



**School Bullying towards Students with
Disabilities at Mainstream Schools from the
Experience of Teachers and Students with
Disabilities in Kuwait: Case Study**

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التنمر المدرسي تجاه ذوي الإعاقة في المدارس العادية من وجهة نظر المعلمات والطلبة ذوي الإعاقة في دولة الكويت : دراسة حالة

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المستخلص:

يعتبر التنمر المدرسي من السلوكيات الشائعة التي تحدث بين الطلبة في المدارس العادية. هدفت هذه الدراسة الكيفية إلى تسليط الضوء على آراء المعلمات والطلبة ذوي الإعاقة حول التنمر المدرسي في المدارس العادية في دولة الكويت، وذلك من خلال إجراء المقابلات الشخصية مع عينة قوامها (٣) طلبة من ذوي الإعاقة في كلية التربية الأساسية للتعرف على خبراتهم السابقة حول التنمر المدرسي. وشملت العينة أيضاً (٤) معلمات للفصول الخاصة في المدارس العادية في الكويت. دلت النتائج في هذه الدراسة على أن التنمر المدرسي هو من أبرز العوائق التي واجهها الطلبة ذوي الإعاقة في المدارس العادية. كما دلت النتائج على وجود آثار سلبية للتنمر المدرسي على الطلبة ذوي الإعاقة مثل العزلة الاجتماعية وتجنب الصداقات مع الطلبة العاديين وتجنب المشاركة الاجتماعية في الأنشطة المدرسية. أوصت الدراسة بضرورة تعزيز ثقافة الدمج بين الطلبة العاديين وزيادة درجة الوعي في المجتمع حول كيفية التعامل مع الأفراد ذوي الإعاقة قبل تطبيق الدمج التعليمي في المدارس العادية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التنمر المدرسي، الإعاقة، الدمج التعليمي.



School Bullying towards Students with Disabilities at Mainstream Schools from the Experience of Teachers and Students with Disabilities in Kuwait: Case Study

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ABSTRACT:

Bullying is a common behavior among students at mainstream schools. This study aims to investigate the degree of bullying against students with disabilities at mainstream schools. The study used a qualitative methodology by conducting interviews with three disabled students at the College of Basic Education to explore their previous experiences with bullying at mainstream schools. The sample also included four female teachers at inclusive schools in Kuwait. The results of this study indicate that school bullying is one of the main barriers that disabled students face at mainstream schools. The results also highlight the negative effects associated with bullying, such as social isolation, lack of social participation in school activities, and avoiding friendships with non-disabled students. The study recommends that it is important to enhance the knowledge of inclusion in society and among non-disabled students to increase awareness of how to deal with students with disabilities at mainstream schools before implementing inclusion in the state of Kuwait.

Keywords: school bullying, disability, inclusive education.

Introduction :

School bullying is a widespread problem that affects students worldwide, but it presents a particularly serious challenge for students with disabilities in mainstream schools. These students are often at a higher risk of being bullied due to perceived differences and vulnerabilities. Bullying can manifest in various forms, such as physical aggression, verbal abuse, social exclusion, and cyberbullying, all of which can have profound and lasting effects on the victims (Carter & Spencer, 2006).

For students with disabilities, the consequences of bullying can be even more severe. It impacts not only their academic performance but also their emotional well-being, social interactions, and overall quality of life. These students may experience social isolation, a lack of peer support, and difficulties in forming friendships, which are essential for their development and integration into the school community. In most Arabian Gulf countries, including Kuwait, qualitative research on the voices of students with disabilities is lacking, and there is little or no information about their perspectives on bullying in mainstream schools.

Bullying among school students is an increasingly widespread phenomenon. It is a very serious social and personal problem that leaves negative consequences on the general school environment. It also affects the cognitive, emotional, and social development of students, and their right to learn within a safe school environment. Therefore, understanding the experiences of students with disabilities who are bullied in mainstream schools is essential for developing strategies to support them. By listening to their voices and those of their teachers, educators and policymakers can gain valuable insights into the nature of the problem and the measures needed to address it. This study aims to shed light on the issue of school bullying towards students with disabilities, exploring their experiences and the perspectives of their teachers to inform better practices and policies in inclusive education.

Study aim and research questions

A key aim of this research was to understand the current state of the phenomena of bullying towards students with disability in a mainstream school in Kuwait. This was driven by a belief that considering the voices of students with disability, and teachers is a vital foundation for developing clearer understanding of the barriers and challenges of inclusion at mainstream schools., which in turn can

shape practice .In order to address this aim, the following research questions were developed:

- 1.What is the experience of students with disability about bullying from non disabled students at the mainstream school ?
2. What is the experience of students with disability about bullying at the university level?
3. What is the experience of teachers about bullying towards students with disability at mainstream schools?

Terms and Definitions of the Study

Bullying: “Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020)

Disability: “Disability” is defined under the Equality Act Gov. UK (2010) as “A physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long term,’ negative effect on an individual’s ability to do normal daily activities.” (Gov.UK, 2010)

Inclusion: “Inclusion is not just a structural issue about how we organize or change the different aspects of the school - with reference to personnel, pedagogical methods, material and cultural structures - to fit the diversity of the pupils; it is also an ethical concept because it is for the purpose of something - that is, inclusion is for participating in something that is valuable.” (Reindal, 2010, p. 8)

Literature review

Bullying can affect the climate of the school in social ways. It can impact learning, cause fear, and even lead to anti-social behavior (Cole et al., 2006). Bullying may take physical, verbal, or emotional forms and has a hidden nature, occurring in most schools and being difficult to perceive due to the secrecy that surrounds it. Successful inclusion requires developing the school culture and attitudes towards disability, as well as accepting all learners to achieve their well-being. Armstrong (2005) indicated that implementing inclusion involves removing cultural and environmental barriers to increase the participation of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. In this regard, schools’ attempts to provide inclusion should not be seen as merely making additional provisions for children with special needs. Effective educational leadership is central to this (Hassanien, 2015). Thus, students with disabilities and teachers’ experiences toward inclusion contribute to enhanced inclusive values and practices,

creating an educational environment for all children regardless of their conditions.

Norwich et al. (2004) investigated the central policy concern of inclusive education for young people with disabilities and challenges in the UK. An essential aspect is understanding children's perspectives regarding their specialized educational arrangements. The article introduces a recent research endeavor focusing on young people with mild to moderate general learning challenges, often termed moderate learning difficulties (MLD). The study explores the belief that students' viewpoints reveal a conflict between positive elements, such as desiring and valuing assistance, and negative elements, such as avoiding stigmatization, in various educational settings (e.g., special schools, partial integration into mainstream schools, or classroom-supported arrangements). The results showed both positive and negative evaluations of special education, regardless of whether students were in mainstream or special schools. Most students were positive about their current educational setup and teachers, but there were also mixed reviews and reports of bullying incidents. Despite some concerns about differences, many students favored inclusion in mainstream schools and received similar levels of support as their mainstream peers. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding students' viewpoints to guide educational policies and practices, highlighting the need to involve children's voices in decision-making processes.

Humphrey et al. (2010) discussed the inclusion of pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) in mainstream schools, which presents significant challenges and is a poorly understood area in education. Despite an increase in ASD pupils in mainstream settings globally and in England, schools often struggle to adequately support them. ASD pupils are more likely to face exclusion, bullying, and a lack of social support compared to peers without SEN. They also have a higher risk of developing mental health issues. This pattern poses a substantial challenge to the inclusion movement. Overall, these findings underscore the unique challenges faced by students with ASD in mainstream settings and the importance of tailored support mechanisms, particularly in fostering positive peer relationships. The study contributes valuable insights for educational policy and practice, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of students' diverse needs within inclusive school environments.



Zablotsky et al. (2014) determined that students with ASD who were in fully inclusive classrooms experienced higher levels of victimization than students with ASD who received services in more restrictive settings. These studies are notable in the bullying and disability literature because they point to a research gap, as bullying is associated with the social environment of an individual (Hong & Espelage, 2012).

McDougall and Vaillancourt (2015) investigated how disability and gender interact to influence the likelihood of victimization and bullying among adolescents in mainstream schools. The study aimed to understand how these factors differentially affect students' experiences and to identify patterns related to both disability and gender. It was found that students with disabilities faced higher rates of bullying compared to their non-disabled peers, with 45% of students with disabilities reporting being bullied, compared to 25% of those without disabilities. The research also indicated that gender impacted the types and frequency of bullying. Female students with disabilities were more often subjected to relational and verbal bullying, while their male counterparts were more likely to encounter physical bullying. Additionally, students with specific disabilities, such as emotional or behavioral disorders, were at increased risk of being bullied, with the type of disability influencing the nature of the bullying. The study also highlighted that bullying had severe consequences for the emotional and psychological well-being of students with disabilities, leading to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem.

A review of the literature reveals that bullies victimize students with disabilities more frequently than typical peers (Blake et al., 2012; Dieterich et al., 2015; Rose et al., 2011; Whitney et al., 1992). For students with disabilities, the power imbalance is enhanced because they are likely to experience lower self-esteem, fewer friends, and higher rates of rejection than their typical peers (Blake et al., 2012; Farmer et al., 2012; Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka, 2003). Surveys of students with disabilities and/or their parents report bullying victimization frequencies ranging from 25% to 34% of students (Blake et al., 2012; Cho, Hendrickson, & Mock, 2009).

Wei et al. (2016) examined the prevalence of bullying and victimization among students in special schools in Taiwan. The sample included 140 students with various disabilities, aged 12–18, from 10 special schools throughout Taiwan. Trained interviewers conducted

face-to-face surveys using structured questionnaires. Results showed that 31.8% of students in special schools experienced peer victimization within the past year, while 26.5% of students had bullied others during that period. While the findings did not yield gender differences, students in junior high grades tended to report more victimization experiences than their senior high counterparts. Severity of disability was positively associated with both bullying and being bullied; however, no difference was found regarding types of disability. Students who suffered victimization also reported a higher number of suicide attempts.

A recent study showed that, in mainstream classrooms, 33% of students with special needs experienced bullying, while only 5% of their regular peers were bullied (Lo & Lu, 2013). The most common forms of maltreatment reported are verbal and relational bullying. Moreover, Duh and Hsin (2009) found that junior high school students with intellectual disabilities were more likely to be sexually harassed, mostly by acquaintances, than were their peers. Based on interviews with local students and teachers, Lo (2011) concluded that, in regular schools, students with disabilities could easily become the victims of bullying because of poor school performance, unusual behaviors, poor social skills, class disturbances, and failure to comply with group norms.

Gaad (2004) highlights traditional cultural issues and values that shape attitudes towards individuals with intellectual disabilities. Three countries were identified in Gaad's study: two from the Middle East, Egypt in North Africa, and the United Arab Emirates in Asia, and England. The aim of Gaad's study was to consider cultural effects on the provision of inclusion for these children in mainstream schools. The findings indicated that in Egypt, negative attitudes towards families of children with intellectual disabilities, particularly with Down's Syndrome, were reported. Parents stated that children with such disabilities were kept in their houses due to facing rejection by non-disabled individuals in their society, especially children, because of their intellectual disability and distinctive facial and physical characteristics. Consequently, such children have to endure labeling and bullying from other non-disabled children. The researcher concluded that in the United Arab Emirates, children with intellectual disabilities are still a long way from inclusion.

Research has extensively examined the social advantages of inclusion, revealing that inclusive classrooms nurture reciprocal



friendships among students (Vaughn et al., 2001). Furthermore, studies indicate that children with SEN who establish reciprocal friendships exhibit lower levels of loneliness and a more positive self-concept within inclusive school settings compared to those lacking such friendships (e.g., Erath et al., 2008; Rubin et al., 2008). Even children identified with learning disabilities (LD), characterized by average intellectual abilities with specific deficits, demonstrate some positive social outcomes in inclusive environments despite lower overall social engagement (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2001).

However, challenges exist within inclusive settings. Some studies suggest that children with SEN may encounter difficulties interacting with non-SEN peers in mainstream schools, leading to social challenges relative to their typically developing counterparts (e.g., Koster et al., 2007). Further investigations by Pijl, Frostad, and Flem highlight a notable portion of children with SEN who do not actively participate socially in inclusive classrooms, unlike their non-SEN peers (Pijl et al., 2008). Consequently, there is ongoing interest in researching the social participation of children with SEN in mainstream educational settings, as emphasized by OFSTED (2002) and various scholars who consider social participation a pivotal aspect of inclusive education (e.g., Bossaert et al., 2011; Alqallaf, 2015). This focus is crucial given that negative social experiences in school can lead to academic underperformance and maladjustment later in life (Ollendic et al., 1992).

The centrality of positive peer relations and feelings of belonging in children's self-concept and social positioning has been underscored (Parker et al., 2006). Within the school environment, opportunities abound for children and adolescents to engage with peers, fostering friendships and social bonds. Notably, autistic students' experiences within schools have garnered attention in numerous studies (Calder et al., 2013; Conn, 2014; Goodall, 2020; Sproston et al., 2017), revealing challenges in social participation unique to this demographic (Mamas et al., 2021; Rotheram-Fuller et al., 2010; Simpson et al., 2019). These students often find themselves on the periphery of social networks, encountering difficulties in acceptance and friendship reciprocity, and facing heightened risks of bullying resulting in anxiety and social exclusion (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015; Symes et al., 2010).

Research on students with intellectual disabilities, visual impairments, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, cerebral palsy, and many other special needs has similarly highlighted their risk of being bullied (Christensen et al., 2012; Lindsay & McPherson, 2012; Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011; Timmermanis & Wiener, 2011). Although a number of studies have explored bullying and peer abuse at mainstream schools and have identified negative effects of bullying in multiple domains, researchers have placed less focus specifically on students with disabilities. Virtually no qualitative research to date has been conducted about bullying at inclusive schools in Kuwait; however, evidence from other countries suggests the potential gravity of this problem (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Rose et al., 2009).

Methodology of the study

In this research, we have adopted a case study methodology within an epistemological framework of constructivism (Crotty, 2003). Case study "has been tried and found to be a direct and satisfying way of adding to experience and improving understanding" (Stake, 2000, p.25). This case study carries the potential to add insight to the international discourse on inclusion and to prompt consideration of the complexity of such an approach within the Kuwaiti context

Methods

This research constitutes a qualitative interpretive case study involving selected students with disabilities from the College of Basic Education and teachers from inclusive schools in Kuwait. Data were gathered through semi-structured research interviews and subsequently processed and analyzed using data coding, categorization, and identification of emergent themes, which formed the basis of the study's findings. Interviews enable researchers to capture participants' interpretations of their world and their perceptions of various encountered situations. According to Cohen et al. (2007, p. 267), 'the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life; it is part of life itself,' highlighting its integral role in qualitative research. Mertens (2010) argues that many qualitative researchers opt for interview methods due to their ability to yield substantial information. Furthermore, interviews are crucial for researchers seeking to comprehend individuals' beliefs, experiences, desires, and intentions in their own words (Kvale, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).



Participants

The intent of qualitative inquiry is to develop an in-depth understanding of a central phenomenon rather than to generalize to a population. Thus, the qualitative researcher selects individuals and sites that can help understand the central phenomenon purposefully or intentionally, aiming to learn about people, events, or phenomena and providing a voice to individuals who may not otherwise be heard (Creswell, 2012). Considering these advantages, we adopted purposive sampling, which helped in the current study to select individuals with different disabilities. According to Wellington (2000), “purposive sampling, as its name implies, involves using or making a contact with a specific purpose in mind” (p.59). Therefore, the participants were selected purposively to gain rich data about the issue of bullying at inclusive schools in Kuwait. The participants of this study are teachers at inclusive schools and students with disabilities. It is worth mentioning that the students in this study are currently studying at the College of Basic Education; they have been interviewed to interpret their previous experiences with bullying at mainstream schools. The following table includes the information of the participants:

Table (1): Participants' information

Number of participants	7 (3 students with disability and 4 teachers)
Age range of the student with disability	19-21
Age range of the teachers	30-42
Gender	3 Male student with disability 4 female teachers
Type of disability	1 Cerebral disability (Case 1) 1 Mild Visual disability (Case 2) 1 Physical disability (Case 3)

Reliability and validity

In relation to the reliability of this research, the interview questions excluded any misleading questions, as determined in the pilot study, and we made sure that during the interviews we did not indicate or point to any answer or exert any kind of influence over the interviewee, towards specific answers. Furthermore, the pilot study allows clarification of ambiguous questions, re-adjusting the focus if

necessary, changing question order, and removing any redundancies. All this helps the researcher to ensure that the main study will proceed as planned (Gillham, 2005). As recommended by Kvale (2007, p.8), "reading the transcribed interviews may inspire the researcher to new interpretations of well-known phenomena". Thus, we continuously re-examined the data in an effort to deepen our understanding and interpretation of it.

In addition, certain criteria were defined to allow readers to confirm the results of the study. For instance, the process of analysis, in this research, was explained systematically by providing examples drawn from the raw data, in each step of the analysis. This was done so as to help the reader to make sense of the analysis and to assure that the results are compatible with the analytical criteria. To ensure the reliability of the qualitative data analysis, the level of agreement between coders was assessed using the Kappa (κ) statistic. Inter-coder Agreement is a crucial measure of reliability in qualitative research, as it indicates the consistency with which different raters assign codes to the same data. In this study, the decisions made by the coders were compared, and the percentage agreement was calculated. According to recommendations in the literature, a percentage agreement of 70% or higher is considered acceptable for ensuring reliable coding (McHugh, 2012). The calculated Kappa value for this study was 0.75, indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). This high level of agreement between the raters confirms the reliability of the coding process and supports the validity of the study's findings. The robust inter-coder reliability achieved in this study ensures that the data interpretation is consistent and dependable, thereby strengthening the overall credibility of the research.

Regarding the validity, our intention was not to generalize the results of this research across all colleges in Kuwait. Instead, we aimed to enhance in-depth understanding and gain a clearer picture of the issue of bullying from the perspectives of students with disabilities at the College of Basic Education and teachers at inclusive schools in Kuwait.

Pilot study

A pilot study with three teachers and three students with physical disability was conducted to evaluate the semi-structured interview questions before conducting the main study. These participants were not included in the main study. A pilot study allows the researcher to identify potential problems that might occur during



the interviews. In addition, it allows the researcher to determine the time needed to complete the interviews (Kvale, 1996; Creswell, 2012).

Ethical issues

Since educational research involves human participants, ethical considerations must be prioritized (Wellington, 2000). I distributed a leaflet outlining the study's aims and procedures to all participants, including students with disabilities and teachers, ensuring they were fully informed (British Educational Research Association, 2004). Participants were assured of confidentiality, with their identities protected through data anonymization. Permission to record interviews was obtained from all participants, who were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Personal information was securely stored and never made public (Wellington, 2000).

Data analysis

In the current study, the coding process was based on two main aspects. The first was the research questions as Creswell (2012) indicates that "In a qualitative research study, you need to analyze the data to form answers to your research questions. This process involves examining the data in detail to describe what you learned, and developing themes or broad categories of ideas from the data" (p.247). Following Creswell's (2012) suggestion that, "you can state codes in the participant's actual words" (p.244), we drew up a list of codes for each interview separately, the list of codes arose from the participants' actual words. Such a way of coding the data facilitated the process of being able to go back and search for participants' quotes that support such codes easily. The next step was to identify and group similar codes and look for redundant codes, as suggested by Creswell (2012)), who indicates that the main objective of this process is "to reduce a list of codes to a smaller, more manageable number such as 25-30. It is best not to overcode the data because, in the end, you will need to reduce the codes to a small number of themes" (p. 245), we designed a colour and shape guide for the process of reducing the codes and categorising them under broad theme. The process of identifying the themes was executed "by examining codes that the participants discuss most frequently, are unique or surprising, have most evidence to support them" (Creswell, 2012, p.245). It was essential to read the transcribed data more than once to generate the initial categories of themes and sub-themes. Grouping and categorising the codes required

a continuous process of modification, including adding emerging themes, relevant categories, and deleting non-related ones and combining others. Microsoft Word was used to cut and paste the codes from the lists of codes and categorise under specific themes. The main themes identified in this study are the negative impacts of bullying on students with disabilities. These include avoiding friendships with non-disabled students, experiencing a lack of social belonging in inclusive schools, and facing social isolation.

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Finally, it's worth mentioning we translated the codes and the quotations related to each code from Arabic to English. The translation was checked and verified by a professor of English at the University of Kuwait.



Findings

This study presents the participants' experiences regarding bullying directed at students with disabilities in mainstream schools, along with the barriers and challenges they encountered. It also identifies necessary reasonable adjustments that should be implemented have been highlighted.

(A) Students with Disability Responses about the Issue of Bullying at Mainstream School:

Bullying Pressures Some Parents to Prefer Private Schools Over Public Mainstream Schools for Their Disabled Children:

Case (1), a student with Cerebral Palsy (CP), which affects movement and balance, discussed his family's decision to choose a private school due to concerns about bullying and educational quality:

"My parents opted for a private school to protect me from bullying and for better education as I grew older. They advised me to inform teachers if anything happened."

Regarding bullying and the lack of awareness among non-disabled students towards those with disabilities, **Case (1)** shared:

"My experience with bullying started at a young age, around 5-6 years old, not at home but at kindergarten. As a small child with crutches in a private school, there was confusion among other students about why I was different, questions I didn't know how to answer at that age."

"I faced physical and verbal bullying during breaks from students in other classes until I reported it to teachers, which lessened the incidents. Bullying can also occur between students with disabilities, where comparisons like 'I can walk faster or better than you' lead to feelings of inferiority."

Case (1)'s narrative reveals significant challenges faced by students with disabilities in mainstream schools. Bullying emerged early in his educational journey, highlighting initial confusion and questions from peers about his condition. This underscores the importance of early education on disability awareness and acceptance.

The decision to attend a private school reflects parental concerns about the adequacy of support and protection against bullying in mainstream public schools. Despite efforts to address bullying through teacher intervention, incidents persisted, affecting social interactions and self-esteem.

Negative affect of bullying on students with disability

Regarding the Negative affect of bullying on students with disability :
Case (1) highlights the emotional impact of bullying on a student with a physical disability. The fear of embarrassment during a graduation ceremony due to potential physical mishaps underscores the psychological toll of bullying. This fear not only affects immediate social interactions but also influences long-term decisions, such as participation in significant events such as the graduation indicates that:

“I had a friend with physical disability in my same senior class year told me that he is not going to the graduation ceremony because he’s scared to Wear the traditional clothes that will effect him because he’s scared to fell down in front of everyone and they laugh may at him .”

Case (2) who Is visually impaired confirmed that. :

“At secondary school I was suffering from bullying from other students , they called me blindness and laughing at me at the school bus I couldn’t forget that moments until now “

The derogatory terms used by peers and thethe ridicule faced on the school bus illustrate the persistent emotional distress caused by bullying. These experiences continue to resonate with the individual, indicating long-lasting effects on self-esteem and social integration.

Further, **Case (3)** provides insights into the complexity of bullying experiences among students with disabilities. While the individual may have some acceptance of bullying from peers with disabilities, they find it unacceptable when it comes from non-disabled students.

case (3) state that :

“Actually I accept bullying from another person with disability , however. I couldn’t accepted from non disabled students “

Additionally, **Case (3)** mentions how bullying affects their academic performance by causing emotional distress. The inability to concentrate on studies due to emotional pain underscores the significant cognitive and psychological impacts of bullying on academic outcomes, state that:

"Bullying impacts my ability to focus on studying because it causes me emotional pain. Sometimes I can overcome it, but other times I struggle to do so."

Bullying, Friendship, Social Belonging, and Social Relations with Non-disabled Students:

The following responses illustrate the varied experiences of students with disabilities in educational settings. Bullying remains a significant

issue in mainstream schools, leading some students to isolate themselves or experience social exclusion. However, experiences improve at the university level, where students report more supportive environments and fewer instances of bullying.

For example , **Case (1)** indicated:

“I wasn’t involved in any fun activities. At the start, I didn’t experience any friendliness and preferred to stay in class alone during breaks to avoid being bullied again.”

“As I got older, those bullies became friends and people who helped me with stairs or shoes, seeing beyond my disability to the person I am.”

Regarding bullying at university, Case (1) mentioned:

“At college, I didn’t face any bullying from my classmates.”

“I have a few friends among non-disabled students inside and outside college, and I feel happy when they treat me without pity.”

Case (2) confirmed:

“All my college colleagues are supportive, and I’ve never faced bullying from them. However, my friendships with non-disabled students are very rare.”

Case (3) stated:

“No bullying at all at the university. Non-students in this age are more mature and aware of how to interact kindly with us, but my friendships with non-disabled students are limited.”

Suggestions of Students with Disabilities to Minimize Bullying in Mainstream Schools:

Participants’ suggestions focus on education and awareness as key strategies to combat bullying. They advocate for educational programs, media representation, and increased societal awareness to foster inclusive environments. Additionally, there is a call for broader job opportunities post-graduation to enhance social integration and inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Case (1) suggested:

“To minimize or stop bullying, there should be educational studies showing the effects of bullying and presentations for students, families, and teachers.”

Case (2) proposed:

“A cartoon on TV discussing disabled people would help young children understand the people they will interact with.”

Case (3) emphasized:

“Increasing awareness about the negative effects of bullying among students in mainstream schools is crucial.”

“We are an excluded group in our society, so social interaction with others is weak. After graduation, increasing job opportunities for us in various sectors, not just limited places, is essential.”

These perspectives highlight the importance of proactive measures in schools and society to promote understanding, support, and inclusion for students with disabilities

Teachers responses about the “issue of bullying” at mainstream school:

All participants expressed concerns about the negative effects of bullying by non-disabled students in this study, emphasizing that students with disabilities are socially excluded in mainstream schools as a result of bullying. These concerns are illustrated by the following responses:

Teacher (1):

“Even during recess, teachers refrain from integrating them with non-disabled students because when they do, students with disabilities experience bullying and aggression from their non-disabled peers.”

“Laughing at slow learners during recess results in these students being excluded from social activities and kept inside the classroom. I have observed that slow learners tend to lack friendships with non-disabled students in this school.”

Teacher (2):

“There was a student in my class who had a stammer, and due to being bullied by other students, she no longer speaks in class.”

“The main reason for bullying at mainstream schools towards students with disabilities is the lack of awareness. There is no promotion of positive attitudes towards students with disabilities throughout the school.”

These responses underscore the significant social and educational challenges faced by students with disabilities in mainstream educational settings, highlighting the urgent need for awareness and supportive attitudes to combat bullying and foster inclusive environments.

Teacher (3)

“Laughing and physically assaulting disabled students during recess compels slower learners to remain indoors because non-disabled students label them as ‘crazy’ due to their attendance in special classes.”



Another teacher concerned about the issue of bullying indicated that special separate schools are better for students with disability rather than mainstream schools. She believe that the current mainstream school is not prepared in several aspects, such as lack of awareness which causes bullying by non-disabled students. For example:

Teacher (4) mentioned, “Mainstream schools are not suitable for slow learners because during breaks, non-disabled students sometimes bully and hit them.”

“I prefer special schools for students with disabilities because of the problems they face at inclusive schools, where other non-disabled students often call them ‘crazy’.”

The preceding responses highlight the negative impact of bullying by non-disabled students towards students with disabilities in mainstream schools in Kuwait. This undermines the practice of inclusion in mainstream education, leading teachers to avoid inclusive practices and causing students with disabilities to refrain from interacting with non-disabled peers during breaks to avoid bullying issues, as reported by most participants.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore that bullying constitutes a serious educational, social, and personal issue in Kuwait, adversely affecting the overall academic environment. It particularly impedes the cognitive, emotional, and social development of students with disabilities, who often experience social isolation in mainstream schools due to bullying. Participants expressed difficulties in feeling socially integrated and forming friendships with non-disabled peers, highlighting these as major barriers for disabled students in mainstream education. Similar findings are supported by Banks et al. (2018), Pinto et al. (2019), and Broomhead (2019), who observed that students with disabilities often face social exclusion and have limited or no friendships in inclusive settings.

Moreover, this study aligns with existing literature, such as Alqallaf’s (2015) research in Kuwait, which found that social participation among students identified with learning difficulties in special classes within mainstream schools was confined to their peers in similar classes and did not extend to non-Special Educational Needs (SEN) peers. This study emphasizes the rights of students with disabilities to participate equally in mainstream schools, emphasizing

the necessity of a safe learning environment free from bullying, danger, and violence, which significantly impact academic achievement and self-esteem.

The study also concurs with previous research indicating that bullying can severely affect a child's mental health, self-esteem, social participation, and academic performance, impacting both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Espelage & Holt, 2021; Zablotsky et al., 2014; Rose & Gage, 2017). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the psychological effects of bullying in inclusive schools is crucial.

In conclusion, this study aims to illuminate bullying against students with disabilities in mainstream schools in Kuwait, drawing insights from both disabled students and teachers. It reveals bullying as a significant barrier to inclusive education in Kuwait, undermining efforts to provide equal educational opportunities. Effective anti-bullying policies and a culture of inclusivity are essential to counteract these challenges and promote a supportive environment for all students.

The data indicates a clear absence of key principles of inclusion advocated by the Salamanca Statement (1994), including an inclusive school culture, reduction of exclusionary practices, increased participation of students with disabilities, positive attitudes toward inclusion in the school community, and inclusive policies and practices. The lack of these principles negatively impacts inclusive practices in Kuwaiti mainstream schools, compounded by inadequate legal protections against bullying for students with disabilities. Additionally, many teachers express reluctance toward inclusion due to bullying concerns, further marginalizing disabled students. Lack of awareness among non-disabled students about disabilities contributes significantly to bullying in mainstream schools.

Conversely, disabled students report a reduction in bullying at the university level, suggesting increased awareness and acceptance among non-disabled peers (Espelage & Holt, 2021; Swearer et al., 2017). Effective inclusion policies that celebrate diversity and safeguard the rights of students with disabilities are crucial for creating inclusive mainstream school environments. Studies by Rose (2020), Cook et al. (2019), and Alenezi (2016) underscore the importance of developing such policies to foster inclusive education.



Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Like any research inquiry, this study has its strengths and limitations. It contributes to a deeper understanding of bullying issues in inclusive schools in Kuwait. Methodologically, the study benefits from a case study approach, which allowed for a nuanced exploration of inclusive education complexities in Kuwait. The use of qualitative research methods yielded rich data, particularly valuable for comprehending bullying dynamics among mainstream school students. Despite the limited number of participants, qualitative data analysis provided substantial insights and participant perspectives, which quantitative methods alone would not have captured due to their constraints on expressing detailed viewpoints. The semi-structured open question approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of ideas, aligning well with the research goal of identifying bullying issues in Kuwaiti inclusive schools.

Semi-structured interviews effectively amplified the voices and perspectives of various participants, notably teachers and students with disabilities. By sharing their thoughts and experiences, this approach enriched the study's findings, informing stakeholders and decision-makers on enhancing inclusivity in mainstream schools. This study appears to be the first qualitative exploration of teachers' and students' with disability perspectives on bullying in Kuwaiti mainstream schools.

However, this study has limitations. Due to time constraints, it involved only a small participant sample, but enhancing a detailed understanding of bullying in inclusive schools. Additionally, cultural restrictions limited the inclusion of male teachers' perspectives. Future research should investigate the views of male teachers, head teachers regarding bullying in inclusive schools in Kuwait.

Recommendation

1. Schools should develop and enforce comprehensive anti-bullying policies that specifically address the bullying of students with disabilities. These policies should include clear definitions of bullying, procedures for reporting and investigating incidents, and consequences for perpetrators.
2. Increase Awareness and Training by conducting regular training sessions for teachers, staff, and students on recognizing, preventing, and responding to bullying, with a focus on the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities.

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3. Raise awareness about the impact of bullying on students with disabilities through workshops, seminars, and campaigns.
 4. Promote Inclusive Education Practices by fostering an inclusive school environment where diversity is valued, and all students are encouraged to participate in activities.
 5. Implement inclusive education practices that promote the integration of students with disabilities into all aspects of school life.
 6. Enhance Peer Support Systems by encouraging the formation of support groups where students with disabilities can share their experiences and strategies for coping with bullying.
 7. Inclusive schools should organise seminars or training courses for parents of non-disabled students and parents of students with disabilities to increase awareness about bullying and inclusion.
 8. Provide published guides on inclusion for parents, schools, students, and teachers.
 9. Increase support for inclusion through media involvement, seminars on inclusion and disabilities, and public education on interacting with individuals with disabilities.
 10. Conduct more research and surveys on bullying and inclusion.
 11. Develop a cartoon or TV program that discusses disability to raise awareness about children with disabilities in society.
 12. Conduct more qualitative research involving male teachers and non-disabled students on school bullying, given the scarcity of studies on this issue in mainstream schools in Kuwait.
- By implementing these recommendations comprehensively and consistently, schools can create a safer and more supportive environment where all students can thrive free from the fear of bullying.



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