



## EFFECT OF FIELD TRAINING ON THE ATTITUDE OF STUDENTS TOWARDS PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION CENTERS

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### ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the effect of field training on undergrad students' attitude towards people with disabilities. This study took place in Amman, Jordan, and consisted of six centers for children with disabilities in Amman, Jordan. This study used a quasi-experimental design. Two groups of students completed a survey. Data from the Attitude toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) were collected on 79 Participants at the beginning and at the end of four months of training. The experimental group received intensive training in special education while the control group did not. Findings revealed that there were significant difference between experimental group and control group regarding their attitude to children with disability; but, there were no significant difference between gender and previous experience and their attitude to people with disability. Based on the findings, it is recommended that undergrad students need to be well prepared to work with children and youth with disabilities to reduce negative attitudes. Educators still need to work on including all children in public schools. This study recommends the method of integrating both children of disabilities and without disabilities in the same classroom or same environments for optimal results. Teaching children with different types of disabilities in the same environment of children without disabilities may aid in changing the negative attitudes given to the children with disabilities. This in turn, gives children with disabilities confidence to communicate, interact, and integrate into society.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study investigated the influence of field training of undergrad students and their attitude toward people with disabilities. Also, this study provided methods and strategies that help undergrad students to develop a likeness for the children and youth with disabilities and reduce negative attitudes.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Students with disabilities are a vital part of our society. As human beings too they have the right to learn and engage as citizens with the ability to be effectively productive within their communities. Attitudes towards people with disabilities come from different sources, such as culture, values, lifestyle, political environment, age and contact with people with disabilities (Nagata, 2007). There is no doubt that improper treatment by more able people towards individuals with disabilities causes complexes and makes them adverse to accepting any help. Historically, people treated individuals with disabilities with fear and other negative emotions common in many societies, under the belief that evil spirits dominated them. A study done by Nagata (2007) found that people living in rural areas in Jordan have a negative attitude toward people with disabilities, and many families deliberately hide the individual

with disabilities and prevent him/her from going out to the public and interviewing guests, especially women. Community culture plays an important role in understanding attitudes, perceptions and perspectives towards children with disabilities (Choi & Ostendorf, 2015).

Teachers need to earn experience and knowledge to work with children with disabilities in order to improve their living as well as academic skills. Jung (2007) revealed that teachers with negative self-esteem are more likely to refer students to special education service centers instead of sending them to effective teachers. As a result, field experience is important to raise self-confidence awareness, knowledge and professional skills to such practicum students. The concerns about students with disabilities have gradually improved over time. Initially, supplemental support was only available to students with cognitive disabilities, but recently the model of inclusive education has been expanded and now services are provided even to those with physical, emotional, and social needs.

Studies indicate that the lack of appropriate social skills for many individuals with disabilities prevent them from developing motivation and self-efficacy. To avoid marginalization for individuals with disabilities, and to provide them an inclusive environment, it is important to develop their feelings, confidence, friendships, community involvement, and independent living (Van Belois & Mitchell, 2009). Social exclusion, bullying, lack of resource rooms' capacity, and lack of equipment are always a concern of any parent, and steps to mitigate these negative attitudes include trained teachers and plentiful resource rooms. Teachers need to be more knowledgeable about inclusion and its effects in improving and supporting children with disabilities. Based on all previous challenges educational leaders should focus on developing positive attitudes toward children with disabilities. Bataineh (2009) for instance, pointed out that providing teachers with training in social skills interventions will be helpful to encourage them to work with students with disabilities. Based on the attitude of people towards individuals with disabilities in Jordan, opportunities in education and access to essential services are limited. Such limited services are due to the lack of expertise and limited financial resources. This results in individuals with disabilities remaining unqualified for most jobs, and thus become unemployed and dependent.

Attitude toward people with disabilities needs greater effort from all communities. Separating people with disabilities from the communities, and not including them in schools gives a negative outcome towards them. Instead, educators and leaders should work hard on including them in schools and communities. Children with disabilities are a part of the society, communicating and interacting with them more frequently, will give a better outcome for them. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of 4 months of practicing academic skills activities on the attitudes of practicum students who work on teaching students and young people with disabilities. Field training programs are required for trainees to develop and practice leadership skills and teamwork. It gives an opportunity to the trainees to apply what they learn theoretically on the ground. During field training, trainees also need to spend their last semester special education centers. The University of Jordan is located in Amman and so trainees are sent to special education centers located in Amman. A variety of special education centers function in Amman for different disabilities. These centers provide services for the children and youth with disabilities as well as their families. A major role is played by these Special education centers in rehabilitating and rejuvenating these youth and children to come in the mainstream of the society.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Attitudes toward people with disabilities are still negative although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1975, 1990, 2004) has mandated provisions for free and appropriate public education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Huskin, Reiser-Robbins, & Kwon, 2018). Society's attitude toward people with disabilities affect them either positively or negatively (Akyurek, Kars, & Bumin, 2018). When other sections of society accept, integrate and interact with people of disability, they may feel that they are a part of society. On the other hand, when society's attitude is inappropriate, people with disabilities may not even get their rights in acquiring health

services or even general services with good quality (Akyurek et al., 2018; Byron & Dieppe, 2000; Kritsotakis et al., 2017).

In many places, people with disabilities are still suffering from negligence, mockery and abuse. In addition to this, some society's do not allow them to marry or obtain their right to education because this may cause a weakening to society (Saad & Borowska-Beszta, 2019). Advocators are working on changing people's attitudes by providing teachers as well as pre-service teachers with theoretical and practical activities to gain the knowledge and experience they need. Many studies documented the negative attitude of teachers toward people with disabilities (Lobosco & Newman, 1992; Phillips, Allred, Brulle, & Shank, 1990; Pruett, Lee, Chan, Wang, & Lane, 2008). The shaping of negative attitudes toward students with disabilities results from a lack of training, and awareness of disabilities (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 1995; Sze, 2009). Kozleski, Mainzer, and Deshler (2000) reported that "four out of every ten entering special educators have left before their fifth year" (p. 5). The reason that teachers leave schools is due to the lack of preparation in special education. Moreover, previous research has indicated that pre-service teachers often lack knowledge and experience to meet the needs of future teachers in serving students with disabilities (Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon, 2005).

One necessary component of teacher preparation programs is the field-based experience which allows future teachers to practice what they have learned in their academic coursework (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017). Most academic courses provide practicum students with practical and theoretical activities that prepare them to deal with what they're likely to face in the classroom. The activities given to the practicum students evolve the students' skills that support them in teaching, management, and prepare them fundamentally before becoming teachers. Slininger, Sherrill, and Jankowski (2000) exposed that people who interact with others of disabilities tend to hold favorable attitude about individuals of disabilities than those who do not make contact with them. Communication and contact with individuals with disabilities reduces individual biases and stereotypical attitudes, which holds a more positive attitude toward them (Santiago, Lee, & Roper, 2016).

The use of field experiences is considered to be an important mechanism for providing practicum students with opportunities to apply knowledge in practical teaching situations. Field experiences that were carefully designed to facilitate practicum students, help implement newly learned skills with efficiency, perceptions of competence, planning abilities, knowledge, and classroom performance (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Murphy, 2012). Field experience opens the opportunities for practicum students to apply theoretical classes on the ground, get experience from expertise, and work with diverse students (Yu & Hunt, 2016). Field experience is considered the most important learning experience for future teachers through preparing them for complexity and diversity of the classroom (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017).

The first institution for students with disabilities in Jordan was started at the end of the 1960's to provide services to the deaf, blind, and cognitively impaired (Derderian, 2015). In 1964, the Episcopal Church in the Middle East established institutions for the deaf. After four years, a comprehensive institution was established by the Swedish Organization to provide services for people with intellectual disabilities (Hadidi, 1998). Currently, Jordan provides services for students with disabilities under the principle that everyone has a right to a free and public education.

### 2.1. Research Questions

This study aimed to answer three research questions:

- 1) Are there differences in attitudes of practicum students towards disabled persons due to the field training variable?
- 2) Are there differences in attitudes toward the individual with disabilities based on gender variable?
- 3) Are there differences in attitudes of practicum students towards disabled people due to the interaction between the field training variable and the variable of previous experience with disabled people?

### 3. METHODS

This study used a quasi-experimental design. There were both an experiment and control groups in this study's quasi-experimental design. The experimental group received intensive training in special education while the control group did not. The study administered a pre-test and post-test design by giving treatment for the experimental group, intensive training in special education for practicum students whom their major field in special education. The independent variable in this study was the field experience and the dependent variables were Practicum student's attitude, gender, and previous experience with disabled people.

The survey contained 20 questions for the trainers to examine their attitudes toward children with disabilities. Participants were asked to fill the same survey two times, the first time before the training and the second time after the fourth month of the training. For the experimental group, two hours every week of training were conducted. The training assisted Practicum students with practice activities, creative activities, instructional activities, planning for the final lesson, and providing feedback. The training also focused on practicum student interactions, initiative, independence, and responsibility. After every training trainers have to apply what they learned at the Special education centers for disabilities. Trainers worked 5 hours a day with students with disabilities. Practicum students were mentored appropriately and on time. Eighteen visits were conducted by the supervisor to the six centers during the four months period. On every visit, the supervisor spent four hours at every center, completing 72 hours in all. After 400 hours of training during the 16 weeks, the second survey was conducted to see if there were changes in trainers' attitudes to students with disabilities.

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 79 participants from the Educational Science Department. The experimental participants in the study were 43 practicum students enrolled in special education program served as the experimental group. This sample included 32 female (74%) and 11 male (26%). The Control group had 39 undergrad students from the special education field studying in the last semester before field training was served to them. This group included 28 female (72%) and 11 male (28%) participants. The 43 participants in the experimental group were distributed on teachers who dealt with four types of disabilities: Hearing, Autism spectrum disorders (ASD), intellectual, and learning disability. Fourteen practicum students worked with children with ASD, 5 worked with students with hearing disability, 13 worked with students with learning disabilities, and 11 worked with intellectual disability.

#### 3.2. Procedure

Participants were provided with the consent form and instructions on how to complete the survey questionnaire. The data was collected two times from both the experimental group and the control group using the same questionnaires during the same semester. A total of 79 Participants completed the first survey at the beginning of the semester and the same samples completed the second survey after four months of training.

#### 3.3. Instrument

The Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale (ATDP) developed by [Yuker, Block, and Young \(1970\)](#) was used to measure the participants' attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. According to [Nabors \(2012\)](#) the instrument is a modified version of a questionnaire originally constructed by [Yuker et al. \(1970\)](#). In the current study, the participants' demographic information was modified. The survey presented items using a six-point Likert scale where a +3 meant I agree very much, +2 meant I agree pretty much, +1 meant I agree a little, -3 meant I disagree very much, -2 meant I disagree pretty much and -1 I disagree a little. In the current study, the authors translated the ATDP to participants' mother language because most of them had limited access to the English language.

#### 4. RESULT

Table 1 shows that there are differences between the arithmetic mean of the trainees' attitudes towards the disabilities between the experimental groups and the control in the pre and post-test. It is noted that the arithmetic mean of the two groups has increased in total from 21.05 to 30.65 but the trainers who were enrolled in intensive training in the special education field were higher toward persons with disabilities than the control group which has very small change, from 24.38 to 26.69.

**Table-1.** Means and standard deviations of students' attitudes toward the disabled regarding gender and treatment.

Group	Variables		Pre			Post	
			Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	Gender	male	11	17.82	12.50	32.45	7.89
		female	32	22.16	9.17	30.03	10.07
	Previous experience with disabled persons	yes	30	20.53	11.54	30.63	9.22
		no	13	22.23	6.04	30.69	10.59
		total	43	21.05	10.15	30.65	9.53
Control	Gender	male	10	23.70	12.87	23.40	9.79
		female	29	24.62	11.37	27.83	15.56
	Previous experience with disabled persons	yes	28	24.21	13.31	27.54	16.24
		no	11	24.82	5.78	24.55	7.70
		total	39	24.38	11.61	26.69	14.32
Total	Gender	male	21	20.62	12.72	28.14	9.78
		female	61	23.33	10.27	28.98	12.91
	Previous experience with disabled persons	yes	58	22.31	12.45	29.14	13.07
		no	24	23.42	5.94	27.88	9.70
		total	82	22.63	10.93	28.77	12.13

To determine whether these differences were statistically significant, the two way ANCOVA analysis was performed. Table 2 presents results of the Two Way ANCOVA Analysis of the differences between the experimental and control groups in the attitudes towards the disabled according to the variable of practical training and the interaction between practical training and gender, practical training and previous experience with the disabled.

**Table-2.** Results of the Two Way ANCOVA Analysis of the differences between the experimental and control groups.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total1	882.82	1	882.82	6.35	0.014
Group	769.98	1	769.98	5.54	0.021
Gender	1.48	1	1.48	0.01	0.918
Treatment	39.13	1	39.13	0.28	0.597
Group * Gender	266.14	1	266.14	1.91	0.171
Group * Treatment	71.01	1	71.01	0.51	0.477
Error	10425.78	75	139.01		
Corrected Total	11922.60	81			

Regarding the first question Table 2 shows statistically significant differences between the two experimental groups and the control group. The value of F (5.54) was a statistical function at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). These differences were in favor of the experimental group, as shown by the modified arithmetic averages in Table 3. The modified mean of the experimental group was 32.20, while the weighted mean of the control group was 24.

**Table-3.** The modified mean of the experimental group and the control group.

Group	Mean	Std. Error
Experimental	32.20	2.35
Control	24.25	2.41

Regarding second question [Table 2](#) shows that there is no statistically significant difference due to the interaction between the group variable (practical training) and the gender variable, where the value is (5.54), which is not statistically significant at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), indicating that the effect Practical training in improving trends does not vary by gender. Regarding third question [Table 2](#) shows that there are no statistically significant differences due to the interaction between the variable of the group (practical training) and the variable of the previous experience with the disabled, where the value of (5.54) is not statistically significant at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) The impact of hands-on training in improving attitudes is also not affected by previous treatment of the disabled.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study revealed that there was a significant difference between the experimental group and control group regarding their attitude to children with disabilities; but, there was no significant difference between gender and previous experience and their attitude to people with disabilities. Training prolonged for 4 months for 25 hours of training per week (400 hours per semester). The field experience provided to the students amounted to 12 credit hours (a week) and no student was allowed to take any other classes within the university. This allowed the practicum student to focus on the fieldwork. The student begins the field experience after completing theoretical tasks that contained classes that focused on a variety of mental and physical disabilities. The instructors were all Ph.D. holders who had specialized in special education; these instructors organized and planned meetings with various schools and disability centers to provide the appropriate training needed for the practicum students.

Instructors were required to follow and observe as well as evaluate the practicum students during their training on a scale of 3 visits per student and 2 hours per week outside the fieldwork so that instructors may provide feedback to the students. The instructors trained students to organize files that contained information such as a case study, Behavior Intervention plans, as well as formal and informal evaluation studies.

Case study methods are valuable for intensive studies and are also an important form of research for all fields. Practicum students get a very detailed and in-depth study of children with disabilities. Each Practicum student worked individually with his/her child in and out the center, they met families of children with disabilities in order to get in-depth information about their children. The case study teaching method is a highly adaptable style of teaching that supports and encourages teaching strategy in science education ([Bonney, 2015](#)).

Direct and physical contact between the trainees and the children with disabilities helped in changing the trainee's attitude positively towards children with disabilities. By cooperating with teachers in the centers, each practicum students worked in applying Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for a child in the center. The IEP helped teachers to focus on knowing student strengths, weaknesses, goals, and choices. This study tried to make sure that practicum students were prepared well to participate in IEP process during the fourth month of training. Applying IEP for children with disabilities helps them understand, develop, write, and participate in their IEP committee and develop Self-Advocacy skills ([Pounds & Cuevas, 2019](#)).

Practicum students attitudes towards the enjoyment of studying special education increases their motivation to work with persons with disabilities ,which reflects positively on their attitudes during the training period ,and the centers where the training is held have a positive and supportive environment ,which stimulates the positive direction towards persons with disabilities .Also, the courses that the students studied in special education increases their awareness and experience of persons with disabilities. In addition, the positive view of students towards persons with disabilities as active and successful people in their community.

Many researches indicate that there are many environmental barriers that hinder children with disabilities and limit their ability to engage in recreational activities. Among the most important obstacles include excessive protection by parents of their children, their inability to access some recreational places, and negative attitudes of others (Harding et al., 2009; King et al., 2003; Livingston, Stewart, Rosenbaum, & Russell, 2011; Sanches-Ferreira, Alves, Silveira-Maia, Gomes, & Santos, 2018; Shikako-Thomas et al., 2012). Play and leisure activities are an important part of children's development (Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2018). Practicum students focused on developing play skills for children with disabilities during their training. To understand children with disabilities, it is important to understand their play. Children express themselves and their feelings of fear, anxiety, or anger through play (Koukourikos, Tzehe, Pantelidou, & Tsaloglidou, 2015). Play also helps children accomplish their cultural and psychological achievements. Children can develop mental creativity through playacting, imagination, and role playing (Ginsburg, 2007). In this study practicum students gave children with disabilities opportunities to choose the activity and the play they want to engage in.

Some studies using the ATDP-O reported that females had more positive attitudes toward people with disabilities compared to males (Yuker & Block, 1986) but the current study as revealed in Table 2 shows that there is no statistically significant difference due to the interaction between the group variable (practical training) and the gender variable, where the value of F is (1.91), which is not statistically significant at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.171$ ), indicating that the effect of Practical training in improving trends varies by gender (There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups). It could be because both groups (experimental and control) had common mixed classes in special education centers such as Introduction To Special Education Class, Early Intervention Class, Learning Disability Class, and Modified Behavior Class. Also, the Educational Science Department at the University of Jordan has many undergrad students with disabilities specifically students with vision impairment, hearing impairment, and physical impairment. The two previous assumptions might be affected by the result.

In her study, Nabors (2012) reported that females were positively impacted by their previous experiences with children with medical conditions compared to males. The current study (Table 2) shows that there were no statistically significant differences due to the interaction between the two groups based on previous experience with individuals with disabilities, where the value of F (0.51) is not statistically significant at the level of significance ( $\alpha = 0.477$ ). The assumption might be because all the common mixed classes between the counseling and special education department have requirements; for examples, all undergrad students in the special education are required to visit institutions centers in special education and schools during their study period to observe children with disabilities and write a report about the cases they observed. Also, they need to get more knowledge about the challenges children with disabilities face and how to look for solutions and how to be successful in their lives. Also, they need to apply some activities for those children in their institutions or schools. These assumptions might be affected by the result.

Working with children with disabilities and interact with them might be a reason of no differences between the experimental group and the control group according to previous experience. A study conducted by Rowe and Stuttz (1987) supported our research. The researcher had surveyed 175 students who participated in three months of training (2 days per week, 1 hour per day) and assessed their attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. The study also examined the effects of type of practical, experience, and gender. Results indicated that practical had a positive influence on the participants' attitudes whereas there were no significant differences across gender.

Another study found out that in order to check people's attitudes towards children with disabilities, the period of communication with them should be long, because communicating with them for a long time may reduce the bias towards them (Barr, 2013). An important element that current teachers must understand is how to employ effective teaching methods for children and how to transfer what has been theoretically studied within the classroom environment (Dos Santos, 2019).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Student preparation, knowledge, enough exposure to children with disabilities, and willingness to work with children with disabilities make a great impact on the attitude of the trainees towards these children. It is therefore imperative that pre-service teachers and practicum students are adequately prepared to work with children with disabilities to reduce negative attitudes. There were some limitations to this study. The sample was not balanced by gender because the number of males studying in Educational Science Department was limited compared to females. Also, the population of this study was small so it was hard to generalize the results of this study. Future research could include the study of undergrad and graduate students and communities' attitudes toward people with disabilities in addition to students whose major field is special education. More research is also needed to examine practicum student's attitude based on the type of disability. To change a negative attitude to children and people with disabilities, we still need to work in including all children in normal classes and public schools. Teaching children with disabilities in the same class with children without disabilities may help in changing negative attitudes toward these children and help them communicate, interact and adapt to society.

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