Families' Awareness of Supportive Services for Their Children with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract:

This study investigates how special education teachers perceive family awareness of support services for female students with intellectual disabilities enrolled in intellectual education programs. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research involved semi-structured interviews with nine special education teachers from various schools in the Aseer region of Saudi Arabia. The findings indicate that while some families demonstrate a good level of awareness and actively seek services both within and outside the school system, many face significant challenges. These include limited awareness of the importance and types of available support services, low educational backgrounds, and financial difficulties. Teachers also reported a general lack of multidisciplinary support teams in schools, which limits the availability of critical services such as speech therapy, psychological support, and physical or occupational therapy. Consequently, the burden of providing these services often falls on teachers themselves. The study highlights the need for initiatives aimed at enhancing family awareness and involvement, as well as systemic efforts to strengthen service provision in schools through multidisciplinary collaboration. These efforts are essential to ensure equitable, effective support for students with intellectual disabilities and to empower families as active partners in their children's education.

Key words: Intellectual disability, family awareness support services, inclusive education, special education, multidisciplinary teams, Saudi Arabia, IDEA, Individualized Education Program (IEP), transition services, rehabilitation

Introduction:

Students with intellectual disabilities often require a range of specialized support services to help them access quality education and achieve developmental, academic, and social goals. These services—such as speech and language therapy, psychological support, physical and occupational therapy, and counseling—are essential components of comprehensive educational programs. Research and international frameworks, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), emphasize that collaboration between schools and families plays a vital role in delivering these services effectively and ensuring student success.

In the context of intellectual education programs, families are expected to serve as key partners in supporting their children's individualized educational and developmental needs. However, the extent to which families are aware of these services, understand their value, and engage in securing them can significantly influence educational outcomes. While some families demonstrate a strong commitment to their children's needs and seek external services when school-based support is insufficient, others face barriers such as lack of awareness, limited education, or financial constraints. These challenges may be

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further compounded by systemic issues, including the absence of multidisciplinary teams in many public schools.

In Saudi Arabia, particularly in regions like Aseer, there is limited research exploring how educators perceive family awareness and involvement in support service provision for students with intellectual disabilities. Understanding these perceptions can shed light on the gaps and opportunities for improving service delivery and family-school collaboration.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the level of awareness families have about support services for female students with intellectual disabilities in intellectual education programs. Using a qualitative approach, the research seeks to identify the roles families play, the challenges they face, and the implications for practice and policy in inclusive and specialized education settings.

Theoretical Framework.

First Theme: Intellectual Disability

Intellectual disability is considered a significant human, social, and economic issue due to its broad educational and societal implications. Individuals with intellectual disabilities have become the focus of global attention because of their cognitive limitations, which adversely affect their academic performance compared to their non-disabled peers (Khalifa & Issa, 2015). Special education has thus emerged to accommodate individual differences among students with intellectual disabilities through curriculum adaptation, learning environment modifications, and the provision of specialized programs aimed at enabling them to achieve the highest possible level of development, learning, and independence (Al-Khatib et al., 2021).

Historical Overview of Intellectual Disability

Children with intellectual disabilities have existed throughout history, though societal attitudes toward them have varied. In ancient Greece and Rome, the prevailing view was one of rejection and neglect. However, with the emergence of monotheistic religions, attitudes shifted toward care and compassion. In the 19th century, formal education for this group began in France and later expanded across Europe and the United States. Initially, special education services were provided in asylums, eventually evolving into centers focused on teaching life skills. In mid-19th-century Massachusetts, Samuel Gridley Howe opened the first residential institution for individuals with developmental disabilities. This experimental school helped change prevailing beliefs, proving that individuals with intellectual disabilities can learn if given appropriate methods (Roth, Sarawgi&Fodstad, 2019).

Islam promoted the dignity and rights of individuals with disabilities, recognizing their full humanity, integrating them into society, and enacting legal measures aligned with their needs. Historical records show how Muslim leaders prioritized the well-being and care of people with disabilities throughout Islamic governance (Bleil, 2021).

As the field of special education developed, both developed and developing nations began prioritizing services for individuals with disabilities. Numerous organizations emerged to enhance diagnosis methods and create suitable educational and therapeutic programs. Universities introduced bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs in special education, reflecting its academic significance across American, European, and Arab institutions (Al-Rousan, 2018).

Definition of Intellectual Disability

Definitions of intellectual disability vary by context and perspective.

- The **American Psychological Association (APA)** defines intellectual disability as a developmental condition characterized by mild to profound impairments in cognitive functioning (e.g., learning, problem-solving, planning) and adaptive behavior, limiting the individual's ability to acquire essential age-appropriate skills (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** describes it as a significant reduction in the ability to understand new or complex information, learn new skills (intellectual impairment), and perform daily activities independently (adaptive dysfunction), starting before adulthood and affecting long-term development (WHO, 2020).

- The **American Psychiatric Association** identifies intellectual disability as limitations in general mental abilities and adaptive functioning (e.g., learning, judgment, communication, and independent living), emerging during the developmental period (Schaepper, Hauser, &Kagadkar, 2021).

- The **American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)** defines it as significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior across conceptual, social, and practical domains, manifesting before the age of 22 (Schalock et al., 2021).

- According to the **Saudi Ministry of Education (2016)**, intellectual disability is defined as a notable reduction in general intellectual performance during the developmental stage, accompanied by significant deficits in two or more adaptive behavior domains such as communication, self-care, social skills, academic skills, and others.

Despite definitional differences, researchers agree on three core diagnostic criteria: limitations in intellectual functioning, deficits in adaptive behavior, and onset during the developmental period.

Prevalence of Intellectual Disability

There is no consensus on the global prevalence of intellectual disability due to varying definitions, diagnostic practices, and the absence of national surveys in many countries. Studies indicate prevalence rates of 1.5% to 2.5% in developed countries and approximately 2.3% in developing nations (Al-Wabli, 2020). According to the APA, about 1% of the global population has intellectual disabilities, with 85% of these classified as mild. Males are more frequently affected than females (Schaepper et al., 2021).

Classification of Intellectual Disability

Classification varies based on criteria.

- **By Intellectual Functioning (IQ Scores):**

– *Mild:* IQ 55–70, generally capable of acquiring basic academic skills.

– *Moderate:* IQ 40–55, able to develop basic self-care and communication skills.

– *Severe:* IQ 25–40, significant impairments in motor and language development.

– *Profound:* IQ below 25, requiring continuous support and care (Jalamdeh, 2017; Purgganan, 2018).

- **By Intensity of Support Needs:**

– *Intermittent:* As needed during life transitions.

– *Limited:* Consistent but time-bound support (e.g., job training).

– *Extensive:* Long-term daily support in specific settings.

– *Pervasive:* Continuous, high-intensity support across environments (Daqmeeri&Fathi, 2018; Al-Wabli, 2020).

Each classification provides a framework for individualized planning and service delivery.

Characteristics of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Students with intellectual disabilities exhibit unique characteristics across multiple domains:

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- **Cognitive:** Delayed mental development, limited attention span, poor memory, and difficulties with abstract thinking and generalization (Jalamdeh, 2017; Shash, 2015).

- **Physical:** Slower growth in height and motor development, particularly in severe cases, often accompanied by physical abnormalities (Qamish&Mu'ayatah, 2014).

- **Linguistic:** Delays and disorders in speech and language, hindering effective communication (Metwally, 2015; Purgganan, 2018).

- **Educational:** Low motivation, difficulty with symbolic learning, and a need for structured, concrete instruction tailored to their abilities (Al-Luhaidan& Abdul Jabbar, 2020).

- **Social and Emotional:** Poor social adjustment, emotional flatness, low self-esteem, and vulnerability to social isolation or exploitation (Qadhi et al., 2020).

Given these challenges, students with intellectual disabilities require individualized educational plans, therapeutic interventions, and support services to foster their development and maximize their potential. The growing emphasis on inclusive education and support services reflects a commitment to equity and empowerment for all learners.

Second Theme: Support Services

Some students with intellectual disabilities require a variety of additional services to maximize their educational potential and foster their social, emotional, and functional development. These are known as support services, which serve as essential supplements to the instructional process and act as a bridge between specialized educational content and students' diverse learning needs (Al-Beblawi, 2016).

Definition of Support Services

Support services—referred to in special education literature as *related services*, *ancillary services*, *allied services*, or *assistant services*—constitute a broad spectrum of provisions aimed at supporting students with disabilities so they can access and benefit meaningfully from education (Al-Wabli, 1996). These services are not optional; rather, they are mandated components of comprehensive educational planning, particularly when designing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), support services are "those developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education." The law specifically includes services such as psychological counseling, physical and occupational therapy, speech-language therapy, social work, transportation, early identification, health services, parent counseling, and transition support (Wright & Wright, 2004). Al-Quraini (2007, p. 18) expands on this by stating that support services are those provisions "aimed at enabling students with intellectual disabilities to benefit from the special educational programs provided to them to the maximum extent possible." Similarly, Al-Beblawi (2017, p. 190) emphasizes their comprehensive and interdisciplinary nature, defining them as "a coordinated process involving extracurricular, medical, psychological, educational, and vocational services offered to students with disabilities to help them function as independently and productively as possible in society." International literature also supports this view. According to Forlin and Chambers (2011), support services are foundational to the success of inclusive education, particularly in ensuring equitable access and addressing learning barriers beyond the academic domain. Without these services, students with intellectual disabilities often face systemic exclusion, even in formally inclusive environments.

The Importance of Support Services

The importance of support services lies in their central role in ensuring equity, accessibility, and empowerment for students with intellectual disabilities. Their primary goal is to enhance and reinforce the educational, psychological, physical, and social development of students, ultimately facilitating their integration into school and society.

The IDEA framework views support services not as supplemental "extras," but as integral components of educational planning that help students move toward greater autonomy, self-determination, and quality of life. Al-Wabli (1996) affirms that support services are most effective when paired with individualized instruction that directly aligns with the unique learning profiles of students. Therefore, they are closely linked to the development and implementation of IEPs, which legally mandate the inclusion of any necessary services based on professional evaluations.

In the Saudi Arabian context, the Special Education Guide (Ministry of Education, 2016) highlights the importance of integrating support services into school systems, advocating for their alignment with global standards. Recent research conducted by Alshahrani and Alosaimi (2023) underscores the limited availability and coordination of these services in some regions, noting the urgent need for professional development, policy reform, and institutional support. Moreover, Al-Zahrani (2021) emphasizes that support services offer both preventive and developmental functions. On the preventive side, services such as medical assessments and speech therapy mitigate the progression of disabilities or secondary complications. Developmentally, psychological counseling, social work, and recreational therapy promote emotional resilience, social skills, and student well-being. Suleiman and Murad (2016) argue that as the severity and complexity of disabilities increase, the need for comprehensive, multidisciplinary support systems becomes even more pronounced. These systems must go beyond basic academic accommodations to address the full spectrum of student needs—ranging from mental health and mobility to communication and transition into adulthood.

The role of support services has grown even more critical in light of global educational goals, such as those outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which calls for inclusive and equitable education for all learners, including those with disabilities. Studies like that of Kiuppis (2019) assert that countries must strengthen their support systems if they are to fulfill international commitments to inclusive education.

Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Al-Zahrani (2021) states that support services serve both *preventive* and *developmental* functions. Preventively, they offer health and therapeutic services to alleviate the challenges faced by students with disabilities. Developmentally, they provide psychological and counseling support to foster emotional well-being and social interaction.Suleiman and Murad (2016) point out that the need for support services becomes more critical when students exhibit severe or multiple disabilities, as this requires specially designed programs supported by targeted services that meet their complex and varied needs.In the researcher's view, the value of support services is reflected in the diverse domains they cover. For instance, psychological, counseling, and social services help students adapt to their environments; speech and occupational therapies address functional limitations; and vocational guidance and transition services promote independent living and social inclusion.

Domains of Support Services

Support services for students with intellectual disabilities are essential in fostering their development and integration into society. Based on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, these services encompass several key domains:

1. Psychological Services

Psychological services address the mental health and behavioral needs of students with intellectual disabilities, assisting them in managing challenges such as low self-esteem, aggression, withdrawal, and anxiety. These services also focus on developing self-regulation and emotional resilience. In Saudi Arabia, the Special Education Policy (2016) outlines tasks for behavioral skills teachers, including assessment, diagnosis, behavior modification planning, psychological reporting, participation in Individualized Education Program (IEP) development, and offering family counseling (Suleiman, 2019; Al-Khafash, 2018; Special Education Guide, 2016).

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2. Speech and Language Correction Services

Students with intellectual disabilities often experience language impairments due to cognitive delays. Specialized sessions in speech-language pathology help diagnose and treat these communication challenges, improving both verbal expression and comprehension. In Saudi Arabia, the first bachelor's program in speech-language pathology was established at King Saud University in 1985, emphasizing the importance of this field in addressing communication disorders (Mustafa & Al-Reedy, 2015; Al-Beblawi, 2016; King Saud University, 2023).

3. Physical Therapy Services

Physical therapy aims to enhance motor functions, coordination, and joint flexibility. Therapists employ exercises, braces, hydrotherapy, and electrical stimulation to treat physical impairments affecting mobility, posture, and endurance. Recent research has shown the importance of these services for promoting physical health and independence among individuals with disabilities in Saudi Arabia (Al-Jalamda, 2017; Alnahdi, 2024).

4. Occupational Therapy Services

Occupational therapy assists students in acquiring or regaining daily living skills through task-oriented activities. It addresses fine motor skills, sensory integration, and the use of adaptive tools to foster independence. Between 2010 and 2019, seven Saudi academic institutions launched occupational therapy programs, reflecting the growth of the profession and its rehabilitative focus (Al-Beblawi, 2016; Al-Khafash, 2018; Alsalamah et al., 2024).

5. Early Identification and Assessment Services

Early detection of intellectual disabilities is crucial, particularly in the first five years of life, to ensure timely interventions. Early identification allows for tailored medical, psychological, and educational planning. Studies from Saudi Arabia stress the role of early intervention in improving long-term developmental outcomes (Al-Qadi et al., 2020; Alsaif&Alsaif, 2022).

6. Medical Services

Medical services encompass diagnosis, treatment, genetic counseling, preventive care, and family health education. These are crucial for managing co-occurring health conditions and ensuring the well-being of students. The Saudi Ministry of Health supports the right of individuals with disabilities to access comprehensive and specialized medical services (Al-Jalamda, 2017; Ministry of Health, 2023).

7. Social Services

Social workers assist students in overcoming social and emotional difficulties, building relationships, and integrating into their communities. These services help reduce isolation and foster self-worth. The Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has implemented various initiatives to support social inclusion for individuals with disabilities (Al-Khafash, 2018; HRSD, 2023).

8. Parent Counseling and Training Services

Families play a crucial role in the development of children with intellectual disabilities. Counseling and training empower parents to better understand their child's condition, build coping mechanisms, and work collaboratively with educators (Al-Beblawi, 2016; Alotaibi, 2023).

9. Recreational Services

Structured recreational activities promote the motor, social, and emotional development of students and offer opportunities for inclusive engagement. Organizations like Special Olympics Saudi Arabia support these goals through adaptive sports and community programs (Al-Khafash, 2018; Special Olympics, 2023).

10. School Health Services

In partnership with health sectors, school health services offer preventive care, health monitoring, and medical interventions. The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia continues to expand health initiatives within schools to support all students, including those with disabilities (Al-Zahrani, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2023).

11. Counseling Services

Counseling helps students and their families understand the implications of disability, manage emotional challenges, and foster positive self-identities. The Saudi Ministry of Health promotes access to mental health services as part of a holistic support system (Al-Khafash, 2018; Al-Jalamda, 2017; Ministry of Health, 2023).

12. Rehabilitation Counseling Services

These services prepare students for independent living and career development by focusing on vocational assessment, goal setting, and life-skills training. The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development in Saudi Arabia supports vocational rehabilitation and workforce integration for people with disabilities (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.; HRSD, 2023).

13. Transition Services

Transition services guide students with intellectual disabilities into adulthood, whether in further education, employment, or community living. Though Saudi Arabia introduced such services in 2005, studies suggest a need for expanded community partnerships and greater program effectiveness (Saudi Inclusion Framework, 2017; Alshahrani&Alosaimi, 2023).

Third theme: Family Awareness of Support Services

Family awareness of support services plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational and developmental trajectories of students with intellectual disabilities. When families are well-informed about the services available to their children—such as psychological counseling, speech and language therapy, occupational and physical therapy, and social support—they are better positioned to advocate for, access, and reinforce these services both in school and at home. Conversely, when families lack this awareness, it can lead to delayed intervention, reduced service utilization, and limited collaboration with schools (Alotaibi, 2023; Alshahrani&Alosaimi, 2023).

The literature consistently highlights the importance of equipping families with the knowledge and tools necessary to understand their children's needs and rights. According to Al-Zahrani (2021), family knowledge of support services is directly linked to improved student outcomes, especially when families are engaged in planning and monitoring Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Similarly, a study by Alshammari and Al-Fahad (2022) in Saudi Arabia found that low parental awareness was one of the most critical factors impeding access to rehabilitation and therapeutic services for children with intellectual disabilities. This lack of awareness was particularly prevalent in rural areas and among families with low socioeconomic or educational backgrounds.

International studies also reinforce these findings. For example, Forlin and Chambers (2011) emphasize that parental understanding of inclusive education and available support services significantly enhances the effectiveness of school-family partnerships. They argue that schools must proactively inform and involve families in service planning and delivery to ensure holistic support for students with disabilities.

In the Saudi context, several recent studies have stressed the need for structured awareness programs. Alosaimi (2022) examined parents' knowledge of support services in special education schools and found that while most parents expressed a willingness to support their children, they lacked accurate information about how and where to access professional services. Another study by Alqahtani (2023) found that many families depended solely on school staff for guidance and rarely sought out additional services, largely due to a lack of knowledge or confidence in navigating external systems.The Ministry of

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Education (2016) has emphasized the need to strengthen home-school collaboration through awareness campaigns, parent training, and clear communication of students' rights and available services. Despite these national efforts, gaps persist in implementation—especially in remote or underserved regions such as Aseer, where access to qualified professionals and service centers remains limited (Alshahrani&Alosaimi, 2023).

Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of targeted efforts to raise family awareness as a strategic priority in inclusive and intellectual education programs. Educators, school administrators, and policy-makers must collaborate to ensure that families are not only informed but also empowered to participate in their children's support and educational planning.

Materials and Methods:

To gain a deep understanding of how special education teachers perceive family awareness of support services for students with intellectual disabilities, this study employed a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretive paradigm. This approach was selected for its ability to capture the complexity of participants' experiences, beliefs, and the contextual factors influencing their perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative design enabled a rich exploration of the ways in which teachers interpret families' roles and the barriers they face in accessing or utilizing support services.The interpretive framework was particularly appropriate for this study, as it acknowledges that teachers' views are shaped by their professional contexts, social interactions, and everyday experiences within educational institutions (Tracy, 2020).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine special education teachers working in intellectual education programs across the Aseer region in Saudi Arabia. This method allowed for flexibility in probing individual perspectives while maintaining a consistent focus on key themes related to family awareness, engagement, and systemic support. The approach ensured that the findings authentically reflect the realities of educational practice, offering valuable implications for improving family-school collaboration and service provision in intellectual education programs.

Participants

The study involved nine female special education teachers working in intellectual education programs in the Aseer region of Saudi Arabia. These teachers were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that participants had direct experience with students with intellectual disabilities and ongoing interactions with their families. The participants taught in various public schools that implement intellectual education programs, which serve female students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. Their teaching experience ranged from 3 to over 15 years as shown in table 1, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives based on years of service, school settings, and exposure to family engagement practices. All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the study and were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant Name	Years of Experience
Amal	12 years
Salma	8 years
Dalia	15 years
Noor	6 years
Yusra	10 years
Rima	9 years
Hana	5 years
Basma	7 years
Lujain	3 years

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Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). After transcribing the semi-structured interviews verbatim, the researcher became thoroughly familiar with the data by repeated reading. Initial codes were then generated to capture significant patterns and meanings related to the teachers' perceptions of family awareness and involvement in support services. These codes were organized into broader themes that reflected both the facilitators and challenges associated with family engagement.

Themes were reviewed and refined through an iterative process, ensuring that each theme was clearly defined and supported by representative quotes from the data. The analysis aimed to highlight recurring experiences while also allowing for the inclusion of unique or divergent perspectives. Mmanual codingwas used to support the organization and categorization of the data. This analytic process ensured that the findings were grounded in participants' lived experiences and provided meaningful insights relevant to educational practice and policy.

Findings and Discussion

The studyaimed to explore how special education teachers perceive family awareness of support services for female students with intellectual disabilities in intellectual education programs. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with nine teachers working in various schools in the Aseer region of Saudi Arabia. Thematic analysis revealed six key themes, which are discussed below with supporting quotations from participants and connections to the broader context.

4.1 Family Awareness and Involvement

Some teachers reported that certain families demonstrate an encouraging level of awareness regarding their daughters' needs and the value of support services. These families often communicate regularly with the school, inquire about available services, and seek out additional assistance through external specialized centers.Teacher Amal shared:*The families are very cooperative, and they ask about the support services. Some of them are not satisfied with what the school provides and take their children to specialized centers in the evenings."* Additionally, some families collaborated with schools to submit formal requests for more support services to be provided on campus. These actions reflect a subset of families who actively engage in advocating for their children's educational needs.

4.2 Lack of Awareness about Support Services

Despite a few positive examples, most participating teachers emphasized that many families have limited or no awareness of the types of support services available to their daughters. This lack of knowledge hinders their ability to seek appropriate assistance or participate meaningfully in their children's education. For example, teacher Salma observed: *"Some families are unaware of the importance of providing support services".* Teacher Hana echoed this concern: *"Some families have no background or any information about support services".* All nine teachers agreed that lack of awareness is a significant barrier to family engagement. These findings are consistent with prior research, such as Al-Quraini (2020) and Al-Fahad (2018), which identified weak awareness among families as a major obstacle to accessing services for children with disabilities.

4.3 Influence of Educational Attainment

Many teachers attributed the limited awareness of support services to the low educational levels of some parents. They noted that families with limited schooling may not understand the importance of support services or how to access them. This was clear in teacher Dalia response: *"we have families with low level of education and therefore they have little knowledge of support services".* These findings suggest that educational background plays a critical role in shaping parents' ability to engage with and advocate for

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support services. This aligns with Al-Wabli (2020), who identified low parental education as a key barrier to effective family involvement.

4.4 Financial Constraints

Economic hardship was also reported as a major challenge that prevents families from seeking support services outside the school setting. Teachers noted that many families cannot afford the fees associated with private centers or the transportation costs required to access them. For example Teacher Salma shared:*"Some families are in financial distress, making it difficult for them to access services since the specialized centers are very far away".* This challenge was especially pronounced in rural or underserved areas. These findings echo those of Saidan and Al-Saqr (2018), who found that financial limitations restrict access to support services among families of students in inclusive education settings.

4.5 Limited Availability of Support Services in Schools

Another key finding was the shortage—or complete absence—of support services within schools. Most teachers reported that only basic services such as psychological support or speech therapy were available, if at all. None of the participants reported the presence of full multidisciplinary teams. Teacher Noor explained: *"We don't have any support services—no psychologist, no speech therapist, not even occupational or physical therapy."* Teacher Basma added: *"Due to the absence of a team, our students are not accustomed to receiving support services".* This lack of in-school services not only limits student support but also places added pressure on families to seek services externallysomething not all can afford or manage.

4.6 Teacher Efforts and Overlapping Responsibilities

In the absence of formal support services, many teachers described taking on additional responsibilities themselves. They reported searching for online exercises, implementing speech and motor skill activities, and even enrolling in training courses to better support their students. Teacher Rima said:*"We search for fine motor exercises and apply them ourselves."* Teacher Dalia added: *"I provide sessions targeting specific speech issues and help students with movement difficulties because I've taken courses in occupational and fine motor skills development.* While these efforts demonstrate the teachers' commitment, they also highlight the burden placed on educators to fulfil roles typically handled by a multidisciplinary team. As Teacher Noor stated: *"Because of the lack of team members, we, the teachers, have to provide support services, which is exhausting because it adds to our academic workload."*

From the above, it can be concluded that while some families are engaged and aware, the majority face significant challenges in understanding, accessing, and utilizing support services. These challenges include lack of awareness, low educational attainment, financial hardship, and insufficient service provision within schools. As a result, teachers often bear additional responsibilities, which affect the overall quality and sustainability of service delivery.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how special education teachers perceive family awareness of support services for female students with intellectual disabilities in intellectual education programs in the Aseer region of Saudi Arabia. The findings reveal that while a minority of families exhibit high levels of engagement and awareness—actively collaborating with schools and seeking external services—the majority face significant challenges that hinder their ability to access or utilize the support services their children need.

Three primary barriers emerged from the data: (1) lack of awareness about the nature and importance of support services, (2) low levels of parental education, and (3) financial constraints that prevent families from securing external services. These barriers are compounded by systemic limitations, particularly the widespread absence of multidisciplinary teams and the limited availability of in-school support services. As a result, many teachers have assumed additional roles traditionally carried out by therapists, counselors, and support specialists, often without formal training or adequate institutional support. This

overlapping of responsibilities increases the burden on educators and risks compromising the quality of service provision.

The study emphasizes that raising family awareness is a critical first step toward improving the accessibility and effectiveness of support services. This can be achieved through targeted outreach, parent training programs, and collaborative school-family partnerships that empower caregivers to become active participants in their children's development. In parallel, systemic reforms are needed to strengthen support service infrastructure within schools, including the recruitment of qualified specialists, development of interdisciplinary teams, and policy enforcement to ensure compliance with inclusive education standards.Ultimately, fostering meaningful family involvement and providing comprehensive support services are essential for fulfilling the goals of inclusive and equitable education for students with intellectual disabilities. These efforts will not only benefit students' developmental and academic progress but will also promote greater collaboration between schools, families, and communities.

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