what she is going to do with them. So, I think it will not be successful at all. If we are going to apply the idea of inclusion, it will not make progress at all, so, hiring special education teachers is mostly ... mostly needed.

In conclusion, three main themes were generated based on the previous findings and which suggested a group of school reforms for principals to help them

promote their inclusive schools. The first theme was: School reforms related to staff development, application of teaching assistance strategies, financial support, students' admission policies, and the increase of special education members and faculties, are essential in order to promote effective inclusive school system. The second theme was: Most inclusive schools are lacking principals who are willing to support and promote inclusive schools' practices by implementing new effective reforms. Finally, the third theme was: Regardless of the school sector, whether it was a public or a private school, the principal decides whether to facilitate or constrain school reforms for a better inclusive school.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools in Al Ain from teachers' perspectives. The role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools was examined, and the factors affecting SODs in inclusive schools along with the school reforms should be implemented by school principals were explored qualitatively.

This chapter presents the study main discussions and conclusions based on the study findings and links them to the literature. The chapter extends into five sections, three discussion sections that display the implications of the previous findings of the study with relation to the literature. And the last two sections present both recommendations for practice and recommendations for future studies.

### **5.1 Discussion of question one**

The first question's findings presented the generated themes, which all revealed that the school principals have a major role in promoting inclusive schools. As the first theme suggested, school principals' perception and attitudes toward inclusion affect the school members' attitudes, especially the teachers. It is with great importance to mention here that the principal's attitude can be considered first as a vital motive either to direct him or her into applying actions which support inclusive practices or the other way. Second, it can be an influential agent on teachers' and other school members' attitudes, which altogether can affect the perception towards SODs and then the acceptance of implementing inclusive practices in the school. Consequently, considering the principal's as well as the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion can be counted as the basis which supports a well-structured inclusive school.



Therefore, when the researcher collected data initially on teachers' attitudes, the findings could reveal that the school principals' attitude and perception about SODs and inclusion, to some extent, were identical. More specifically, the relationship between the school principals' attitude and the implementation of inclusive practices could show and reflect the principal's level of awareness and knowledge about SODs. These, in return, were propagated to teachers and other school members. Thus, when the researcher asked the participant teachers about their attitudes towards inclusion, the majority showed their neutral feelings towards it and could not determine their actual impression. Nevertheless, many of them had positive feelings, and few had negative feelings. Those who showed neutral and negative attitudes were general education teachers from both public and private schools, and the majority of those who showed positive attitudes were special education teachers from public schools.

Agreeing to these findings, Ng (2015) reported in his study that the shadow teachers (special education teachers here), generally, showed their positive attitudes towards both inclusion conception and the inclusive classroom. However, mainstream teachers (general education teachers here) had a less positive outlook towards introducing inclusive schools.

It is with great significance to identify teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and SODs; it can reflect many facts and impacts beyond those attitudes. As mentioned earlier, teachers' attitudes could reflect the principals' attitude and then the levels of awareness and knowledge they have about inclusion. This was proved in other studies which reported that both the attitude of the principal and school members may be influenced by the quantity of knowledge and training they receive about inclusion and how best to implement it (Praisner, 2003). Accordingly, the school principal should start the change by raising his or her self-awareness and getting the required training

to acquire more knowledge and background about the effective inclusive schools' practices and SODs and then propagate that knowledge to the other school members especially the teachers.

Horn (2011) emphasised the same finding in her study and considered it as a primary factor to foster inclusive practices. She implied that as inclusion suggests that children with disabilities have to be taught along with the other students in the regular classroom by general education teachers, these teachers' beliefs and attitudes are fundamental. Once the teachers are getting the required training on ways of teaching these students, this will give them a feeling of comfort while teaching them. Moreover, teachers can feel more comfortable when they are supported by school administrators, provided with resources, given the time for planning, and getting good parents' communication. Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) also highlighted that the school principal's attitude toward inclusion is fundamental to the successful implementation of inclusive practices in a school. The principal's attitude alongside with other school members' attitudes may be influenced by the knowledge and the training each one of them has obtained about inclusion and the best ways to implement it (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Horn, 2011).

In conclusion, the researcher concluded a group of statements under the first theme. First, the level of awareness an inclusive school community has of the SODs, and the inclusive practices can be reflected from the principal's attitudes and awareness and knowledge regarding them. Second, principal's levels of awareness and acceptance of SODs affect their implementation of the inclusive practices which protect and respect those students' rights and needs, and which will result in a crucial impact on teachers' and other school members' attitudes toward those students. Finally, principals' and teachers' awareness and attitudes, as a result, could be

considered as one of the main internal school-based factors which can affect the success of inclusive schools, as mentioned in the second question findings and discussion.

The second theme suggested that most public schools' principals in Al Ain, who may be promoting inclusive learning, assign support teams and programs to encourage and support the SODs' learning. As it is known about public schools, school districts have power over the school principal in terms of the provided budget, facilities and the recruited teachers. In contrast, the other schools' systems and rules are to be managed and directed immediately by the school principal. As the findings showed, most principals in public schools could support SODs and could have better plans for inclusive education. This finding reflected the current state of public schools in Al Ain in terms of the provided services and needs for SODs in the school. However, public schools' principals in the participant teachers' schools, as the teachers reflected, had different levels of perception and awareness regarding SODs and inclusive schools. Furthermore, there was no study found to approve or support this finding. Therefore, this finding could be applicable to reflect the quo state of some public schools.

The third theme suggested that school principals in some private schools in Al Ain increase the accepted numbers of SODs in their schools regardless of these students' rights along with the absence of the allocated budget to provide their needs. The findings revealed that those principals accept the SODs in their schools, yet they disregard their rights and needs, and they do not allocate enough budget for the special education department in their schools to provide their individual needs and services. Nevertheless, again, this cannot be generalised to all private schools, as in the high-income private schools, for example, a division of the budget will be allocated for them, if the school principal considers the SODs and their individual needs.

Additionally, this finding cannot be proved as being accurate and generalised to all private schools, as there were no previous studies found by the researcher, which concluded the same finding and interpretation. This could be due to the absence of consistency in private schools' practices. As these schools are initially managed, monitored and funded by private owners; thus, the final word over school legislation and funding will be for the owner rather than the school principal in most cases.

The previous findings and discussions led to the conclusion that school principals have a major role in promoting their inclusive schools. It emphasised that school principals' attitude toward inclusion affect other school members' attitude and practice, and then influence the success of their inclusive schools. In addition to that, it highlighted another crucial factor to be considered which is the school sector, as school sectors determine the authority which school principals have over some decisions and choices related to the school budget and the hired teachers' qualifications and experiences. However, the school principals' level of awareness and the attention they have for SODs will affect the implemented inclusive practices in their schools, which can protect those students' rights and respect their needs. As a result, all these outcomes and variables can demonstrate the significant role of school principals in inclusive schools.

## **5.2 Discussion of question two**

The second question findings displayed the main factors that affect SODs inside and outside schools suggested by general and special education teachers from Al Ain schools. The first theme was generated under the findings of this section suggested that general education teachers, who teach SODs, do not have sufficient knowledge and experience regarding students with disabilities and the cases they teach in their classrooms. This finding could lead to the conclusion that general education

teachers' unawareness and little knowledge in inclusive settings can lead to negative impacts on students' performance and development. This was verified by Cassady (2011) as well when he reported that general education teachers had contradicted views regarding the integration of students with disabilities in their classrooms. As a result, he confirmed that the teachers' negative attitudes about inclusion and their unwillingness to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms could cause a lack in both the provided support and the effectiveness of learning of these students. In addition to that, Horn (2011) confirmed the same finding, claiming that as long as the general education teacher is the one responsible for teaching SODs, along with the other students in inclusive classrooms, the teacher beliefs, attitudes and expectations will be with great importance and with central impact on them.

Consequently, teachers' attitudes and knowledge could be introduced as a school-based factor which has a significant impact on the effectiveness of inclusive schools, and which could be sorted as an internal factor within the school building. Cassady (2011) clarified that many factors could influence the educational experts' attitudes toward the idea of including students with disabilities. Such factors are like the level of confidence while teaching the students, the support they receive from the school, and the collaboration opportunities. Therefore, it is crucial here to highlight the crucial impact of school principals' support and guidance on the teachers' performance and their willingness to teach SODs in their classrooms.

The researcher collected data about the factors which affect the SODs in inclusive schools so as to focus on the significance of considering them by school principals. The participant teachers disagreed on the degrees of the impact which their school principals' have in their inclusive schools according to the school sectors and conditions. However, the participant teachers could agree on some factors which can

affect SODs and inclusive schools from inside and outside the school building regardless of the school sectors. Thus, the researcher categorised these factors consistently with their source from inside or outside the school building. Hence, the researcher named them as school-based factors, as Anyango (2017) named them in his study. And then the researcher classified them into other two detailed groups which are internal and external factors.

In contrast, Ng (2015) categorised the factors which are influencing the inclusive practices, according to the student of determination, into external environmental factors and internal factors. Internal factors like the characteristics of the child and the educator and others which can control how well the inclusive practices can succeed. Ng referred to the internal factors in the child as the child characteristics. However, teacher characteristics were referred to the teacher knowledge, attitudes, background and awareness, and role perception. He described the external factors as in collaboration and planning practices, and the support provided by the school and other parties (Ng, 2015).

As the second theme suggested in the findings, the internal school-based factors, which are with direct impact on SODs, could be classified into social, emotional, academic, environmental, and cultural factors. Those factors included the main circumstances and surroundings which have a direct impact on the SODs' learning and which, as a result, influence the effectiveness of inclusive schools. As these internal factors were numerous, the researcher had to classify them into those five major categories. The following is a detailed discussion and interpretation of each factor with evidence from the literature, to underline its impact on SODs.

Social factors conveyed the effect of social interactions and relationships between SODs and the people around them in the school environment. Interactions

between the SODs and others could convey many meanings and impacts on the student's mental and psychological status towards the inclusive classroom environment and their relationships with people. As a result, this may affect the SOD's learning and acquisition of knowledge. This factor can affect all parties in the social interaction process; it can affect both SODs and other students' learning and socialise, in return, it will affect the teachers' achievement and performance in the classroom.

Horn (2011) stressed on the importance of the social skills in an inclusive environment, on both SODs and other students, in her study findings. She referred to her participant teachers' view saying that they encourage inclusion, and they value what the students with disabilities can gain by socialising with other typical students. They confirmed that students could learn from each other in many ways; one of the most significant ways is learning new social skills and developing better prospects about one another.

Academic factors, however, have a direct impact on the student's learning and outcomes, those factors include the knowledge and the qualifications which both general and special education teachers have, who teach the SOD. As the findings showed, the main idea of inclusive education cannot work if the teachers who are responsible for the students' learning are not qualified and aware of the cases of SODs and of the best strategies used to deal with them which help those students adapt in the general classroom. As a result, the findings emphasised the importance of training and preparing the school staff and specifically teachers to well-educate the SODs and ensure that the primary purposes of inclusive education are fulfilled, and the students are getting their rights equally and fairly.

Curriculum and instruction also were classified as one of the academic factors. SODs, in some cases, need accommodation and modification of the school curriculum

content and the instructional strategies. This condition, if not provided in some schools, the students, as the findings showed, will be moving from a grade level to another without learning and acquiring the education service as the other students do. As Konza (2008) suggested, inclusion aims to eliminate the separation between regular and special education, as well as to ensure that all learners are provided with suitable education in their local school, even with their various levels of disability. The educational system should be entirely restructured for the application of inclusion. That will require schools to take the responsibility of providing all the means needed for the sake of its success, including the facilities, suitable curriculum and resources needed for all learners irrespective of disability.

The emotional factors can be affected by the social factors directly, and the emotional factors can affect all the other factors as the study findings suggested. Agreeing to the above, Anyango's study (2017) showed that the majority of the surveyed teachers referred to the positive impact of inclusion on the students with special needs' social and emotional development, and considered it beneficial to both typical students and students with special needs.

The school building safety and the healthy surroundings are with great importance for SODs as it determines the success or failure of inclusive schools. As some of the SODs cannot distinguish what is dangerous for them, everything should be designed and prepared in order to facilitate and ensure their safety in the school building. Konza (2008) clarified that it is remarkably essential to highlight the teachers' needs of a safe and nurturing environment, which is as important and effective as students' needs of that environment. Since dealing with students with wide-ranging needs is quite challenging and risky in case of failure, which is basically



when others, including parents, teachers or students, perceived the school as incompetent and unqualified enough.

The class size also can impact the performance of SODs. The big number of students with diverse needs and levels in one class, as this may cause to crowded classes and then the teachers will not be focused on each student as an individual. Which, as a result, can lead the teachers to be frustrated and to lose track of each student's level and progress individually. Ng (2015) emphasised that there will be significant benefits schools would gain in raising manpower which includes teachers and special needs employees, in addition to smaller class sizes. It is interesting to mention that a group of shadow teachers have explained that big class sizes were not ideal for the application of inclusion due to lack of time the mainstream teacher have to concentrate and give attention to the students with special needs in the big class size.

The availability of resources and facilities in a school also can have a direct impact on the success of inclusive schools, as the learning of some SODs requires individual devices and resources to reinforce their learning and meet their needs. If the principals neglect this factor, it will affect their learning and then their outcomes and progress. Ng (2015) highlighted the need for more resources to be provided to students with special needs which can be utilised within their classrooms. Hussain (2017) also stressed on some factors which the inclusive schools depend on to attain the recommended objectives toward both nondisabled (typical) and disabled learners, starting from preparing classroom and school to providing the facilities needed for teachers' habilitation and disabled students and the new process.

The school culture has a significant influence on SOD's adaptation and acceptance of the general classroom. The level of moral education and cultural awareness about SODs and their rights among the school also affect the students'

relationships and interactions with people around them. People perception, like school principal and teachers, about SODs, is a crucial role in successful relationships and social interactions in the school and thus to successful inclusive schools. Also, the culture of collaboration and teamwork in schools is critical to enhancing the knowledge about SODs' primary needs and requirements among the school members.

Hussain's study (2017) examined attitude differences of special and general education teachers toward inclusive education system in relation to their speciality, which includes their ability and experience, as well as their culture. The study showed that those were mainly affected by the teachers' personal beliefs (Hussain, 2017). Moreover, Cassady (2011) clarified that the teachers' willingness to accommodate pupils in their classrooms, increases when they perceive that their school culture promotes collaboration and teaming, as well as when their school administration boosts a supportive environment. Sufficient support from school administration contributes to raising teachers' likelihood of collaboration with special educators in order to control and solve any issues that might arise within the inclusive classroom (Cassady, 2011).

All in all, the internal school-based factors were found in this study, and which were categorised into five categories, were referred to in the literature as significant variables, practices and factors which are influencing SODs and inclusive schools immensely and most commonly.

According to the third theme, the researcher found that the external school-based factors, which are related to variables outside the school building and which most teachers agreed they indirectly affect the SODs' inclusion in inclusive schools, were mainly the parents' impact, the external centres, and the school districts' policies and legislations. As the findings stressed on, parents have a distinct role in facilitating

the inclusive practices and the transition, the admission, the placement and the planning procedures of their child of determination into the regular school and classroom. They can be an excellent support for schools as well in promoting their child's learning and acquisition of the new knowledge by following up with him or her at home and asking the teachers for extra support whenever is needed. Parents' perception and awareness likewise can help their children further, especially if they are prepared for any expected drawbacks, or hurdles might face their children in the inclusive school environment so that they can prepare their children ahead and support them mentally and spiritually.

Jackson, Ryndak, and Billingsley (2000) believed that family involvement is considered one of the effective practices in inclusive education. The researchers stated that it is required from SODs' families to be involved relatively and meaningfully in their children's educational development. Families are required to participate in the development and daily routines of their child's school mission. They stressed on six main functions and roles, of which the inclusive school can engage the SODs' families in, and which make the family and the parents' role a crucial factor to be considered. For instance, creating huge roles for the parents to have chances of participation and control, gathering information from the families about their children while preparing educational plans, ensuring the effective mutual communication between schools and parents, and others.

The other external factor which was mentioned in other studies is the school districts' policies and legislations. As the study findings emphasised, school districts can have some control over the ultimate implications and policies implemented in schools and which are related to the inclusive practices. An excellent example of a school district's positive impact on inclusive schools, if the district's new policy stated

a new strict policy regarding the number of special education teachers in inclusive schools. The policy implies that the number of special education teachers should be interrelated and linked to the number of SODs in the school, and the kind of their disabilities. This will help the SODs' general education teachers get the support needed to teach them inside and outside the classroom when required. Other beneficial policies can be considered as well, the compulsory professional development held by the school district to all schools' principals and samples of teachers from each school.

In contrast, negative impacts of school districts can be remarked in a new regulation which, for example, indicates an increasing percentage in the number of the admitted SODs in schools or additional moderate to severe cases to be permitted to access regular schools. This can definitely affect the overall school environment and performance, and the teaching and learning practices inside the classrooms which are crowded with SODs. Therefore, these regulations and policies can have a significant impact on inclusive schools' practices and success. As Chuchu, T. and Chuchu, V. (2016) reported in their study, the responsibility for education at all school levels is on the government ministries. This includes all curricular and cultural courses and the allocated funds and resources to make inclusive schools and to apply more effective rules and policies to acknowledge inclusive education with low achievements. However, it is essential to mention here that this factor, compared to parents' impact, is the only one which the school principal cannot have control over it.

The last external school-based factor suggested in this study by the participant teachers was the external centres or organisations dedicated to SODs' needs, whether for academic, social or physical treatments and support. Those centres or organisations were not mentioned in the literature as a significant factor. Thus, even though most participants in the present study suggested and confirmed its impact on SODs and their

academic levels, it cannot be considered a major factor since the SODs' families can determine the necessity of these centres for their children. Hence, not all SODs can be enrolled in such centres.

Based on the above discussion, the researcher concluded that general education teachers' unawareness and little knowledge in inclusive settings could lead to negative impacts on SODs' performance and development. Moreover, the stated factors here which affect SODs inside and outside the school building were found in previous studies too, except one of the external factors. However, the other studies classified these factors into internal and external factors, and some of them considered them as practices or themes. Eventually, the internal factors were frequently discussed in many studies and were considered more than the external factors.

### **5.3 Discussion of question three**

The third and last question findings in this study presented and suggested a group of school reforms of which principals can implement to promote their inclusive schools. The findings focused on a group of reforms according to the participant teachers' perspective, who teach SODs in regular schools, and which they believe can promote and enhance the implementation of inclusion in Al Ain schools. The first theme in the findings of this section suggested that school reforms related to staff development, application of teaching assistance and rewarding approaches, financial support, students admission policies, and the increase of special education staff, are essential in order to promote and enhance the inclusive school system.

Accordingly, in this discussion, the researcher presents each of these reforms and highlights their implications and presents evidence from the relevant literature where it is applicable. The school reforms mentioned in this study were presented in seven practices. First, holding regular professional development and training sessions

for stakeholders about SODs' needs. Second, encouraging peer coaching and rewarding best practices. Third, allocating budget for providing SODs' needs of facilities and resources. Fourth, limiting the accepted number and types of cases of SODs. Fifth, reducing class size. Sixth, introducing and encouraging co-teaching in inclusive schools. And seventh, increasing the number of special education teachers in schools.

Holding regular professional development sessions and training for school members and parents, as the findings revealed, have a significant impact on the SODs' adaptation in the regular schools and on their academic performance. Moreover, it has a significant impact on teachers' and school members' attitudes toward SODs and inclusive education. Furthermore, many characteristics of the provided professional development should be considered by the school principal, for instance, the training courses' quality, training frequency, and the high qualification and expertise of trainers about inclusive education, and who hold accredited degrees of proficiencies in special education. As Ng (2015) found in his study, raising awareness about the need for inclusive classroom practices is with high importance, and teacher training and professional development can help in increasing this awareness and knowledge. He added that professional development could result in more positive attitudes towards teamwork with special education teachers and support staff.

Due to the great importance of this school reform, school principals need to believe that professional development is necessary for everyone, including themselves. Once the principal is well-aware of the importance of professional development, he or she will provide it for all school members consistently to get its positive impact. Anati (2012) acknowledged that teachers', the participants in her study, primary concern was the instructional strategies used in inclusive classrooms, due to their shortage in

professional development sessions on teaching in their inclusive schools. This could show that change can be accomplished when providing professional development.

Peer coaching is an advantageous process which can benefit both general and special education teachers who will perform peer coaching. Even in general education, it is highly recommended and advised for teachers to benefit from each other's experiences and to share ideas among themselves as their degrees of certification could differ, as well as their levels of expertise and development. Konza (2008) approved on the importance of peer coaching and cited a group of studies and models which emphasised this concept, and he proved that peer coaching could carry out changes throughout schools more effectively. He underlined and focused on the importance of regular weekly coaching or seminar sessions which aim to develop the required strategies or skills. Rewarding teachers with best practices also, as the findings of the present study suggested, will have a significant impact on other teachers and it can be a great motivation for them to perform on a high level and to give their best.

It is with great significance to consider financial support as a foundation for the creation and implementation of new systems and services in schools. Allocating a budget for providing the SODs' needs of facilities and resources was one of the suggested reforms which school principals should provide to assure that the school building is well equipped with all the requirements for this program. The SODs need special devices and tools which can help them in the learning process, even with the mild cases. Therefore, this reform should be taken into consideration initially by school principals to promote their inclusive schools.

As much as financial support is required in schools, the findings revealed that private schools were not empowered financially to provide the required facilities and services for SODs. Which consequently called for the importance of school reform to

change the situation. Agreeing to this finding, Anati (2012) stressed on the fact that many private schools in the UAE cannot afford budgets to employ extra employees or to provide additional support facilities and services for the school. She supported this claim saying that there were few special education teachers hired in private schools, and where her participants worked. Hence, the general education teachers were the one dealing with and teaching students with special needs in the classroom (Anati, 2012). These findings are best presenting and describing the similar situation of private schools were included in the current study in Al Ain.

Principals need to work on limiting the included numbers of SODs and the types of their disabilities to be included. This reform can contribute to offering those learners with their rights in learning, equally and fairly, as other typical students are getting them. As the findings showed, crowded classrooms with a big number of SODs can lead to the lack of teachers' attention on each student individually. Anati (2012) clarified that the participant teachers in her study shared their concerns about the inclusion of students with disabilities with severe levels since they require additional support and endeavour while they are teaching in the classroom.

Eventually, the last two reforms referred to two primary interrelated practices which consist of introducing and encouraging co-teaching in inclusive schools and increasing the number of special education teachers in schools. Co-teaching presents a system of teaching assistance and instruction in a well-organised and well-structured classroom setting, managed and led cooperatively by two or more teachers using different teaching strategies. However, the successful integration of co-teaching requires qualified teachers with high levels of expertise and practice in each classroom.

The classroom when it includes a large class size with one teacher only, the class management and differentiation strategies will be out of control for teachers in



most cases since the classroom contains a big number of SODs along with the non-disabled students, who have diverse levels and needs. This was the situation in most classes in the schools where the study investigation took place, and which general education teachers called it a hindrance in the inclusive classrooms. According to the classroom management, Anati (2012), confirming the existence of this issue, mentioned that her participants, who were against inclusion, suggested that classroom management became harder with the increase of students with disabilities in the classroom, which consumed long times from the lesson and caused extra consumption of classroom resources. Then many behavioural issues appeared in the classroom.

Special education teachers are one of the basic requirements in each inclusive school to assure that the SODs are well diagnosed and that their needs are met in the inclusive settings inside the regular classroom and school buildings. If there is a lack and the number of special education teachers is not parallel with the needs of the included cases of SODs, many consequences will appear. As in some cases, when the general education teacher does not have the knowledge about SODs, and she or he has one of them in the classroom, this student will not be getting the special care and the individualised support he or she needs.

Consequently, a special education teacher will be required to guide the general education teacher and to provide her or him with the individualised plan for SODs in order to meet their needs. Otherwise, the SOD will be included in the classroom as an extra burden for the unknowledgeable teacher. Once there is only one special education teacher in the school which includes a large number of SODs, there will be no chance for the special education teacher to follow up with all SODs in that school. Thus, the need for additional special education teachers will arise in such cases, and

the school principal will be the first to be blamed if that is not provided in the school before including SODs.

The study findings of Anati concluded that teachers were dissatisfied with the inclusion system at that time in the UAE schools. She related that attitude first to the lack of a group of school systems and requirements like the proper training for teachers, the community awareness regarding the issues expected during the inclusion procedure, and funding for training and resources. Lastly, and most importantly, the lack of administrators' attention about inclusion (2012). Accordingly, the stated drawbacks and obstacles which led to teachers' and school members' dissatisfaction about inclusion, can be solved in a term of school reforms implemented by school principals. Therefore, the present study suggested some of those effective reforms which can cause drastic changes in inclusive school systems and which were likewise suggested by other studies. Such effective school reforms can act as remedies for inclusive schools which might be filled with SODs without considering their needs and requirements.

The second theme was generated under the findings section suggested that, in general, most inclusive schools are lacking the principals who are willing to support and promote inclusive schools' settings by implementing new effective school reforms. This finding can apply to this study and this context or settings. However, the situation in other countries and other research studies' findings did not come up with the same result. For example, Avissar, Reiter and Leyser (2003) findings suggested that inclusive practices were extensively implemented in elementary schools and that school principals had a clear vision and leadership behaviours that encourage inclusive policies in their schools. They confirmed that these findings were verified by other studies as well.

The third theme in the findings suggested that regardless of the school sector whether it was a public or a private school, the principal is the one who decides to facilitate or constrain the applied school reforms for a better inclusive school. These decisions can affect the overall school rules and policies related to SODs, which only the principal has authority over setting them in the school. These decisions can be represented too in the principal's capacity in assuring that special and general education teachers work collaboratively and that the general education teachers employ peer coaching and other effective strategies. This, as a result, can improve the quality of their instruction and performance in the inclusive classroom. Other aspects and reforms can be affected by these rules like training sessions related to professional development and spreading awareness throughout the school regarding inclusion and the SODs' rights. Thus, the process of raising the principal's awareness of the importance of these actions, practices and reforms to their inclusive schools can push them toward the effective implementation process.

Supporting these findings, Geleta (2019), found that principals are proactively required to ensure inclusive school settings. Moreover, they need individualised training so that they become capable of developing complete understanding and perception of the meaning of setting up inclusive school systems. School principals' active involvement and support in inclusive schools are critical. School principals carry out crucial roles in inclusive school environment improvement and the implementation of educational policies.

Consequently, to address this issue, the first reform should be implemented in each inclusive school is raising the school principals' awareness of their critical role in promoting inclusive schools' systems and of the importance of inclusive practices to SODs and all school members. Mthethwa (2008) emphasised that there should be a

connection between the principals' knowledge about inclusive education and their attitudes toward it.

Subsequently, once the principal is knowledgeable and well-aware of the importance of inclusive practices for SODs, and of his or her role in promoting this system, he or she can be more willing to develop and apply school reforms for a better inclusive school. The school sector, whether public or private, does not impact this principal's knowledge or perception and willingness for improvement. In other words, most of the school reforms can be implemented by school principals, once they are willing to apply such reforms and changes in the school systems in order to promote the inclusive school practices and environment.

Accordingly, and eventually, the school sector does not hinder principals or control them once they wish for change, and they are aware of the importance of these inclusive school reforms. As a result, school principals' awareness is the key factor which can guide them toward promoting their inclusive schools. As Avissar, Reiter and Leyser (2003) concluded in their study, to ensure that the applied inclusive practices are reflecting essential changes in a school, the barriers related to people's attitudes and knowledge are to be overcome. This can, as a result, successfully impact the inclusion of students with special needs and the practices in inclusive schools.

All in all, to researcher's knowledge, this study is the first one which examined the determining factors of schools' inclusiveness with a focus on the role of principals in creating and promoting inclusive schools in the UAE context. In this sense, the study provided a comprehensive examination of the critical roles played by school principals from the perspectives of both special education teachers and general education teachers comparatively. The study findings also illuminated the fact that there is a lack of attention given to SODs due to the lack of principals' attention to the matter, the

lack of resources provided, and the awareness among schools' communities. The study findings confirmed the importance of pertinent research in unveiling complex dynamics of determination, and the role of principals played in the field towards creating and promoting inclusive schools. Most of all, the study and its findings highlighted a humane and rightful issue, that is, the inclusion of SODs in the normal course of education with their peers who do not possess such limitations the SODs do; rather than be confined in isolated learning environments resulting in their isolation from the society in general.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for practice**

The Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) has applied many policies and laws which protect SODs' rights. They require all schools in the area to offer proper educational support to learners in the general education classroom. This support includes modifying the curriculum to meet students diverse learning needs and providing schools with the Learning Support Teams, who can prepare specialised and individualised plans for students who need it (ADEK, 2020).

In addition to that, it is recommended for the ADEK to apply firm and strict policies and checklists under the standard of diverse students' learning for schools' inspection, which as a result can stimulate and lead school principals to provide the needs and requirements of each individual of the included SODs. The following recommendations are with great importance for guiding school principals' practice in inclusive schools.

First, this study can show school principals the major role they have in the success of schools with an inclusive system. Moreover, it shows how this role includes taking some actions and considerations into practice for creating better inclusive schools, which can serve all students with diverse needs.

Second, the results can capture the school principals' attention towards the importance of the factors which affect SODs' inclusion in regular schools. These factors, once they are considered, can lead principals to promote their inclusive schools and, as a result, will help SODs by providing them with their needs.

Third, the results of the study can spot the light on some examples of school reforms which can help school principals in promoting their inclusive schools and, as a result, in providing better learning climates for all students in their schools.

Fourth, according to the suggested reforms in the study, additional professional development is needed through training and workshop sessions which can serve in developing school members in this field in the school. These sessions should not be limited to teachers only but all school members, starting from the school principal and ending up with the students.

Fifth, other reforms should be applied by principals in inclusive schools like encouraging peer coaching and rewarding best practices among general education teachers and special education teachers which can promote the collaboration and challenging essence as well.

Sixth, school principals need to allocate additional budget for providing SODs' needs of facilities and resources which are crucial to fulfilling the SODs' rights of learning and adaptation in the school. Additionally, it is highly essential for schools, which include a big number of SODs, to hire an additional number of special education teachers.

Seventh, other reforms principals should consider is limiting the accepted number and types of cases of SODs and reducing the class size can contribute to a better understanding and attention paid for each SOD's needs.

Finally, introducing and encouraging the principals for new reforms like co-teaching in inclusive schools can help teachers better serve the included students with diverse needs and abilities, as teachers suggested.

### **5.5 Recommendations for further studies**

Further studies can investigate more specific aspects of the role of school principals in promoting inclusive schools. It would be useful, likewise, to collect data using other qualitative research instruments like observations and other types of interviews. The participants of the study can be selected from both the female and male population in further studies. This study can be replicated by collecting data on the current issue from multiple participants, not only teachers but also principals and other stakeholders. Also, a replicated study can be conducted in different educational zones such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai or other zones in the UAE, and then to use the results to compare between these zones. Furthermore, a case study can be conducted to show a sample of an exemplary inclusive school where the school principal promotes the inclusive school effectively and provides the SODs with the best services they need.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: School access permission by ADEK

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p>دائرة التعليم والمعرفة<br/>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION<br/>AND KNOWLEDGE</p>  |   |
| <p><b>Date:</b> 15/12/2019</p> <p>To : Private School's Principal</p> <p><b>Subject:</b> Research Permission Request</p> <p>Dear Principal,</p> <p>The Department of Education and Knowledge would like to express its gratitude for your generous efforts and sincere cooperation in serving our dear researchers.</p> <p>You are kindly requested to allow the researcher/ <b>Nida Waleed Saleem Khaleel</b>, to complete her research on:</p> <p><b>ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN IMPLEMENTING FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE SUCCESS OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: EXPLORING THE CURRENT STATE IN ALAIN SCHOOLS</b></p> <p>Please indicate your approval of permission by facilitating her mentioned study with the sample groups at your schools.</p> <p>Thanks for your cooperation.</p> <p>Yours respectfully,<br/>Sulaiman Al Ameri</p> <p>Customer Experience Office Director</p> | <p>التاريخ: 2019/12/15</p> <p>السادة/ مديري المدارس الخاصة المحترمين</p> <p>الموضوع: تسهيل مهمة باحث</p> <p>تحية طيبة وبعد،</p> <p>يطيب لدائرة التعليم والمعرفة أن تتوجه لكم بخالص الشكر والتقدير لجهودكم الكريمة والتعاون الصادق لخدمة أبنائنا الباحثين.</p> <p>نود إعلامكم بموافقة من دائرة التعليم والمعرفة على موضوع الدراسة التي سيجريها الباحث/ <b>نداء وليد سليم خليل</b> ، بعنوان:</p> <p>دور مبادئ مدراء المدرسة في تنفيذ العوامل التي تؤثر على نجاح الممارسات الشاملة: استكشاف الحالة الراهنة في مدارس العين</p> <p>لذا، يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهام الباحث ومساعدته على إجراء الدراسة المشار إليه.</p> <p>شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم و تفضلوا بقبول خالص الشكر والتقدير،</p> <p>سليمان العمري<br/>مدير مكتب خدمة العملاء</p> |

## Appendix B: To whom it may concern letter by UAE University



التاريخ: 2020/1/19

السادة المحترمين

### لمن يهمه الأمر

نود إفادتكم علماً بأن الطالبة: نداء وليد سليم خليل\_ ID: 201770191  
التخصص : القيادة التربوية

مسجلة في برنامج الماجستير في كلية التربية، و تقوم بإعداد بحث بعنوان:

#### ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN IMPLEMENTING FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE SUCCESS OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: EXPLORING THE CURRENT STATE IN ALAIN SCHOOLS

نرجو التكرم بالموافقة على تسهيل مهمتها البحثية.

شاكرين ومقدرين حسن تعاونكم .  
هذا وتفضلوا بقبول فائق التحية والتقدير .

منسق برنامج الماجستير

أ. دعلي شحادة

*Ati Shehadeh*



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**Appendix C: Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee: Ethical approval  
confirmation e-mail**

Ethical Approval Application Approved

Research Office <research.office@uaeu.ac.ae>

Thu 09/01/2020 09:20 PM

To: Nid'a Saleem Khaleel <201770191@uaeu.ac.ae>

Dear Nida Khalil,

Your application entitled **ERS\_2019\_6044 : THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN IMPLEMENTING FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE SUCCESS OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: EXPLORING THE CURRENT STATE IN ALAIN SCHOOLS** has been approved. Kindly logon to <https://odvcrgs.uaeu.ac.ae/easp> to view the status.

Regards,  
Research Office

**Appendix D: Sample of the participants' consent form**

Page 1 of 2

## Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee - Consent to Participate in a Research Study-

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**Please read carefully before signing the Consent Form!**

*You will be asked to provide or deny consent after reading this form.*

**Topic of the research, the researcher(s) and the location**

You have been invited to take part in a study to investigate **THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN IMPLEMENTING FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE SUCCESS OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: EXPLORING THE CURRENT STATE IN ALAIN SCHOOLS**

This study will be conducted by Nida Waleed Khaleel in Department of Education, UAE University.

The study will take place at private and public schools located at **Al Ain**.

Participation in this study will take 20 to 30 mins – 5 minutes for explanation, around 20 minutes for the interview itself, and 5 minutes for a discussion with the researcher afterwards.

**Benefit of the research**

Although you will receive no direct benefits from this study, this research may help us better understand the role of school principals in promoting our inclusive schools and in supporting the students of determination in our schools.

**Procedure/setting**

The procedure will rely on answering the interview questions and settings will be inside the school campus/ staffroom or wherever it suits you.

**Safety Information**

There will not be any types of physical or psychological risks as the interview will be conducted directly with the investigator only and within the school campus and according to the participant satisfaction.

**Confidentiality and Privacy Information**

Your private information is definitely not revealed and neither of your name nor your school name will be mentioned in any kind of written or oral reports.

**Right to Withdraw**

You have the total right to withdraw at any stage during the interview or to refuse to answer specific questions without being penalized or questioned about that.

## Informed Consent

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1. I confirm that I have read and understood the above information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw.
3. I understand that my data will be kept confidential and if published, the data will not be identifiable as mine.

I agree to take part in this study:

Alaa Alaa  
(Name and signature of participant)

14.2.2020  
(Date)

Nida Waleed Khafed  
(Name and signature of person taking consent)

14 Feb, 2020  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name and signature of witness (if participant unable to read/write)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name and signature of parent/guardian/next of kin (when participant unable to give consent due to age or incapacity)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)