

ROLES OF RESOURCE ROOM TEACHERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN PALESTINE

Mazen R.M Allaham¹
Siaw Yan-Li, PhD^{2*}
Azmayaty Mohamad Nor, PhD³

¹Postgraduate Student
^{1 2 3}Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling
Faculty of Education
Universiti Malaya
Malaysia

¹mazenrh@yahoo.com
^{2*}Corresponding author: yanli@um.edu.my
³azy_mn@um.edu.my

Many special education teachers are working in resource rooms designated for students with special educational needs. Therefore, it is vital to get acquainted and be familiarised with special education teachers' roles in various learning settings. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives of resource room teachers (RRTs) on their roles in the resource room as well as in the inclusive classroom. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four RRTs from primary inclusive education schools in Bethlehem city, Palestine. The semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically to address the themes generated from the interview data to meet the objectives of the study. Results revealed that RRTs have a major role in the resource room, including implementing the assessment portfolio, selecting resource room students (RRSs), creating Individualised Education Plans (IEPs), and supporting RRSs in Arabic and Mathematics through individual or group instruction. In the inclusive classroom, they clarify regular teachers' instructions and promote RRS involvement in both classroom and extracurricular activities. This is the first Palestinian study to provide insight into the roles of RRTs in various learning settings. The outcomes considerably help policymakers improve resource room practices as well as enhance the services, support, and special education programmes offered to RRSs.

Keywords: Resource room, inclusive classroom, roles and responsibilities, special education

INTRODUCTION

In harmony with the global trend towards “Education for All”, the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MOE) officially adopted an inclusive education programme in the year 2000. This project aimed to address the needs of children with special educational needs requiring their inclusion in mainstream schools (Abu-Heran, 2014, Qawasmi, 2016). However, due to the lack of Palestinian special education teachers, students with different disabilities were taught in the regular classrooms and supported by general teachers (Abu-Heran, 2014). This support was insufficient because general teachers were not qualified enough to deal with students with disabilities (Abu-Heran, 2014). Therefore, the Palestinian Ministry of Education adopted the Resource Rooms Project in 2004. The resource room is known as a support education room. It can be defined as a separate setting where special educators, other professionals, and therapists provide students with special needs with either academic or behavioural assistance for part of their school day to ensure that all learners, including the disabled and gifted, benefit from the public education services (Dev & Dev, 2015; Kart, 2017; Mackey, 2014; Özaydin et al., 2017).

In Palestine, RRTs are also known as special education teachers and work in resource rooms to assist students with special educational needs (SEN). Meanwhile, RRTs also support regular teachers in an inclusive classroom, where SEN students spend part of the school day learning alongside their normal peers. Kart (2017) indicated that students with learning disabilities (SWLD) are withdrawn from the general setting and receive assistance in a separate resource room where they work in small groups under the supervision of special educators and other specialists to develop their academic abilities.

In Palestine, the resource room project is aimed to provide resource room students (RRSs) with the best services that develop their abilities and raise the level of their self-reliance. RRSs, also known as students with special educational needs (SEN). SEN students are low academic achievers who make modest progress toward mastering reading, writing, and numeracy skills. In short, they lack the fundamental academic abilities of reading, writing, and mathematics. Therefore, they require assistance from the RRTs in both Arabic and Mathematics. In the general classroom, where SEN students learn alongside their normal peers, they mainly receive academic support from their general class teachers (Abu-Heran, 2014; Qawasmi, 2016). Due to the lack of Palestinian empirical research regarding the resource room, little is known about resource rooms in general and RRTs in particular. Therefore, learning about the resource room and RRTs is critical.

The present qualitative study is aimed to explore the roles of RRTs in the resource room as well as the inclusive classroom. The researcher sought out the voices of Palestinian RRTs to learn about their roles and analyse their practices in the resource room and the general classroom. By exploring RRTs' roles, there is potential to shed light on their tasks and responsibilities as well as the services provided to SEN students either in the resource room or the general classroom, and whether these services meet their educational and social needs. This study illuminated the current situation of the resource rooms as well as the working mechanism of RRTs. It is a new addition and scientific enrichment in the field of special education about RRTs. The main findings of this study could inform policy direction and enable Palestinian decision-makers to reconsider the services, support, and special education programmes offered to SEN students in Palestine, which in turn, will have a positive impact on the type and quality of services offered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

RRTs play a very important role because they are the first educator that interacts directly with SWLD, identify their educational needs, and support them in the resource room. RRTs also support the SEN students in the general classroom, where SEN students learn alongside their normal peers under the supervision of the regular teacher, who usually hold a bachelor's degree in general education.

The RRT is the only person responsible for assisting SWLD and providing them with educational services, while other regular teachers have not efficiently engaged in assisting students with disability yet (Abu-Hamour & Al Hmouz, 2014; Al Mamari, 2017; Al Shoura, 2015; Kizir, 2020). RRTs are the first to distinguish the difficulties of learners in school (Alahmadi & El Keshky, 2019). Their responsibilities include evaluating the learning needs of learners with disabilities, making intervention plans, evaluating the effect of those interventions, and collaborating with other educational personnel to support students with diverse abilities in the inclusive setting (Benedict et al., 2014; Brownell et al., 2014). RRTs design individualised educational plans (IEPs) for each student and provide students with

appropriate educational services that meet their needs (Melhem & Isa, 2013; Al-Zoubi & Rahman, 2016). Under the IEP, learners receive learning in small groups where they have a better chance to improve and increase their soft skills in social interaction (Al Mamari, 2017).

Al Mamari (2017) indicated that RRTs play various roles such as evaluating learners' performance daily, collaborating with regular teachers to support SWLD in the general setting, and providing them with appropriate learning and vital skills. In the same context, Abu-Heran (2014) indicated that the RRT plays several roles such as contacting parents to collect information about target children, implementing the educational assessment tool, and teaching students with disabilities. They also cooperate with the regular teacher to set IEPs, and implement it, in addition to setting a daily and weekly schedule for RRTs in cooperation with the general teacher and school principal.

On the other hand, RRTs play a major role in assisting SWLDs in inclusive classrooms. They collaborate with the regular teachers in supporting SWLDs within the inclusive setting. Moreover, some RRTs work as consultants who help students to succeed in inclusive settings, while others participate with regular teachers in planning and teaching (Dev & Dev, 2015). According to Vygotsky's theory, collaboration and re-appropriate feedback from others lead to gaining knowledge, learning, and thinking (Vygotsky, 1978).

Special education teachers communicate, plan and collaborate effectively with regular teachers to create a new learning setting where learners practice new skills independently and receive clear instructions, instant feedback, and reinforcement (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). Additionally, they provide regular teachers with the adequate knowledge and skills needed to support students with special needs in the inclusive classroom. In short, special educators assist learners with special needs in the least restrictive environment by collaborating with regular teachers and providing them with the necessary consultations and instruction (Shaw, 2019).

Moreover, special education teachers should be able to understand and analyse their teaching practice to develop integrated knowledge of fluency instruction and word study, which can be used in teaching students with reading difficulties (Brownell et al., 2014). They also use appropriate instruction, support, assessment, behavioural intervention, and modern assistive technology in addition to learning about different types of disabilities and making an individualised educational plan (Dukes et al., 2014; Murry & Alqahtani, 2015). According to Feldman et. al. (2015), special educators should develop a social environment that allows children with disabilities to stay in the inclusive classroom for extended periods and learn alongside their peers. They also support learners with disabilities socially and academically. In a mainstream school setting, special educators enhance peer interactions among students with learning difficulties. They were devoted to following school curricula and following up with children in special education groups (Sigstad, 2018). Advocacy is another crucial role for a special education teacher. In addition to being an instructor, the special educator must advocate the academic, behavioural, and social needs of their learners. They collaborate with other colleagues to help learners with special needs to be more independent, more cooperative with their peers, and more effective individuals in the school and community (Murry & Alqahtani, 2015; Ruppert et al., 2017; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Urbach et al., 2015). In the same vein, Urbach et al. (2015) found that expert special educators use individualised instruction that meets the academic needs of each learner. They see themselves as a learner advocate, who use teaching to increase the anticipations and chances for their learners, rather than being a protector (Ruppert et al., 2017; Urbach et al., 2015).

To summarise, the RRT is currently the only professional on the front line who has the specialised knowledge to ascertain the nature and severity of the difficulties experienced by many students and the ability to provide these children with carefully tailored instruction. The RRTs also can recognise the necessity of input from other professionals who may be contacted to provide important supportive services (e.g., speech and language pathologists).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory has direct implications for inclusive education aiming to prove that students with disabilities can learn through interaction with their normal peers in an inclusive classroom. Educators are key in nurturing the self-concept of learners with special educational needs (Malik, 2017; Mcleod, 2018; Mwaimba, 2014).

There are two major themes under Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, namely Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Learning occurs within a learner's ZPD on two planes or "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the classroom, teachers as MKO can create group ZPD that can be scaffolded through collective instruction (Smit et al., 2013). Under the guidance of the MKO, students can expand their ZPD by gaining new knowledge, capacities, and skills. This process can be transacted when a teacher ascertains the ZPD for a particular skill (e.g., reading comprehension) and thus targets instruction to ensure that instruction is pitched at the 'sweet spot' of a student's learning' (Lewis, 2019). Learners participate actively in the learning process after receiving teaching from the MKO. In other words, a student becomes part of the learning process when he/she actively interacts with the teacher in a specific setting that includes meaningful teaching, content, and methodology. The teacher can also use each of these components to develop a significant personalised learning setting for each student to enable him/her to interact effectively (Suleymanov, 2014; Farrokh, 2017). To ensure the learning process is successful, the teacher's assistance should meet the learner's abilities. As soon as a learner becomes more capable, the teacher's assistance should be gradually faded (Smit et al., 2013).

Based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the RRT is the MKO that plays an essential role in supporting SEN students either in the resource room or the general classroom. The RRT is continually assessing a student's progress during a learning activity and responding to their needs. This means that the RRT adjusts the task difficulty and learning objectives for the student to meet the requirements. The ZPD denotes the level of activity that the student can complete independently, demonstrating the actual task that can be completed with guided support from the teacher. RRTs must keep in mind when developing learning objectives that each student will have unique personality traits that will affect their zones. Based on students' ZPD, RRT groups students into homogenous groups and support them either individually, or collectively.

Moreover, the RRT as MKO should cooperate with other teaching personnel for the benefit of the SEN students. For example, they should cooperate with the regular teachers to diagnose SEN, prepare and implement the IEP, as well as provide SEN students with appropriate academic and psychological assistance in the general setting.

To summarise, SEN students need numerous opportunities to prove their point of learning so that the RRT can devise the next steps and meet each need. Scaffolding, or the gradual release of responsibility, helps SEN students acquire independence in learning tasks as they progress towards their goals.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to explore the roles of RRTs in Palestinian primary schools. In this present study, RRTs are frequently referred to as special education teachers. They are educators in leading and managing the resource room activities. It is vital to understand that RRT is a key person to ensuring the success of special needs education. However, past studies revealed that most of the Palestinian RRTs were unaware of their roles and responsibilities in either the resource room or the inclusive classroom. They experienced marginalisation and were subject to a categorical view of assisting SEN students (Abu-Heran, 2014; Qawasmi, 2016). Therefore, exploring the roles of RRTs helps to define the educational services, tasks, and responsibilities that the RRT performs in the resource room as well as the general classroom. Four RRTs participated in the interview sessions to explain their roles as special needs education teachers in the resource room and inclusive classroom. They were also observed in both environments. In relation to this concern, the current study focuses on two main research objectives:

1. To explore the roles of resource room teachers in the resource room
2. To explore the roles of resource room teachers in the inclusive classroom

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An explorative case study research design was adapted using purposive sampling. According to Yin (2018), the goal of a case study is to understand a complex social phenomenon in a real-life setting, such as organisational and managerial processes. Semi-structured interviews and observations were administered to four RRTs purposively chosen from Palestinian primary schools, to gather their perceptions and experiences in the resource room and inclusive classroom.

Participants

There are four participants in this study. They consist of RRTs from four primary schools in Bethlehem, Palestine. Participants are required to have at least three years of working experience in resource rooms attached to Palestinian primary schools as well as a bachelor's degree in either special education or general education. They were appointed by the Ministry of Education to assist RRTs in Arabic and Mathematics. They have formal special education training, which includes diagnosing students with special educational needs by implementing assessment portfolios in Arabic and Mathematics, designing lesson plans, preparing and implementing individual educational programs IEPs, teaching and evaluating SWLD, and creating teaching aids.

Data Collection Process

The researcher collected data using method of triangulation that included semi-structured interviews and observations. Primary data and secondary data sources were used to gather the information for data analysis. Semi-structured interviews and a series of open-ended questions were used as a data collection technique in this present study. Pre-planned core questions were designed to guide the interview process which aligned with the research objectives. All the interview sessions were held in a private room at school. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and the interview procedures to all the interviewees. All interviewees voluntarily agreed to participate before starting the interview session. Informed consent was obtained from each interviewee. All information obtained was solely meant for research purposes and was kept confidential. During the interview, interviewees were given the freedom to express their experiences, review, and comments for the researcher to get in-depth information related to the research objectives. The identity of the interviewee was anonymised by using pseudonyms.

In addition to conducting interviews, the researcher employed observation to collect first-hand information about the activities that took place in the resource room and regular classroom. The researcher looked into the participants' experiences, instructions, actions, and behaviour that occur naturally in the learning setting which are difficult to ascertain through interviews. During and after each observation, notes were taken on the conduct of the teachers and the students.

Data Analyses

In the current study, the researcher began transcribing the data for each interview and summarising the notes from each observation before going on to another case. To prepare the data for analysis, the recorded data was converted into written text, and the observational notes were typed. The raw data was then analysed manually using the thematic analysis technique that includes coding and categorisation. The ultimate objective of thematic analysis is to produce key themes for interviewees' experiences and perceptions, which are useful in answering the research questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis process passes in six phases, namely (1) familiarisation with collected data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) presenting and discussing results. The whole process consisted of an ongoing cycle of coding, data reduction, and displays, writing memos, searching for patterns, and generating and testing assertions. Open coding included reducing data into codes that consist of a few words or phrases that represent pieces of data. While axial coding was undertaken by grouping the open codes into categories or themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the current case study, the researcher carefully analysed the transcripts, case by case, after converting the data into text form in order to look for patterns in the data. The researcher then identified the broad ideas, concepts, or phrases from the data and set up appropriate codes to compress and label the data in a way that discloses essential information. Once the data had been coded, the researcher used constant comparative methods to review the coded data from each case. In order to establish emerging themes and provide answers to the study questions, the researcher compared and contrasted the patterns found within and across each case. The researcher looked over each theme to see if the excerpts fit together and had enough evidence to support them. These themes were reviewed and refined in the successive stages of analysis. All the emergent themes were shared by all participants because all of the participants are RRTs with bachelor's degrees in special education and have undergone official training by the

Ministry of Education. The participants provided feedback confirming the ‘dependability and confirmability’ of the analysis.

FINDINGS

RRTs play a significant role in assisting SEN students in the resource room as well as the inclusive setting. There are two sections in this reporting. Section A will first highlight the demographic profiles of the participants involved in this study. Section B subsequently discusses the emerging themes. The interviewees were coded as RRTA (resource room teacher A) to RRTD. The demographic data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Profiles for Informants

Demographic	RRTA	RRTB	RRTC	RRTD
Age	25	28	39	33
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Bachelor’s Degree	SE	SE	SE	SE
Years of Experience in Education Field	4	6	11	7
Years of Experience in Resource Room	4	6	6	7

The profile of participants includes their age, highest academic qualifications, years of experience in the education field, and years of experience in the resource room. All the informants have at least four years of working experience in the resource room. They hold a bachelor's degree in special education (SE) and work in resource rooms at Palestinian primary schools in Bethlehem City.

The next section will present the findings in two major sections according to the research objectives. Each section will introduce the major themes in accordance with what the informants said.

Role of Resource Room Teachers in the Resource Room

Analysis of the data from interviews and observations indicated that the roles of RRTs in the resource room were evident in the two emerging themes: (a) Teaching and Learning; and (b) Assessment. Table 2 shows the open coding and axial coding process for the themes.

Table 2

Open Coding and Axial Coding for Research Objective 1

Open Coding	Axial Coding	
	Theme 1 Teaching and Learning	Theme 2 Assessment
Preparing IEP		
Forming groups	Preparing IEP	
Designing teaching materials	Forming groups	Assessment portfolio
Teaching	Teaching materials	Formative assessment
Assessment portfolio	Teaching	
Formative assessment		

Teaching and Learning

The data gathered from the interviews indicates that RRTs in the resource room practice teaching and learning. They assist SWLD, slow learners, and students with academic delays. RRTs are not, however, permitted to label the students. They call them resource room students (RRS) or students with special educational needs (SEN). RRTs must deal with all students who have been referred to the resource room, regardless of their classification. In general, they teach students who are struggling with basic Arabic or Mathematical skills, as well as capacities such as the complete shape, the complete picture, movements, sensory-motor synergy, and so on. Below is the supporting statement from the informants:

“In the resource room, I support those who have weaknesses in basic skills in Arabic language, Mathematics, and capabilities related to cognitive structure. Generally, we take students with learning disabilities, slow learners, and students with academic delay; however, we are not allowed to label students.”

(RRTA/ Interview Transcript)

“We are not required to classify the students. We just apply the assessment portfolio to determine which students need help in the resource room. I have students with learning difficulties, but most of the cases have academic delays problems caused by negligence and a failure to follow up with parents.”

(RRTC/ Interview Transcript)

“We take students with learning disabilities, slow learners, and academic delay students. We must use the assessment portfolios, describe the problem, and develop a plan. However, we are not permitted to categorise students. We call them RRS or students with special educational needs (SEN).”

(RRTD/ Interview Transcript)

After selecting RRSs, RRTs design IEPs for each RRS. These plans include students' weaknesses, strengths, and the objectives to be achieved for each student. Based on the IEPs, they form homogeneous groups with students of similar academic levels and needs. The RRTs

design and prepare teaching aids and educational materials to help SEN students achieve the goals set in IEPs. In the resource room, educators give their instruction collectively or individually. They employ group teaching for the whole group, however, if a child with special needs in the same group is struggling to follow up with peers, one-on-one tutoring is used. Below is the supporting statement from the informants:

“Based on the assessment portfolio outcomes, I design the individualised educational plan for each student.”

(RRTA/ Interview Transcript)

“Resource room students are divided into homogeneous groups according to their educational needs. For example, I put those who do not know certain alphabet letters in the same group. Then, I prepare the learning materials for each group, taking into account their needs and my observations about each student.”

(RRTD/ Interview Transcript)

“I provide appropriate educational materials that meet the goals based on the IEPs. For example, if my goal is to teach students to read three-letter words, I create worksheets, cards, videos, and PowerPoint presentations that support the goal in proportion to the student's level.”

(RRTC/ Interview Transcript)

“In the resource room, we teach in groups. I teach groups collectively. However, if I find that one of the students in the same group requires additional attention, I work with him or her individually. So, I deal with students both in groups and individually.”

(RRTB/ Interview Transcript)

In the resource room, RRTs follow the same daily routine. They start their classes by greeting students and asking them about their conditions or about their regular classroom class. Then they proceed to the teaching corners, including the attendance and absence corner, where they check attendance and write their names on the board. Then they move to the class rule corner, where teachers highlight an issue concerning students' behaviour or their daily lives, such as mutual respect or how to protect themselves from COVID-19. Following the class rule, teachers discuss the days of the week, the date of the day, and the four seasons in the time and place corner. After introducing the class elements, they begin their presentations, using various teaching strategies such as play, drama, storytelling, concrete, pictorial, Concrete-Pictorial-Abstract (CPA) strategy, dialogue and discussion, and so on. They also use a variety of teaching tools during the presentation, depending on the class objective, including the whiteboard, cards, pictures, educational toys, computers, and so on. They conduct an evaluation at the end of the class using a worksheet related to the class objective. Then, in the daily follow-up record, they record each student's performance. Below are the responses from informants:

“I start my class by asking students about their conditions, Then I present the class elements including the teaching corners. Then, I introduce the class objective using different teaching methods using cards, pictures, or drawings. My favourite teaching methods are concrete, pictorial, abstract - CPA, repetition as well as drama. In the end, I evaluate students using a worksheet.”

(RRTA/ Interview Transcript)

"We are required to follow the same procedure every class whether it is Arabic or Math. I start with the class elements including the teaching corners. Then I introduce the class objective using the example on the whiteboard or telling a story or playing a game. While teaching, I use colourful cards, pictures, rings, straws, cons, the computer, LCD, and so on. I usually use a worksheet or a textbook exercise to evaluate students' performances."

(RRTB/ Interview Transcript)

"Every class, I follow the same routine including welcoming students, checking the absence and attendance, then I move to the class law corner where I focus on how to protect ourselves from Corona virus. Then, I asked students about the date of today, the days of the week, and the four seasons. I present the class objective using storytelling, drama, role play, play, and repetition. I usually end my class by performing evaluation using a worksheet."

(RRTC/ Interview Transcript)

In addition to the interviews, the researcher conducted resource room observations. It was observed that the RRTs used different teaching aids that met students' needs and achieve the class objective. They employed teaching corners including time and place corner, the class rule corner, the four seasons corner, and the Mathematics and Arabic language corners. They created instructional tools for each teaching area in the resource room.

"RRTA welcomed the students and inquired about their health. She then went to the attendance area, where each kid wrote their name on a hanging geometric figure made of felt."

"RRTB conducted an amusement break before starting her talk. This was a game. She told the students to leap ten times while standing on their left leg. The students leapt as she instructed and then counted to ten."

"RRTC used storytelling, playing, and CPA to introduce the concept of the "Subsequent Number" within 99 employing hand-made teaching aids."

"RRTD's room contained several instructional aids. In the time and place corner, there were teaching tools that represented the four seasons, the days of the week, and the months of the year. Three coloured wheels were present; one had the twelve months of the year, another the seasons, and the third the days of the week."

Assessment

RRTs use assessment portfolios in Arabic and Mathematics to select RRSs and identify their academic problems. These assessment portfolios have been proposed by the Ministry of Education to help resource teachers detect the needs of each student in these two subjects. These assessment portfolios measure the basic skills such as reading, writing, letters in Arabic and numbers, addition and subtraction, less/more concepts, and preceding/ subsequent concepts in Mathematics. Based on the results of these portfolios, RRTs design the IEP for each student.

"The assessment portfolios are used to identify student's weaknesses and strengths in the Arabic language, Mathematics, and capacities."

(RRTA/ Interview Transcript)

"I can determine each student's weaknesses based on the results of applying the assessment portfolios in Arabic and Mathematics. In Arabic, the focus is on reading and writing, while in Mathematics the focus is on basic skills such as addition and subtraction."

(RRTB/ Interview Transcript)

The data gathered from the RRTs also indicated that teachers employ formative assessment to evaluate the academic performance of each student with special needs. Formative assessment includes observation, field notes, worksheets, and follow-up records. The following statements highlight the related assessment used in the resource rooms:

"During class, I write notes on each student's progress in a notebook. I also use a worksheet to assess students' understanding and check that the goal is achieved. At the end of the class, I use a daily follow-up form to evaluate each student's performance."

(RRTD/ Interview Transcript)

"At the end of each session, I employ worksheets, as well as evaluation questions and observation. Of course, I keep a daily follow-up record for each student, in which I write her current condition and how far she has progressed toward her objective."

(RRTC/ Interview Transcript)

The resource room observation involved formative and summative assessments. In other words, throughout presentations, participants evaluated students orally or in writing to monitor students' development and modify their instructions. Participants encouraged students to do assignments in their textbooks or on the whiteboard. Additionally, they orally asked students about the class objective. All of the participants employed worksheets as part of the class's final evaluation. Each student finished their own worksheet. Then the participants reviewed the students' responses and provide them with the appropriate ones.

"On the whiteboard, RRTA scribbled questions about vertical and horizontal subtraction. She then requested one response from each student. They each carried out their tasks alone. When they were done, she allowed each student to correct the other."

"RRTB evaluated the students' learning by asking oral questions and having students complete textbook exercises that corresponded to the lesson's objective."

"RRTD used a tidy worksheet with three simple activities about the alphabet (أبجدي). The instructions were straightforward."

Role of Resource Room Teachers in the Inclusive Classroom

From the data analysed, three themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews and observations to explain the role of RRTs in the inclusive classroom, namely: (a) Academic Assistance, (b) Psychological Support, and (c) Extra-curricular Activities. Table 3 shows the open coding and axial coding process for the themes.

Table 3

Open Coding and Axial Coding for Research Objective 2

Open Coding	Axial Coding		
	Theme 1 Academic Assistance	Theme 2 Psychological Support	Theme 3 Extra-curricular Activities
Understand instruction			
Textbook/ Worksheet			
Regular visit	Understand instruction	Regular visits	Classroom activities
Student engagement	Textbook/ Worksheet	Student engagement	School activities
Classroom activities			
School activities			

Academic Assistance

“I assist them to understand worksheets and textbook exercises. I also collect feedback from their normal teacher on their academic performance and communicate with her about methods to assist them to improve.”

(RRTD/ Interview Transcript)

“I also take feedback on their academic achievement from the regular teacher and talk with her about ways to help them get better.”

“I choose activities from the standard class textbook that serve the same purpose and assign them to the students to complete.”

(RRTC/ Interview Transcript)

The abovementioned statements highlight that RRTs assist RRSs academically in the inclusive classroom. They helped RRSs understand general teachers’ instructions. They also assist RRSs to do worksheets and textbook activities that they cannot do on their own. In addition, they receive feedback on RRSs’ performance from the regular teachers and discuss with them ways to help students improve their performance. However, RRTs are not satisfied with the regular teacher’s cooperation and performance since there is no implementation of collaborative practice between them and the classroom teachers. According to RRTs, regular teachers do not participate in creating or implementing the IEPs. They only see and sign them at the beginning of the school year. Moreover, in their instruction, regular teachers do not consider RRSs’ needs outlined in the IEPs. RRTs believe there is a gap between what is taught in the resource room and what is taught in the regular classroom. Therefore, regular teachers need training courses on the implementation of inclusive education and how to deal with RRSs. Below are statements from informants:

“I believe regular teachers must gain a better understanding of students with special educational needs. Resource room students will develop academically and socially if regular teachers cooperate with resource room teachers.”

(RRTA/ Interview Transcript)

“They must understand the nature of the resource room teacher's job as well as how to interact with resource room students in regular classes. They must be able to construct remedial plans for the struggling student.”

(RRTC/ Interview Transcript)

“Of course, they require training courses in order to properly deal with students with special needs. They must acquire new, non-traditional strategies for assisting students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom.”

(RRTD/ Interview Transcript)

In the general classroom observation, the participants sat in the front or the back of the classroom and observed the presentation made by the regular teacher. They did not take part in teaching or instruction. They simply saw how the regular instructor interacted with the pupils in the general classroom. They only clarify regular teachers' instruction as well as help RRSs complete the worksheet or the textbook tasks.

“RRTA seemed upset. She only offered assistance to RRS at the end of the lesson. She did her best to ensure that the students understood regular teacher's instruction.”

“RRTB helped RRS understand regular classroom teacher's instruction and assist them complete textbook tasks.”

“RRTC moved around to clarify regular's teacher instruction and help RRSs complete the worksheets.”

Psychological Support

In the inclusive classroom, RRTs support RRSs psychologically. They visit classrooms regularly according to a predetermined schedule. They follow up on each group once a week.

“Every day, I attend a class and observe resource room students in the regular classroom, where I provide them with academic and psychological support. My presence is important as it encourages resource room students to be positive and take part in classroom activities, as well as urges the regular class teacher to pay attention to them. Moreover, they become self-assured and more confident.”

(RRTA/ Interview Transcript)

Moreover, RRTs observe RRSs' interactions with general teachers as well as their involvement in classroom activities. They visit the general classroom and encourage RRSs to participate in inclusive classroom activities. RRSs strive to show their RRTs that they are capable by participating in regular classroom activities. They also want to show RRTs that they are happy with their visits.

“When they first see us in class, they grow more confident. They have the impression that the resource room teacher is concerned about them. As a result, the student becomes interested in engaging, even if he does not often do so in class, and he strives to show me that he is interacting. He makes an effort to show that he is working.”

(RRTB/ Interview Transcript)

In the general classroom observations, the researcher observed that the participant's psychological impact on RRSs outweighed their academic impact. There was warm, intimate, and significant contact between the RRTs and their pupils. The majority of participants kept eye contact with the RRSs throughout the lesson, encouraging them to participate at their desks or on the board. These connections seem to encourage the kind of confidence and social skills that the participants mentioned in the interviews.

Extra-curricular Activities

On the other hand, RRTs encourage RRS to participate in extracurricular activities performed by their classmates or at the school level. For example, they ask mainstream teachers to engage RRSs with their peers on the morning school radio. This is done to bridge the gap between the RRSs and their peers. Additionally, RRTs motivate RRSs to take part in school activities, such as scouting and competitions. Below are the responses from all the RRTs:

“I help students participate in all school activities, such as singing patriotic songs on the school radio. They also take part in Mother's Day celebrations. I help them design cards for their mothers.”

(RRTA/ Interview Transcript)

I encourage the resource students to join the school radio station. For example, they might participate in a song, chant, or other activities related to national or religious occasions. Also, we sometimes organise leisure activities in the yard for students in conjunction with the counsellor.”

(RRTB/ Interview Transcript)

“If the school has a celebration, such as an open day, the resource room students join in the dancing and singing as one of their extracurricular activities.”

(RRTC/ Interview Transcript)

“In the schoolyard, I encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities such as talking on the school radio show and acting in plays. I let them do silent plays with no words; it's a great way for them to express themselves.”

(RRTD/ Interview Transcript)

To conclude, results indicated that RRTs have a significant impact on RRSs whether they are in a resource room or an inclusive classroom. In the resource room, RRTs provide RRSs with academic assistance based on students' needs included in their IEPs. RRTs form homogenous groups and prepare educational materials that meet RRSs' needs and achieve the objectives for each learner. They support RRSs either in groups or individually according to their academic level. In the inclusive classroom, RRTs assist RRSs academically, and psychologically as well as engage them in extracurricular activities. They visit general classrooms regularly, help RRSs understand general teachers' instruction, and encourage them to involve in both academic and non-academic activities that occur in the classroom or at the school level. However, all the participants were unsatisfied with the regular teachers' cooperation. They did not take part in the general classroom teaching or assessment procedures. There was minimal cooperation between RRTs and regular teachers.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the roles of RRTs in resource rooms and inclusive classrooms. The analysis results revealed that the role of RRTs in the resource room was evident in the two main themes: (a) Teaching and Learning; (b) Assessment. While the role of RRTs in inclusive classrooms was evident in three main themes: (a) Academic Assistance; (b) Psychological Support; and (c) Extracurricular Activities.

Resource Room

In the resource room, RRT plays an essential role as a special education teacher in providing academic support to SEN students. After selecting RRSs, they prepare an IEP for each student. The IEP includes the objectives to be achieved for each RRS. This is consistent with Gee and Gonsier-Gerdin (2018) indicating that the special education teachers' roles include designing appropriate IEP; adapting instruction and modifying the curriculum to meet students' cognitive abilities. In a study conducted by Al-Zoubi & Rahman (2016), it was found that resource room instructor is the cornerstone of the preparation and implementation of the IEP. However, Tams (2019) found that Palestinian RRTs faced difficulties in designing and implementing the IEPs. In the resource room, RRTs form homogeneous groups based on students' academic levels and needs. They also create educational materials that meet the class objectives. Past studies found that, in the resource room, RRTs teach students in small groups and provide them with academic support that meets their needs and aligns with the objectives embedded into the learner's IEP (Gilmour, 2018; Tosun & Öztürk, 2020). In a study conducted by Al Shoura (2015) on learning disabilities students in Jordanian public schools, it was found that RRTs provide both remedial and academic services and play a critical role in identifying students' challenges by conducting separate assessments. Likewise, Bottge et al. (2018) indicated that RRTs use a specialised syllabus that meets students' needs and helps them achieve better academic results using a general syllabus.

Findings also indicated that RRTs support resource room students in Arabic language and Mathematics in groups or individually. In Jordan, RRTs provided students with appropriate educational services that meet their needs in major subjects such as Mathematics and Arabic language which is consistent with the RRTs' role in Palestine (Melhem & Isa, 2013). Likewise, Al-Mamari (2017) indicated that RRTs provide individual or group instructions for SWLD who might face academic problems in one or more subjects or are unable to learn basic skills, such as writing, reading, and spelling.

Assessment is the second theme of RRTs' roles in the resource room reported in this present study. Results revealed that RRTs use the assessment portfolios in Arabic and Mathematics to identify the weaknesses and strengths of each student referred to the resource room. In addition, RRTs evaluate RRSs' performance using observation, field notes, worksheets, and follow-up records. This is supported by a study done by Akay et al. (2014) whereby RRTs use different assessment techniques, such as observation, worksheets, and follow-up records to evaluate students' performance. The RRT is also responsible for making programmes, developing consultancies, defining suitable individualised purposes, observing learners' progress periodically, in addition to evaluating students' results. In a study conducted by Al Shoura and Ahmad (2014), it was found that RRTs use diagnostic tools to evaluate students' educational levels, as well as to identify their strengths and weaknesses to design an IEP for each student. However, Abu-Heran (2014) found that assessment tools used by Palestinian RRTs to identify students with SEN are inappropriate. Similarly, Al-Mamari (2017) found that the assessment tests used in Omani resource rooms are inappropriate and may lead to a poor classification of students with academic problems. Therefore, more studies need to be conducted to further explore the problems faced by RRTs in managing and leading students' assessment plans.

Inclusive Classroom

In the inclusive classroom, RRTs support RRSs academically and psychologically. They clarify the general teacher's instruction to them. They assist RRSs to do worksheets and textbook activities. In addition, they make regular visits to RRSs and encourage them to participate in academic and extracurricular activities. In inclusive classrooms, RRTs also urge general teachers to promote RRSs' academic participation.

The findings of the current study are in line with past studies on similar topics. According to Ruppar et al. (2017), special educator advocates the academic, behavioural, and social needs of their learners. They collaborate with other colleagues to help learners with special needs to be more independent, cooperative with their peers, and highly effective individuals in the school and community. RRTs can help students in the inclusive classroom to improve their educational achievement in an inclusive setting by using differentiated instruction, and effective communication (Afolabi, 2018). In content learning where students with special needs face difficulties with the curriculum, a special educator classifies objects according to their importance and helps students to achieve the most important goal. Special educators should develop a social environment that allows children with disabilities to stay in the inclusive classroom for extended periods of time and learn alongside their peers (Feldman et. al., 2016; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017).

RRTs support learners with disabilities socially and academically. In a mainstream school setting, they enhance peer interaction among SEN students. This is supported by Sigstad (2018) whereby special educators were devoted to following school curricula and were in charge of following up with children in special education groups. According to Mu et al. (2017), special educators are essential in helping students with disabilities by fostering their well-being and enhancing their resilience in challenging conditions. However, in the current study, there was no implementation of collaborative practice between them and the classroom teachers. A recent study conducted by Xie et al. (2021) indicated that RRTs struggled while performing different roles. They felt marginalised and were controlled by a categorical view of helping learners with special educational needs.

Therefore, this study is significant since it sheds light on the roles of Palestinian RRTs in different learning settings. It illuminates decision-makers to improve the services provided to SEN students in Palestinian primary schools' inclusive education programme. This improved learners' confidence and self-efficacy, as well as increased their participation in the general classroom and developed their academic achievement (Al Mamari, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study provides empirical insights into key concerns surrounding the roles of Palestinian RRTs in supporting students with special educational needs in the resource room and the inclusive classroom. RRTs are the first to identify students with special educational needs by using the assessment portfolios in Arabic and Mathematics. In the resource room, they provide students with academic and assessment services. While in the inclusive classroom, they support students academically and psychologically. They also assist RRSs to involve in school activities. Identifying the roles of RRTs is critical since it shed light on the services provided to students with special educational needs, as well as the tasks and responsibilities of RRTs. Findings contribute to the policymakers especially the Ministry of Education to enhance the existing special education system in Palestine. One of the major strengths of this study lies in its uniqueness in filling an existing gap in the literature on RRTs.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Hamour, B., & Al-Hmouz, H. (2014). Special education in Jordan. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 29*(1), 105-115.
- Abu-Heran, N., Abukhayran, A., Domingo, J. Y., & Pérez-García, M. P. (2014). Perceptions and expectations of Palestinian teachers towards inclusive education in Bethlehem District. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology, 12*(2), 461-486.
- Afolabi, D. (2018). *Elementary teachers' perspectives of the support facilitation instructional model*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Walden University.
- Akay, E., Uzuner, Y., & Girgin, Ü. (2014). The problems and solution efforts of the resource room application designed for the mainstreamed primary school aged hearing impaired students. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Education, 2*(2), 42-66.
- Al Mamari, K. H. (2017). *Resource rooms as one of the alternatives in supporting children with learning difficulties in first cycle in the basic education in the Sultanate of Oman*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Southampton.
- Al Shoura, H. M. S. (2015). Learning disabilities programs at Jordanian public schools: critical look at reality and future aspirations. *Journal of the International Association of Special Education, 16*(1), 51-57.
- Al Shoura, H. M. S., & Ahmad, A. C. (2014). Review of special education programs in Jordan: Current practices, challenges, and prospects. *Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation, 15*(3-4), 24-42.
- Alahmadi, N. A., & El Keshky, M. E. S. (2019). Assessing primary school teachers' knowledge of specific learning disabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology, 9*(1), 9-22.
- Al-Zoubi, S. M., & Rahman, M. S. B. A. (2016). Mainstreaming in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: obstacles facing learning disabilities resource room. *Journal of Studies in Education, 6*(1), 37-55.
- Benedict, A. E., Brownell, M. T., Park, Y., Bettini, E. A., & Lauterbach, A. A. (2014). Taking charge of your professional learning: tips for cultivating special educator expertise. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 46*(6), 147-157.
- Bottge, B. A., Cohen, A. S., & Choi, H. J. (2018). Comparisons of mathematics intervention effects in resource and inclusive classrooms. *Exceptional Children, 84*(2), 197-212.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.
- Brownell, M. T., Lauterbach, A. A., Dingle, M. P., Boardman, A. G., Urbach, J. E., Leko, M. M., Benedict, A. E., & Park, Y. (2014). Individual and contextual factors influencing special education teacher learning in literacy learning cohorts. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 37*(1), 31- 44.

- Dev, P., & Dev, P. C. (2015). Teacher perspectives on suitable learning environments for students with disabilities: what have we learned from inclusive, resource, and self-contained classrooms? *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences: Annual Review*, 9(1), 53-64. <https://doi:10.18848/1833-1882/CGP/v09/53554>.
- Dukes, C., Darling, S. M., & Doan, K. (2014). Selection pressures on special education teacher preparation: issues shaping our future. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 37(1), 9-20.
- Farrokh, P. (2017). Social-personalized versus computer-personalized methods to teaching english learners' reading, comprehension ability. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*, 7(3), 287-315.
- Feldman, R., Carter, E. W., Asmus, J., & Brock, M. E. (2016). Presence, proximity, and peer interactions of adolescents with severe disabilities in general education classrooms. *Exceptional Children*, 82(2), 192-208.
- Gee, K., & Gonsier-Gerdin, J. (2018). The first year as teachers assigned to elementary and middle-school special education classrooms. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 43(2), 94-110.
- Gilmour, A. F. (2018). Has inclusion gone too far? Weighing its effects on students with disabilities, their peers, and teachers. *Education Next*, 18(4), 8-16.
- Kart, M. (2017). *Teacher perceptions of resource room practices for students with visual impairments*. Unpublished Master Thesis, The Ohio State University.
- Kizir, M. (2020). A determination of opinions and experiences of students with special needs regarding resource rooms in Turkey. *European Journal of Special Education Research*, 6(3), 10-33.
- Lewis, C. J. (2019). Vygotsky and moral education: A response to and expansion of Tappan. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51(1), 41-50.
- Mackey, M. (2014). Inclusive education in the United States: middle school general education teachers' approaches to inclusion. *International Journal of Instruction*, 7(2), 5-20.
- Malik, S. A. (2017). Revisiting and re-representing scaffolding: the two gradient model. *Cogent Education*, 4(1), 1331533. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1331533>
- McLeod, S. (2018). *The zone of proximal development and scaffolding*. <http://www.simplypsychology.org>
- Melhem, T., & Isa, Z. M. (2013). Special education in Jordan: reality and expectations. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 3(7), 414-422.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation (4th ed.)*. Jossey-Bass.

- Mu, G. M., Hu, Y., & Wang, Y. (2017). Building resilience of students with disabilities in China: the role of inclusive education teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 125-134.
- Murry, F., & Alqahtani, R. M. A. (2015). Teaching special education law in Saudi Arabia: improving pre-service teacher education and services to students with disabilities. *World Journal of Education*, 5(6), 57-64.
- Mwaimba, A. W. (2014). *Teacher factors influencing implementation of inclusive education in public primary schools in Nyangala division, Taita Taveta county, Kenya*. Unpublished Master Research Report, University of Nairobi.
- Özaydin, L., Kayhan, N., Toker, M., & Karahan, S. (2017). Resource room implementation in a secondary school and on-the-job training of teachers. *International Journal of Psycho-Educational Sciences*, 6(2), 111-136.
- Qawasmi, D. W. (2016). *The reality of academic difficulties in resource rooms and future guidance in Northern provinces schools in Palestine from the administrators and teachers' perspectives*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Al-Quds.
- Ruppar, A. L., Roberts, C. A., & Olson, A. J. (2017). Perceptions about expert teaching for students with severe disabilities among teachers identified as experts. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 42(2), 121-135.
- Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, M. A. (2017). Making inclusion work with co-teaching. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 49(4), 284-293.
- Shaw, A. (May 2019). A snapshot into the role of the special educator in support of student learning: coordinators, teachers and visionaries. *EP Magazine*, 42-45.
- Sigstad, H. M. H. (2018). The role of special education teachers in facilitating peer relationships among students with mild intellectual disabilities in lower secondary school. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 22(4), 378-393.
- Smit, J., van Eerde, H. A. A., & Bakker, A. (2013). A conceptualisation of whole-class scaffolding. *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(5), 817-834.
- Suleymanov, F. (2014). *Academic achievements of students with special needs in inclusive education*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Oslo.
- Tams, M. Y. (2019). *The Effectiveness of the "Individual Educational Program" on the Learning and Social Adjustment of students with learning disabilities*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Birzeit.
- Tosun, C., & Öztürk, S. (2020). Science teachers and pre-service science teachers' science teaching competence belief scores in the resource room in terms of certain variables. *Teachers and Teaching*, 26(5-6), 365-394.
- Urbach, J., Moore, B. A., Klingner, J. K., Galman, S., Haager, D., Brownell, M. T., & Dingle, M. (2015). "That's My Job" Comparing the Beliefs of More and Less Accomplished

Special Educators Related to Their Roles and Responsibilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 38(4), 323-336.

Urbach, J., Moore, B. A., Klingner, J. K., Galman, S., Haager, D. Brownell, M. T. (2015). "That's my job:" Comparing the beliefs of more and less accomplished special educators related to their roles and responsibilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*. 38(4), 323-336.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Xie, Z., Deng, M., & Zhu, Z. (2021). From regular education teachers to special educators: the role transformation of resource room teachers in Chinese inclusive education schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-18.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research: design and methods (6th ed.)*. Sage.