



Factors Affecting Special Education Teachers' Attrition and Retention in Saudi Arabia: A Systematic Review of Literature

Nizar H. Bagadood, PhD

**Department of Special Education, College of Education
Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia**

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Abstract

This systematic review explores the challenges and factors contributing to the attrition and retention of special education teachers in Saudi Arabia. Key issues such as inadequate training, job dissatisfaction, and professional burnout are examined. Special education teachers are pivotal in delivering equitable, high-quality education to students with disabilities. With the implementation of inclusive education policies such as “No Child Left Behind,” there is a growing emphasis on integrating students with disabilities into general education classrooms. Given the demanding nature of special education, targeted attention is required to support and retain qualified professionals, who are central to the success of inclusive education initiatives.

Keywords: Special education teachers, retention, attrition, inclusive education, students with disabilities.

Introduction

Since the early 21st century, education has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental right and a cornerstone of democracy, civilization, and human development (Abdullah et al., 2017). Today, the global commitment to “education for all” emphasizes providing equitable learning opportunities to all students regardless of their background, race, gender, or ability (Kang & Martin, 2018). The World Education Forum in 2000, building on the 1990 international initiative, witnessed 189 countries pledge to expand access to quality education and reduce illiteracy (The World Bank, 2014). In alignment with this commitment, the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—ratified by Saudi Arabia—affirms the right of individuals with disabilities to receive equitable, high-quality education (Daghustani & Mackenzie, 2021).

Although limited research exists on the prevalence of disabilities in Saudi Arabia, the demand for special education is growing, with increasing numbers of students being identified as having disabilities. This has resulted in a heightened need for qualified special education teachers in both specialized and mainstream schools (Al-Jadid, 2014).

The concept of inclusion, as articulated by international frameworks and scholars, extends beyond the physical placement of students with disabilities into general classrooms. It represents a broader educational philosophy grounded in equity, participation, and respect for diversity. According to the social model of disability, barriers to learning arise not from individual impairments but from structural and attitudinal constraints within schools and society (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). In contrast to the traditional medical model, which focuses on “fixing” the individual, the social model calls for transforming learning environments to remove obstacles and promote accessibility. UNESCO (2009) defines inclusive education as a continuous process of identifying and responding to the diverse needs of all learners, emphasizing flexibility, collaboration, and community involvement. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) further describe inclusion as a dynamic practice where teachers design instruction that welcomes learner diversity and encourages participation for all students.

In practice, the experience of inclusion involves both pedagogical and emotional dimensions. For teachers, it requires balancing curriculum expectations with differentiated instruction, collaboration with specialists,

and fostering a classroom culture that values every learner (Forlin, 2010). For students, particularly those with disabilities, inclusion can enhance social integration, self-esteem, and academic engagement when supported by trained educators and appropriate resources (Sharma & Sokal, 2015). These theoretical perspectives are highly relevant in the Saudi Arabian context, where inclusive policies are still evolving and educators are navigating how to translate inclusion from policy into effective practice (Alnahdi, 2020).

Providing appropriate education for students with disabilities requires flexible and relevant resources that promote social, emotional, and academic development (Madani, 2019; Fonte et al., 2017). Since special education teachers are primarily responsible for implementing such resources, they must possess specialized skills and receive continuous professional support. Their ability to identify students' strengths and challenges is essential for implementing personalized teaching strategies that lead to improved educational outcomes.

Qualified special education teachers are crucial for the success of inclusive education. Participation in specialized pre-service and in-service training programs can increase teacher confidence and competence in supporting students with disabilities (Strassfeld, 2019). Such training, when balanced between academic content and practical skills—including communication, classroom management, and collaboration—enables teachers to navigate daily challenges effectively (Feng & Sass, 2013; Yuwono & Okech, 2021). Understanding both the developmental and academic needs of students is key to effective teaching in special education (Wedell, 2020). Therefore, professional development programs must be comprehensive, going beyond theoretical coursework to include practical, hands-on learning experiences.

Although teaching is often viewed as a highly rewarding profession, it presents numerous challenges, particularly within the field of special education. These challenges can contribute to high attrition rates and low retention (Biggs et al., 2019). As Munday (in Martine, 2022) noted, "There is clear evidence that proper commitment to quality ongoing teacher development genuinely makes a difference to retention and to staff's feelings on the importance of their role" (p. 1). Special education teachers in Saudi Arabia face similar difficulties to those experienced in other countries, despite the limited regional research on the topic (Alqahtani, 2021). Recognizing and understanding these challenges is essential to

providing the support needed to reduce attrition, improve teacher well-being, and promote work-life balance.

Research Question

What factors have influenced the retention of special education teachers in the Saudi Arabian educational system between 2000 and 2022?

Method

Overview

This study investigates the multifaceted factors influencing the retention of special education teachers in the context of Saudi Arabia's educational system. The research focuses on teachers' perceptions of institutional support, preparedness, professional development opportunities, and working conditions. These themes framed the scope of the systematic review, which examined dynamics such as mentoring programs, access to instructional materials, technological resources, administrative support, student diversity, demographic considerations, and both organizational and personal factors influencing job satisfaction and retention.

To develop a robust foundation for understanding these dynamics, the study systematically reviewed existing literature on special education teacher retention, with particular attention to research conducted within Saudi Arabia (Matta, 2021). The following subsections detail the inclusion and exclusion criteria, search strategy, screening process, and analysis methods used to select and synthesize the relevant literature.

Inclusion Criteria

The following inclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and contextual appropriateness of selected studies:

1. Studies conducted within the geographic scope of Saudi Arabia to ensure contextual validity.
2. Research focused on the experiences of special education teachers, particularly in inclusive classroom settings.
3. Studies that investigated variables directly related to teacher retention and attrition.
4. Research that presented either qualitative or quantitative data on special education teachers' perceptions.

5. Only studies published in English were included to ensure linguistic consistency and semantic clarity.

The review excluded:

- Studies that did not focus on special education teachers.
- Studies not written in English.
- Research with limited or no emphasis on retention-related factors.

Search Strategy

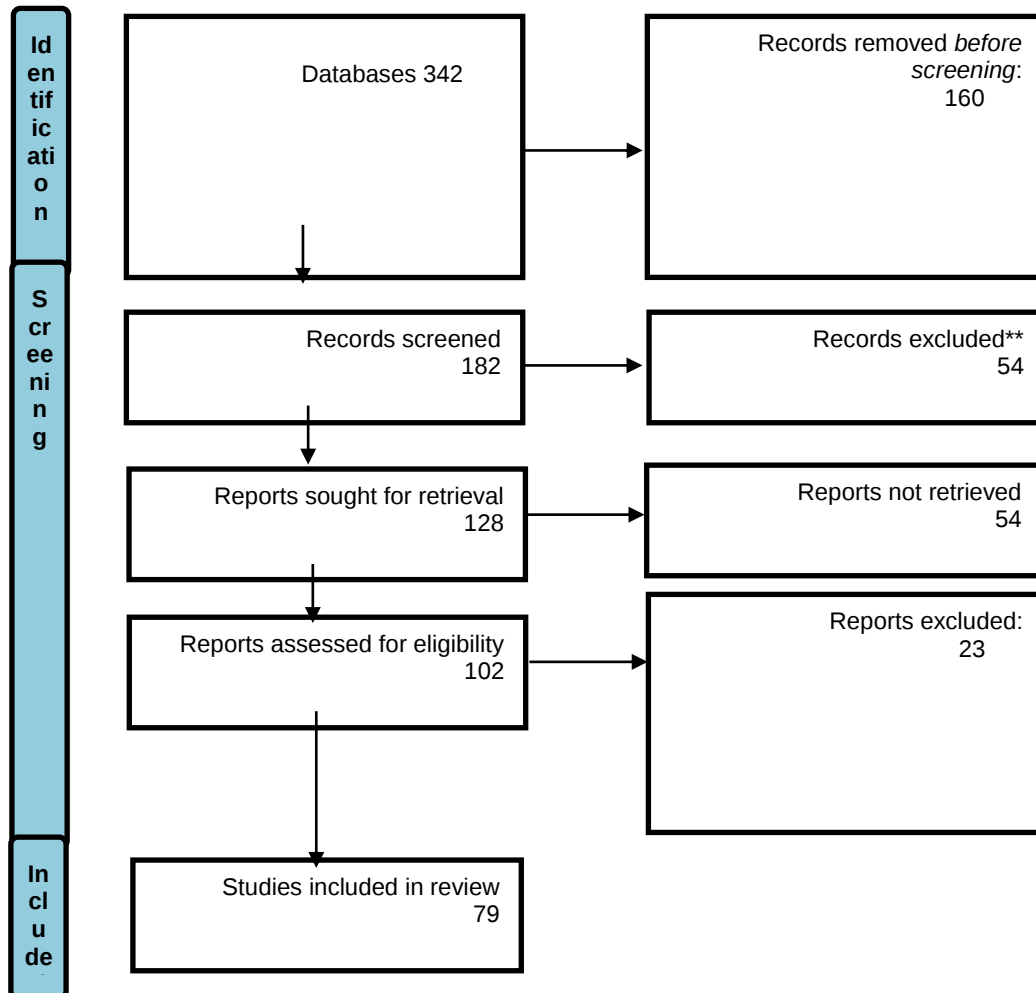
A comprehensive search strategy was implemented to locate the most relevant studies across several academic databases, including ERIC, PsycINFO, and Education Source. Keywords used included: “teacher experiences in special education,” “special education teachers,” “teacher retention,” “Saudi Arabia,” “inclusive education,” and “teacher perceptions.”

The initial search identified 342 studies. After applying the first two inclusion criteria, 182 studies remained. To ensure the inclusion of current literature, the review focused on studies published between 2000 and 2022. After further filtering, 128 studies met the temporal and thematic criteria.

Screening

The screening process occurred in two stages: (1) title and abstract screening and (2) full-text review. In the first stage, independent reviewers evaluated each study’s title and abstract for alignment with the research question. This process narrowed the list to 103 studies. During the full-text review, reviewers assessed the complete articles for eligibility. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus (Matta, 2019), resulting in the final inclusion of 79 studies that met all criteria.

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA diagram summarizing the screening process.



Analysis

The selected studies were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to extract and synthesize key information related to factors influencing special education teacher retention. This included study characteristics, participant demographics, research methodologies, and findings. Thematic coding was applied to identify recurring patterns and overarching themes across the reviewed literature.

The synthesis revealed multiple dimensions of teacher retention, including personal, organizational, and systemic factors. These findings offer valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of special education teachers working in inclusive classrooms in Saudi Arabia. The results are intended to guide evidence-based policy recommendations and support strategies to improve teacher retention and professional satisfaction.

While the included studies provide a rich body of evidence, it is acknowledged that certain methodological and contextual limitations may exist. The discussion section further explores these limitations and proposes directions for future research to address remaining gaps.

Challenges and Retention

Despite the growing need for qualified special education teachers (Biggs et al., 2019), many face challenges that contribute to high attrition rates. Factors such as excessive workload, lack of recognition, stress, burnout, and inadequate training negatively impact retention (Berry et al., 2017; Bruno et al., 2018; Langher et al., 2017; Mrstik et al., 2018; Rhim et al., 2017; Strassfeld, 2019). Estimates suggest that nearly 30% of special education teachers leave the profession within their first three years (Lee et al., 2011), and up to 50% change careers within five years (Donne & Lin, 2013).

However, evidence shows that well-supported and well-trained teachers are more likely to remain in the profession (Thornton et al., 2007). Factors such as effective pre-service training, supportive school environments, and ongoing professional development are crucial to teacher satisfaction and retention (Sheaha, 2004; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). For instance, Cancio et al. (2013) found that administrative support significantly enhances job satisfaction and reduces attrition.

In-service training programs, mentoring relationships, institutional backing, and opportunities for professional growth have all been identified as key supports (Anderson, 2017). A study by Alqahtani (2019), involving 56 new special education teachers in Saudi Arabia, highlighted the positive influence of mentoring programs on teacher retention. Similarly, Prather-Jones (2011) reported that a supportive school culture was critical to the decision of experienced teachers to stay in the field.

Overall, challenges such as heavy workload, lack of administrative and peer support, and inadequate training are among the most significant contributors to attrition in special education. Addressing these issues is

essential for improving retention and maintaining a stable and effective teaching workforce.

Knowledge and Training

When special education teachers lack access to proper training, their confidence and enthusiasm may decline, leading to feelings of inadequacy and negatively impacting their professional identity, motivation, and self-efficacy (Jung et al., 2011). Training is instrumental in shaping teachers' attitudes and interactions with students with disabilities, while also influencing their decisions to remain in the profession.

According to Mintz et al. (2015), insufficient access to up-to-date knowledge hinders teachers' ability to make informed decisions about both their students' development and their own professional growth. Effective training programs equip teachers with classroom management strategies and behavioral intervention techniques. Freeman et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of pre-service training in preparing teachers to handle student behavior effectively.

Mentoring is also critical. Cornelius et al. (2019) found that novice teachers improve significantly when mentored by experienced colleagues. Feng and Sass (2013) highlighted a strong correlation between teacher training and positive student outcomes. Moreover, attrition rates are nearly double among teachers with limited preparation compared to those with robust training (Feng & Sass, 2013).

Special education training programs must be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure they address both academic and practical competencies. These include conflict resolution, collaboration, and classroom flexibility (Yuwono & Okech, 2021; Myklebust, 2010). Teachers who are expected to manage inclusive classrooms often report frustration over inadequate preparation, which affects their ability to effectively support students with disabilities (Crispel & Kasperski, 2019).

Participation in induction and mentoring programs has been shown to reduce attrition (Donne & Lin, 2013). While professional development and mentorship are vital sources of support, online resources can also play an essential role in alleviating stress. Harrison-Collier (2013) and Alqahtani (2021) both found that teachers expressed a strong need for mentoring, access to resources, and support for career development. Teachers who feel unprepared are more likely to experience anxiety and burnout—issues

closely linked to both inadequate training and overwhelming workloads (Yuwono & Okech, 2021).

Workload

Special education teachers often manage responsibilities beyond classroom instruction, including attending committee meetings, handling disruptive behavior, and completing extensive paperwork (Anderson, 2017). Ghani et al. (2013) note that these teachers are frequently tasked with administrative duties and extracurricular activities in addition to teaching. Brunsting et al. (2014) found that excessive responsibilities can compromise teaching quality, underscoring the need for strategies to manage workload effectively.

Unexpected assignments and insufficient time for preparation contribute significantly to teacher stress and dissatisfaction (Samaden et al., 2021). Workload-related factors such as continuous evaluations, limited preparation time, and managing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) directly impact retention (Yecke & Hale, 2001). Moreover, the lack of adequate teaching resources often forces teachers to spend additional hours sourcing or creating materials, further compounding their workload (Ibrahim et al., 2021). These resources are frequently expensive and time-consuming to obtain (Billingsley et al., 2011).

The documentation required for students with disabilities, especially for IEPs, is particularly burdensome. Grant (2017) identified paperwork as one of the most pressing challenges faced by special education teachers. Excessive workload is also a leading cause of burnout, which occurs when stress surpasses an individual's capacity to cope (Brunsting et al., 2014). Administrative indifference, inadequate support, and heavy paperwork are all linked to increased burnout and decreased retention (Anderson, 2017). Williams and Dikes (2013) found that teaching experience combined with high workload correlates positively with burnout. In Grant's (2017) study, participants reported high stress levels due to insufficient support. However, administrative and collegial support can mitigate burnout and foster resilience among special education teachers (Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012).

Supportive Work Environment

Administrative support plays a vital role in the well-being and retention of special education teachers. Recognizing the multifaceted responsibilities

they shoulder is essential to fostering a supportive environment. Stress is often an inherent part of the special education profession; however, appropriate support from administrative staff can mitigate burnout and reduce turnover. When administrators fail to acknowledge teachers' efforts, it can lead to increased stress, diminished job satisfaction, and higher attrition.

Simple acts of support—such as offering unscheduled short breaks or assisting with non-instructional duties—can significantly enhance teacher morale and reduce attrition (Burns, 2021). In a study of 276 special education teachers, Langher et al. (2017) found that perceived administrative support was linked to lower emotional exhaustion and greater self-fulfillment. Similarly, Harrison-Collier (2013) identified supportive leadership as a major determinant of job satisfaction and retention.

Aldosiry (2020) examined administrative support's impact on 343 Saudi special education teachers and found that emotional and appraisal support were especially important in reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction. Teachers in Grant's (2017) study recommended school-based mentorship programs as a practical way to offer meaningful support. Berry et al. (2017) identified key areas where support is needed, including classroom management, curriculum design, and collaborative skills for inclusive settings.

Conley and You (2017), in their research across 2,060 schools, reported that administrative support was among the most significant predictors of teacher retention. Similarly, Berry (2017) found that teachers who received adequate support reported higher levels of job commitment and satisfaction.

Support from colleagues is equally critical. According to Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017), collaboration among educators enhances inclusion and improves outcomes for students with disabilities. Teamwork allows teachers to share ideas, problem-solve collaboratively, and maintain perspective during professional challenges (Cleaver, 2020). Pre-service preparation programs that emphasize collaboration and teamwork help build a professional network that sustains teachers in their roles.

Retention and Attrition

The increasing number of students with disabilities has heightened the demand for qualified special education teachers (Lillywhite & Wolbring,

2022). However, retaining these professionals remains a significant challenge. Many leave the field due to job dissatisfaction, seeking alternative careers (Harrison-Collier, 2013). Stress is one of the most consistent predictors of attrition and job dissatisfaction (Sheaha, 2004).

Billingsley (2004) found that special education teachers are more likely to experience burnout and attrition than their general education counterparts. Other studies have confirmed the strong link between job dissatisfaction and teacher turnover (Wangari & Orodho, 2014; Williams, 2014). Factors such as low salaries, lack of administrative support, and managing students' behavioral challenges all contribute to dissatisfaction. In Wangari and Orodho's (2014) study, many teachers expressed an intention to leave their roles within five years unless working conditions improved.

Induction programs, professional development, and a positive school culture have all been shown to influence teacher recruitment and retention. Two conceptual models provide insight into the causes of attrition: Billingsley's (1993) model and the Brownell and Smith (1993) model.

Billingsley's framework identifies three categories influencing career decisions:

1. External factors—including economic and institutional influences that indirectly affect retention;
2. Employment factors—such as qualifications, working conditions, rewards, and professional commitment;
3. Personal factors—including life circumstances and personal priorities (Billingsley, 2004; Sheaha, 2004).

Brownell and Smith's (1993) model, grounded in ecological theory, views teacher attrition through four interconnected systems:

- The microsystem, addressing direct teacher-student interactions;
- The mesosystem, involving interactions among colleagues and administrators;
- The exosystem, comprising the broader social structure, including the community's socioeconomic level;
- The macrosystem, reflecting cultural values and ideologies influencing teacher decisions (Billingsley, 2004; Sheaha, 2004).

These models highlight how personal circumstances, institutional factors, and social environments collectively influence teacher retention. Issues

such as workload and support must be addressed to create a positive work environment that promotes retention.

Recruiting special education teachers is especially challenging. Berry et al. (2017) noted that new teachers often lack sufficient support, prompting early career exits. According to Guarino et al. (2006), schools offering mentoring and collegial support experience lower turnover among novice teachers. A lack of support frequently leads to feelings of isolation, burnout, and eventual attrition (Kagler, 2011).

Boe (2006) reported that teacher shortages in special education are 20–30% higher than in general education. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) found that novice special educators are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession. Even when schools successfully recruit qualified candidates, retention challenges persist. Maria (2010) emphasized that turnover among special education teachers negatively affects students' educational outcomes.

Supporting early-career teachers through structured orientation, mentoring, and professional development opportunities is critical to improving retention (Putney, 2009). Establishing collaborative school environments, ensuring administrative support, and clearly defining job responsibilities are essential strategies for maintaining a stable and effective special education workforce.

Strategies to Foster Retention

Many schools face a recurring cycle of recruiting, hiring, and retraining special education teachers due to high turnover rates. Researchers emphasize that increasing retention requires targeted interventions such as professional support, improved working conditions, enhanced classroom management training, and increased compensation (Cunningham, 2019; Feng & Sass, 2018; Salazar, 2019). Salary and benefits have been shown to significantly predict turnover; fair compensation helps retain teachers in the field (Chen et al., 2019; Kelly, 2004).

Given the demands of teaching students with disabilities, compensation should reflect the intensity and complexity of the work. In Mississippi, for example, scholarships and financial incentives are offered to encourage entry into special education teaching (Enwefa et al., 2002). Additionally, alternative certification routes have proven effective in retaining teachers, often resulting in longer tenure than traditional pathways (Sindelar et al., 2012).

Collaborative partnerships between schools and higher education institutions can support recruitment by tailoring training programs to meet local school needs. According to Putney (2009), relying on a single recruitment method is insufficient; using a variety of approaches broadens the candidate pool and improves hiring outcomes.

Clear and structured training programs are crucial for preparing teachers to understand the realities of special education. Induction strategies that foster learning and collaboration help promote job satisfaction and reduce turnover (Brownell et al., 2019). Because teachers often face challenging student behaviors, equipping them with effective behavioral management strategies can mitigate stress and support retention (Bataineh & Alsagheer, 2012).

Kilgore et al. (2003) recommend four instructional strategies for special education teachers: (1) understanding the structure of knowledge, (2) ensuring comprehensibility for students with disabilities, (3) mastery of subject content, and (4) reflective teaching for continuous improvement. Teachers who access high-quality curricula report greater job satisfaction and a stronger sense of support (Leko & Brownell, 2011; Youngs et al., 2011).

Research consistently shows that well-prepared special education teachers are more likely to remain in the profession (Alqahtani, 2019; Berry et al., 2017; Feng & Sass, 2013). When teachers feel equipped for their roles, they are more confident, resilient, and committed to their careers.

School leadership and workplace culture also significantly impact retention. A supportive and respectful environment, where administrative staff are responsive to teachers' needs, fosters professional satisfaction (Jones et al., 2013; Conley & You, 2017; Bettini et al., 2018; Luckner & Movahedazarhouli, 2019). Administrators should be sensitive to workload demands and avoid assigning excessive duties. To improve retention, schools should implement holistic strategies, including competitive compensation, rigorous training, structured induction programs, and supportive leadership practices.

Ultimately, retention in special education is a systemic issue. By addressing training, burnout, and work conditions, schools can enhance teaching quality and promote educational equity. Teachers are central to inclusive education, and their well-being must be prioritized to ensure the success of all students.

Education for All

Inclusive education aims to strengthen educational systems by ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to equitable learning opportunities (Mugambi, 2017). Grounded in the “No Child Left Behind” principle, inclusive education promotes integration, reduces stigma, and prepares students with disabilities for active participation in society (UNICEF, 2017). Educating students with their peers fosters social inclusion and encourages acceptance.

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2013) argue that inclusive pedagogy seeks to extend conventional classroom practices to accommodate all learners without labeling them as different. Inclusive environments reduce dropout rates among students with disabilities and can also improve teacher retention by increasing student engagement and classroom success (Plasman & Gottfried, 2016).

Saudi Arabia’s educational policy supports inclusive education. Article 36 of the national education strategy emphasizes the provision of equitable opportunities for all individuals to become productive members of society while maintaining dignity (Saudi Ministry of Education). The Ministry’s 2016–2020 strategy highlights the need for accessible, high-quality education for all and stresses inclusive learning at every level.

Article 73 reinforces this by mandating the provision of special education services—such as resource rooms, specialized teachers, and inclusive classroom environments—within general education settings. Successful inclusion depends on factors such as teacher training, flexible curricula, supportive leadership, and positive attitudes (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2013).

Attitude

Teacher attitudes play a central role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Job satisfaction is one of the primary factors shaping these attitudes. Rahmati et al. (2018) found that special education teachers tend to experience lower levels of job satisfaction compared to their general education counterparts, which negatively impacts their motivation and professional outlook. Teachers who are new to the profession or lack adequate training are particularly prone to dissatisfaction and frustration.

Teacher attitudes also directly influence the degree to which students with disabilities are successfully integrated into general education settings (Alquraini, 2011). According to Cross et al. (2004), a positive teacher

perception is critical to the success of inclusive education initiatives. Numerous studies support the view that inclusion is strongly associated with teacher attitudes (Anderson & Boyle, 2015; Opertti & Brady, 2011). Attitudes are deeply influenced by cultural values and societal norms. In Saudi Arabia, cultural perceptions of disability are shaped by religious, socioeconomic, and educational factors. Disabilities may be viewed as either divine tests or punishments, leading to stigma and feelings of shame. Despite national policies that support inclusion, many educators hold negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. For example, Aldosari (2022) reported that 213 Saudi teachers expressed unfavorable views toward inclusion.

Training plays a crucial role in shaping teacher attitudes. As discussed earlier, adequate preparation increases confidence and helps educators develop more positive and inclusive perspectives.

Readiness and Preparation

Preparing teachers to support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms is essential for successful implementation. According to Ofsted (2008), training should be structured and school-specific, with clear teaching standards and expectations. Continuous professional development helps teachers create appropriate learning environments that meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities (Reese et al., 2018).

In the Saudi context, special education teachers receive training to manage various aspects of inclusive education. However, there is a lack of data regarding the availability and effectiveness of in-service training programs (Alquraini & Rao, 2017). Aldabas (2020) surveyed 382 Saudi teachers and found that most felt either neutral or moderately confident in their readiness to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Similarly, Alnahdi (2019) reported that while many Saudi teachers felt competent in inclusive teaching practices, they expressed lower confidence in managing behavioral challenges.

Readiness is important for both special and general education teachers. Co-teaching, where both types of educators collaborate in inclusive classrooms, can help bridge gaps in preparedness and provide students with more comprehensive support.

Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is a collaborative instructional model where a general education teacher and a special education teacher work together to support all students in an inclusive classroom. This partnership has been shown to enhance academic outcomes for students with disabilities (Fontana, 2005). Effective co-teaching involves shared responsibilities in planning, instruction, and assessment (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010).

King-Sears et al. (2014) define co-teaching as an inclusive strategy involving two or more educators working with a diverse group of students. Successful implementation requires clarity in the division of roles and responsibilities. In some classrooms, the general education teacher leads the instruction while the special education teacher provides targeted support; in others, both teachers co-plan and co-deliver instruction based on student needs (Iacono et al., 2021).

Open and continuous communication is essential for effective collaboration. As Rytivaara (2012) notes, establishing shared responsibilities and trust from the outset of the partnership enables both teachers to navigate unexpected classroom situations more effectively.

The goal of co-teaching is to deliver specialized instruction and create inclusive environments where both teachers leverage their expertise. Innovative training models are now being developed to prepare a new generation of educators who are skilled in supporting diverse learners (Everling, 2013; Alsudairy, 2024; Kimhi & Bar Nir, 2025). A survey conducted by Alotaibi (2017) among 42 Saudi teachers revealed that co-teaching was perceived as highly effective in enhancing academic achievement for students with disabilities. More recent studies have expanded on this by emphasizing the importance of collaborative preparation and ongoing professional development for co-teachers (Raja Al-Amrat, 2024; Tzafrir & Kovač, 2023). Systematic reviews further confirm that effective co-teaching partnerships and inclusive training programs significantly contribute to student success and improved teacher collaboration (Iacono et al., 2021).

Results

The reviewed studies consistently reveal that special education teachers experience significantly higher turnover rates than their counterparts in general education, leading to reduced retention. This high attrition negatively impacts the quality of education for students with special needs.

Several recurring challenges contribute to this trend, including professional burnout, inadequate training, lack of institutional support, and limited access to educational resources.

Teachers frequently reported insufficient support from school administrators, which further exacerbated stress and dissatisfaction. The absence of a supportive working environment, combined with excessive responsibilities and poor training, leads many educators to leave the profession early. On the other hand, studies highlight that effective support systems—such as mentoring, access to instructional materials, and professional development—can significantly improve teacher satisfaction and increase retention rates.

Conclusion

Teaching students with disabilities is a complex and emotionally demanding profession. Special education teachers are often required to manage individualized instruction, behavioral challenges, assessment processes, classroom management, and extensive documentation such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). These responsibilities contribute to higher attrition rates in special education compared to general education.

Key challenges contributing to attrition include insufficient training, an unsupportive work environment, and overwhelming workload demands. Teachers frequently experience burnout and stress due to these conditions, which not only affect their well-being but also impact student learning outcomes. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving teacher effectiveness and increasing retention.

Strategic interventions must focus on developing balanced workloads, ensuring access to adequate teaching resources, offering comprehensive and ongoing professional development, and fostering a positive, collaborative school culture. When special education teachers feel supported, trained, and valued, their performance improves, burnout decreases, and long-term retention becomes more achievable.

As inclusive education continues to expand, ensuring the rights of all learners to receive high-quality education becomes increasingly important. Inclusive educational settings must be designed to meet individual student needs without isolating them from their peers. Special education teachers are central to this mission. Their use of personalized, thoughtful strategies fosters equity and effectiveness in integrated learning environments.

Retaining skilled special educators is not only critical for student success but also fundamental to the advancement of inclusive education as a whole.

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