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Undergraduate Students' Evaluation of Internships in Special Education Programs in Saudi Universities

تقييم طلبة البكالوريوس للتدريب الميداني في برامج التربية الخاصة بالجامعات السعودية

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the views of undergraduate students on internships in special education programs in Saudi universities and delineate any statistically significant differences in the students' views attributable to gender, specialization, university, and grade point average. The study also attempted to investigate the extent to which education outcomes meet the labor market requirements of Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 from the perspective of internship students in special education programs in Saudi universities. To this end, a descriptive approach was applied, using a questionnaire to collect the study data. The study sample consisted of 271 internship students of special education in Saudi universities. The results revealed a high rating level for internships from the perspective of special education students. There were statistically significant differences in the ratings based on gender, with female students reporting better on the academic supervisor dimension. Students specializing in learning disabilities also shared better ratings than those in the autism program, and students with "Excellent" grades reported higher ratings of internship than those with "Good" grades. Overall, there was a high level of compatibility between educational outcomes and the requirements of the labor market stipulated by Vision 2030.

Keywords: evaluation, internship programs, education outcomes.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على آراء طلبة البكالوريوس في التدريب الميداني في برامج التربية الخاصة في الجامعات السعودية وتحديد أي فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في آراء الطلاب تعزى إلى متغير الجنس والتخصص والجامعة ومتوسط الدرجات. كذلك تسعى الدراسة إلى استقصاء وجهة نظر الطلاب تجاه مدى تلبية مخرجات التعليم في برامج التربية الخاصة لمتطلبات سوق العمل الخاصة برؤية المملكة العربية السعودية 2030. ولتحقيق هذه الغاية تم تطبيق المنهج الوصفي باستخدام استبيانه لجمع بيانات الدراسة. وتكونت عينة الدراسة من 271 متدرب في التربية الخاصة في الجامعات السعودية. وكشفت النتائج عن مستوى عالٍ من التصنيف للتدريب الداخلي من منظور طلاب التربية الخاصة. كما أظهرت النتائج أن هناك فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في التقييمات على أساس الجنس، حيث سجلت الطالبات بشكل أفضل في بعد المشرف الأكاديمي. كما شارك الطلاب المتخصصون في تخصصات التعلم تقييمات أفضل من تلك الموجودة في برنامج التوحد، وأفاد الطلاب الحاصلين على درجات "ممتازة" عن درجات تدريب أعلى من أولئك الذين حصلوا على درجات "جيدة". بشكل عام، كان هناك مستوى عالٍ من التوافق بين المخرجات التعليمية ومتطلبات سوق العمل المنصوص عليها في رؤية المملكة 2030.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقييم، برامج التدريب الميداني، مخرجات التعلم.

Introduction

Teachers are the cornerstone of the success of the educational process; hence, educational institutions are making tremendous efforts to qualify teachers in accordance with international quality standards with the intent of improving education and raising the quality of its outcomes.

Further, researchers are paying attention to teacher preparation programs and their capacity to achieve the desired goal, that is, creating a successful teacher.

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In the United States, Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2009) reported on the ongoing debate about the best ways to prepare a successful teacher. Some have suggested that facilitating teachers' entry into the teaching field may attract qualified teachers, who have the ability and potential to succeed in the teaching profession, whereas others posit that investing in high-quality programs that aim to prepare teachers is the most promising approach to teacher preparation. Overall, there is a scarcity of studies that attempt to investigate how teachers are prepared for success.

The teacher preparation process often begins during the university years, and Saudi universities follow an approach that depends on preparing graduates theoretically, practically, and educationally during the university years by developing the program plans in line with the nature of the objectives. The undergraduate programs include a theoretical-methodological stage and an applied one, a strategy that supports the process of the comprehensive preparation of the future teacher.

The practical part of undergraduate programs is called the internship phase, which enables students to apply what they have theoretically learned in the field for a whole semester (Hammad, 2016). Hence, it is the first opportunity for students to engage in practical life and use their knowledge in teaching and learning. Furthermore, internships offer students the opportunity to practice critical thinking, as they create meaning from their experiences and try to discover their identities as teachers. Internships also provide the foundation necessary for the student teacher's growth and professional development, as students have many opportunities to improve and refine their skills, which will help prepare them ethically and professionally (Program in Education, 2020).

Amer (2019) argued that the philosophy of education depends on the number of graduates in high school so that there is a compatibility between the requirements of the labor market and the numbers of graduates. Accordingly, the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) has adopted a policy for accepting students in certain numbers to ensure that qualified and trained human resources are prepared to meet the needs of the labor market.

Preparing special education teachers is one of the topics that preoccupies researchers in the field of special education. This is due to several reasons, including the importance of the target group of

students with disabilities, ensuring the success of the educational process offered to them, and taking into account the individual differences among them. Therefore, universities are keen to prepare students academically and in the field in cooperation with public schools, and private centers. This is done by providing the students with a training opportunity in which they teach persons with disabilities (PWDs) under the supervision of a cooperating teacher from the center or school daily, along with a faculty member, according to clear-cut and consistent criteria, to ensure the achievement of internship objectives and the quality of learning outcomes.

This study aims to investigate students' views on the internship programs run by the Department of Special Education at the universities of Umm Al-Qura, Taif, and Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University by addressing several dimensions, including the evaluation of the academic background that precedes the internship program, academic supervisor, field supervisor, training environment, and internship outcomes. The study also seeks to examine students' evaluation of the compatibility of their educational outcomes with the labor market requirements defined within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) Vision 2030. Lastly, it attempts to investigate any statistically significant differences in students' evaluations of the internship program due to gender, specialization, university, or grade point average (GPA).

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the students' views on internship programs in special education in Saudi universities?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in the students' views on internship programs in special education according to the variables of gender, specialization, university, or GPA?
3. Do the educational outcomes meet the requirements of the labor market according to Vision 2030 from the perspective of the internship students in special education programs in Saudi universities?

Theoretical Framework

This section reviews the concept of evaluation and its importance, the concept of internship and its importance, the concept of education outcomes, the importance of formulating learning outcomes, and the 2030 vision for the education sector.

Concept and Importance of Evaluation

Concept of Evaluation

Evaluation can be defined in several ways. For instance, it is defined by OECD (2022) as a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing process, project, program, or policy by assessing its design, implementation, and results. The evaluation process aims to determine the efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the program under evaluation and the extent to which the objectives of the program are achieved. Evaluation must provide highly credible information and thus allow specialists to benefit from the results of the decision-making process (Bernhard, 2012).

Norris (2016) pointed out that evaluation is the gathering of information about any of the various elements that make up educational programs for a variety of purposes, including understanding, clarifying, developing, and improving the value of the program. It provides evidence of program problems, but the nature of this evidence is not limited to a specific methodology. Weiss (1998) also indicated that evaluation is a systematic process that seeks to improve programs or policies by comparing their outcomes to a set of explicit or implicit criteria with the aim of improving and developing them.

The importance of evaluation

Aydin and Toptas (2017) stated that evaluation and its outcomes play a major role in improving the quality of education and the success of an educational institution. The importance of evaluation is reflected in the five basic principles of good evaluation (Griffiths & King, 1991): i) there must be a goal for the evaluation process, which should not be an end in itself; ii) there is no need for the evaluation process if the program cannot be improved; iii) evaluation should be highly descriptive and take into account the relationship between all parties in the program; iv) evaluation must be continuous, providing a means for monitoring, diagnosis, and change; and v) continuous evaluation must be dynamic in nature so that it reflects new knowledge and changes in the environment.

The importance of evaluation extends to several aspects. According to Roberts (1998), it is a systematic and organized process that aims to measure the appropriateness, adequacy, and effectiveness of the procedure under evaluation. Evaluation fulfils its requirements and makes the required progress if its activities are carried out

according to a planned schedule. The author also stressed that evaluation can be an effective process if it uses the resources allotted to it in the best possible way, and if the results obtained are consistent with its goals and objectives of reducing the volume of the problem or improving an unsatisfactory condition.

Concept and Importance of Internships

Concept of Internship

There is no one specific definition of an internship, as it may take several different forms according to the setting, characteristics, and objective of training (Hora, Wolfram, & Thompson, 2017).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2011) defined internships as a form of experiential learning that combines theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom with practical application and skill development in a professional environment. Internships allow students to gain practical experience value, make connections in areas they are considering in their career paths, and allow employers to mentor and assess talent.

Atkinson (2005) defined an internship as a starting point for the work environment for a beginner looking for a job, as it includes practical experience in the field chosen by students after completing their education; therefore, it is part of the educational program. Internships provide students with several skills that enhance their professional competence and enable them to develop important professional relationships with their employers. Internship programs may be paid or unpaid.

Crumbley and Summers (1998) defined an internship as an activity carried out by students at the postgraduate stage, or as an opportunity to present their talent to the employer, in which case the employer benefits from them as a source of energy in exchange for allowing them to develop their skills and learn about the practical reality of the profession.

Importance of Internship

According to Scholastica (2018) and Hora, Wolfram, and Thompson (2017), education is not limited to classroom learning, as internships provide students with academic wealth and great benefits in four basic ways:

- 1) Students can apply what they have theoretically learned in the internship environment by applying theories and concepts acquired in the classroom in their academic preparation program and, as a result, can develop and acquire new professional skills, and benefit from the techniques provided in the internship environment.
 - 2) Internship allows students to get acquainted with the chosen field, as it allows them to experience the real practical experience of their future career, and accordingly gives the students the option to choose whether to pursue their career or change it.
 - 3) Through educational field experience, students can form and build important professional relationships before graduation, which is a valuable opportunity for later work within the educational institution.
 - 4) Internships allow students to gain practical experience, which gives them the opportunity to find a job. It enables them to put the acquired knowledge into practice and develop their skills for better career opportunities.
- 1) Teachers' or faculty members' knowledge of the importance of formulating learning outcomes allows them to focus on the priorities that help students achieve learning outcomes, using appropriate methods and strategies which enable them to acquire knowledge and evaluate it appropriately. This also helps in the continuity of development based on the students' learning outcomes.
 - 2) Learning outcomes help students achieve the objectives required to acquire the desired learning outcomes at the end of the program and practice active and self-learning to achieve the outcomes, which increases the chance of success and the performance rate.
 - 3) Learning outcomes contribute to raising the level of quality and efficiency of the educational process, which contributes to achieving its vision and mission. They also enable those working on the quality of outcomes to identify strengths and weaknesses and, hence, attempt to improve performance (Aref, Hijazi, & Abdel Hamid, 2018).

Learning Outcomes and Vision 2030 for the Education Sector

Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes, according to the European Union (2011), are a description of all concepts that learners are expected to know, understand, or be able to perform at the end of the learning process, in line with clear-cut goals and expectations set by the teacher or the program developer at the end of a course or the study program. The use of learning outcomes has a significant impact on the education process, training policies, and practices, since the evaluation of learning outcomes aims to make a qualitative leap in terms of curricula and qualifications with the intent of enhancing the learning of individuals. Universities seek to apply academic standards to improve the learning outcomes of academic programs by creating graduates with high specifications and competencies.

Importance of Formulating Learning Outcomes

Researchers have pointed out that learning outcomes and their formulation are of great importance to teachers, students, and universities for the following reasons:

Vision 2030 for the Education Sector

Under Vision 2030, the KSA seeks to develop the education sector by building the philosophy of the curricula and its objectives, activating its objectives, and developing them along with teacher preparation programs. The vision also stresses the development of teaching methods that enhance the role of learners, being the focus of the educational process, supporting them, and upgrading their skills. It also stresses the need to build a rich and supportive school environment that stimulates the educational process in which support services are available to meet individual differences. The vision also focused on the need to integrate PWDs into education and provide appropriate support in all forms for all children with disabilities. Moreover, in accordance with Vision 2030, in 1437 AH, the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the National Transformation Program, which captured initiatives aimed at developing and assessing the quality of performance to identify the challenges that require development and, consequently, achieve the goals of the vision. In this context, the MOE discovered several downsides, including the negative image of the teaching profession, low quality of educational curricula, failure to use innovative modern teaching methods that enhance the quality of the educational process, and students' poor acquisition of the necessary personal skills. In the educational environment, the MOE referred to

the poor educational environment that cannot stimulate creativity and the weak educational outcomes that cannot meet the needs of the labor market. Therefore, the MOE is in the process of supporting inclusive education by providing learning opportunities for all members of society, and improving the educational environment to enhance the acquisition of the necessary life skills in addition to specialized skills required by each profession in various fields. It also seeks to intensively develop curricula, teaching methods, and assessments, and improve the education system to meet the needs of the labor market (OECD (2020)).

Literature Review

Studies on evaluation/problems of internships

Fakhro (2016) attempted to identify the problems facing internship students in the Department of Special Education at Umm Al-Qura University. The researcher used the descriptive analytical method and the questionnaire tool with a study sample of 136 internship students. The findings revealed a gap between what the students learned in theory and what they currently practiced in the internship. The results referred to the schoolteachers' cooperation with the internship students. The insufficient resources in the resource room were also highlighted as the most common problem faced by the internship students, in addition to the poor diagnosis of PWDs in various disciplines and finally, the academic supervisor's failure to make frequent and sufficient visits to evaluate and mentor the trainees.

Jogan (2019) investigated the effectiveness of school internships from the perspective of trained teachers. The researcher used the descriptive approach and the questionnaire tool with a purposeful sample of all internship students with bachelor's degrees (the number was not disclosed). The results of the study showed that the student teachers acquired multiple skills in teaching, in addition to the support and guidance provided by the teachers and their supervisors in the school. The study also indicated that all student teachers were very satisfied with the proper implementation of the school internship program.

Al-Sharaa (2019) identified the problems of internships among students of special education at the University of Hail. The study sample consisted of 142 male and female students in special education. The researcher used a descriptive analytical method to collect data by

means of a questionnaire. The most prominent problems facing the students were related to the school principal, who assigned the students tasks that were not related to special education, while the academic supervisor was at the end of the list of internship problems.

Al-Adwan and Hamdanah (2018) evaluated the quality of the performance of the internship program team at the Department of Special Education in three Jordanian universities (North, Central, and South) from the point of view of schoolteachers and internship students. The researcher used the descriptive approach and the survey method, and the study sample included 407 internship students and 111 field supervisors. The sample was selected using the intentional method of answering the questionnaire, which was used as a research tool. The results of the study revealed a low level of performance for the internship program team of special education, which calls for the development of the program and its outcomes. The results also revealed a statistically significant gender-based difference (0.05) in the mean scores of the internship team performance, in favor of females.

Al-Fawair and Al-Tobi (2017) evaluated internship programs at the College of Science and Arts at the University of Nizwa in the Sultanate of Oman. The researchers used a descriptive approach and a questionnaire for data collection and analysis. The study population included 70 female students from the College of Sciences and Arts in the Child Education Program, the Special Education Program, and the Teacher Preparation Program for General Education at the University of Nizwa. The results of the study showed that the internship program contributed to providing female students with the knowledge and skills required by teachers in general. There were also statistically significant differences in the students' evaluation of the internship program between the general education program and the special education and child education programs.

Studies on the compatibility of learning outcomes with the requirements of the labor market

Aref, Hijazi, and Abdul Hamid (2018) examined the compatibility between the quality of learning outcomes in Saudi universities and the requirements of the Saudi labor market in accordance with Vision 2030. The researchers used a descriptive analytical survey method to meet the purpose of the study. The study sample targeted academic leaders, faculty members,

graduates of all public universities that have institutional accreditation, and employers from sectors seeking to employ graduates. The researchers used three tools for data collection: a questionnaire, content analysis of the documents of the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Labor, and interviews with a cohort of the research sample. The results showed that educational competencies are one of the most important requirements of the Saudi labor market according to Vision 2030. Moreover, the graduates rated their satisfaction with the learning outcomes using the "Very Good" option on the overall scale. The study also showed that the humanities majors suffered from a surplus in the number of graduates. However, the graduates of the humanities and social sciences expressed their dissatisfaction with the learning outcomes due to the poor internship programs to support and develop students' practical skills, and their failure to make use of the major to fulfill their job roles. They also showed dissatisfaction with the quality of the course.

Yusuf and AlBanawi (2016) investigated the compatibility between learning outcomes and the needs of the Saudi labor market. The study targeted 350 employees in the education sector in the KSA as the sample for the study. The results reported that most of the sample participants stressed the need to align education with the needs of the labor market. The study also showed a high rate of unemployment, which puts Saudi teachers under pressure to prepare students in a manner commensurate with local employment due to the gap between the education system and the Saudi labor market. The study also indicated the need to improve the performance of faculty members as a means of aligning learning outcomes with the needs of the Saudi labor market.

Methodology and Procedures

Research Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey method to evaluate internships in special education programs from the students' perspectives. The questionnaire tool was used for data collection, and the survey included many indicators, including academic background, cooperating teacher, academic supervisor, and training environment. SPSS was also used to understand the relationships between all factors and to survey students' evaluation of the internship program of special education. The survey was reviewed by a professor, associate professor, and assistant professor from the members of the

Department of Special Education. The reviewers and researcher reached a high level of agreement (95%), and the researcher reviewed the results of the reviews and modified the survey accordingly.

Study Population

The study population consisted of all male and female BA students of special education in all majors, including learning disabilities, mental disabilities, hearing impairments, behavioral disorders, autism, and visual impairments, to provide the opportunity for all students to participate in the evaluation of their internship program.

Study Sample

Pilot Sample

The pilot sample consisted of 60 students of special education who responded to a questionnaire on the views of male and female students of special education on internship programs to verify the psychometric efficiency of the questionnaire.

Final Sample and its Characteristics

In total, 271 students were observed for the purpose of this study.

Study Tool

A 47-item questionnaire was developed to identify students' evaluations of internships in special education programs. The researcher built the questionnaire after reviewing the internship manuals in a few Saudi universities.

The questionnaire included several variables, including students as the independent variable. The independent variables were gender, university, specialization, and GPA. There are two sections to the questionnaire. The first includes five main dimensions that address the process of evaluating internships by students in special education programs. The five dimensions are i) academic background (5 items), ii) academic supervisor (8 items), ii) field supervisor (9 items), iv) training environment (8 items), and v) internship outcomes (13 items). In the first section of the questionnaire, the researcher collected the evaluation of the study sample for the five dimensions using a 3-point Likert scale (Agree, Neutral, Disagree).

The second section of the questionnaire included the students' evaluations of the compatibility of

education outcomes with the requirements of the labor market. Five answer options were used (met to a very large degree, met to a large extent, met to a moderate degree, met to a low degree, and not met).

Psychometric properties of the study tool

The validity of the study tool was established through face validity. The tool was judged by 10 experts in the field of special education and psychology, and the internal consistency of the tool was verified using Pearson correlation coefficients. To verify the tool's reliability, the half-split and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated.

Face Validity

The researcher administered the initial version of the questionnaire to the pilot sample (standardized sample), which consisted of 60 male and female students of special education in Saudi universities, to identify the extent to which participants in the pilot test understood the terms and instructions of the questionnaire. This sample was excluded from the final study sample selected.

Internal Consistency (Between Each Item and the Total Score of the Questionnaire)

The researcher calculated the correlation coefficients between the score of each item and the total score to survey the views of male and

female students of special education on internship programs after deducting the item score from the total score.

The correlation coefficients were high and significant at the 0.01–0.05 level, which indicates the validity of the questionnaire items. The correlation coefficient ranged between 0.336 and 0.920, which also proved the validity of the questionnaire items.

Internal consistency (Between the Item and the Total Score of its Respective Dimensions)

The researcher calculated the correlation coefficients between the score of each item and the total score of the dimension to which it belonged after deducting the item score from the total score of the axis.

The values of the correlation coefficients were high and significant at the 0.01 level and ranged between 0.379 and 0.969, indicating the validity of the questionnaire's items.

Internal consistency (Between the Dimension Score and the Total Score of the Questionnaire)

The researcher calculated the correlation coefficients between the score of each dimension and the total score of the questionnaire after deducting the dimension score from the total score.

Table 1.

Correlation coefficients between the score of each dimension and the total score of the questionnaire (n = 60)

| Dimensions | Correlation coefficient |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Academic background | 0.771** |
| Academic supervisor | 0.962** |
| Field supervisor | 0.971** |
| Training environment | 0.949** |
| Application Stage (Training outcomes) | 0.922** |

** Correlation coefficients at the 0.01 level

* Correlation coefficients at the 0.05 level.

- The table was created by the researcher

Table 1 demonstrates that the values of the correlation coefficients were high and significant at the 0.01 level, which indicates the validity of the dimensions of the questionnaire.

Reliability of the Questionnaire

The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated from the views of students of special education on the internship programs, using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the split-half method to calculate the internal consistency of the dimensions of the questionnaire.

Table 2.

Values of the reliability coefficients by the Cronbach's alpha method, the split-half method, and the Guttman equation of the questionnaire (n = 60)

| Dimensions | Cronbach's alpha | Reliability level | Split-Half | Gutmann | Reliability level |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|---------|-------------------|
| Academic background | 0.885 | high | 0.924 | 0.892 | high |
| Academic supervisor | 0.806 | high | 0.864 | 0.851 | high |
| Field supervisor | 0.847 | high | 0.858 | 0.855 | high |
| Training environment | 0.764 | high | 0.724 | 0.716 | high |
| Application stage (training outcomes) | 0.985 | high | 0.986 | 0.983 | high |
| Total score of the scale | 0.974 | high | 0.930 | 0.926 | high |

Cronbach's alpha ● low < (0.5) ● moderate (0.5–0.7) ● high > (0.7)

Table 2 demonstrates that all the values of the reliability coefficients were greater than 0.7, which ensured our confidence in the reliability of the questionnaire.

* The table was created by the researcher

The Final Version of the Questionnaire

Since the questionnaire items and the views of students of special education on internship programs were all valid and consistent, none of them were excluded; therefore, the initial version remained the same. According to the 3-point Likert scale (3, 2, 1), the maximum score was 141, and the minimum was 47. The higher the scores, the higher the rating levels of special education students in the internship programs, and vice versa.

Statistical Methods Used in the Study

The statistical techniques used in this study were:

1. Descriptive statistics through means, standard deviations, and relative weights

Table 3.

Arithmetic means and standard deviations of the study tool dimensions.

| Dimensions | Mean | SD | Weight | Rank | Level |
|----------------------|-------|-------|--------|------|-------|
| Academic background | 2.387 | 0.469 | 79.57 | 5 | high |
| Academic supervisor | 2.531 | 0.569 | 84.37 | 4 | high |
| Field supervisor | 2.606 | 0.502 | 86.87 | 2 | high |
| Training environment | 2.575 | 0.448 | 85.83 | 3 | high |
| Application stage | 2.77 | 0.33 | 92.33 | 1 | high |
| Total score | 2.574 | 0.362 | 85.8 | | high |

*The table was created by the researcher

The results revealed that the students of special education highly rated the internship program, a result consistent with those of Jogan (2019),

2. Inferential statistics through correlation coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, and split-half methods
3. T-test and Kruskal–Wallis test to establish the validity of the study hypotheses

Results and Discussion

Results of the First Question

To answer the first study question, “How do students of special education view the internship programs in Saudi universities?,” the researcher calculated the frequencies, percentages, arithmetic averages, standard deviations, and ranks of the results of the views of students of special education on internship programs and identified the actual use level of the tool dimensions (academic background, academic supervisor, field supervisor, training environment, and stage of application (“training outcomes”).

AlZahrani and Brigham (2017), Aletewey (2016), and Hussain (2010). Regarding the tool dimensions, the application stage (training

outcomes) came first in rating (high level). This is also due to the students' achievement of the internship outcomes, in terms of their high ability to carry out the educational process, and their professional readiness for the future. The phrase *I can accept people with disabilities* scored the highest mean (2.915), which reflects the internship students' acceptance of PWDs, despite the difference and diversity of disabilities in the field.

The field supervisor dimension ranked second ($M = 2.606$), which is consistent with the findings by Aletewey (2016). This may be attributed to the importance of field supervisors and their roles in the success of internships. These roles include preparing students for the teaching task in addition to offering support, follow-up, mentorship, problem-solving, and assessment according to the standards agreed upon with the faculty member (the academic supervisor). The phrase *There is a good relationship between the field supervisor and the trainee student* scored the highest average (2.815), which reflects the unlimited support of the field supervisors in improving students' performance and preparing them for the future. This was also confirmed by Fakhro (2016), who indicated that the cooperating teacher cooperated with the internship students and supported them appropriately.

The third-place rating was scored by the training environment dimension ($M = 2.575$). The reason for this result may be attributed to the suitability of the internship environment for the students, in terms of the location of the training site, students' freedom to choose it, the interaction and the positive relationship between internship students and school personnel, including administrative staff and teachers, appropriateness of the classroom environment and its readiness, and availability of an appropriate number of students in the classroom. The phrase *I gained information about the nature of the school environment and its work rules* scored the highest average ($M = 2.849$), which is contrary to the results reported by Aletewey (2016), who demonstrated a moderate level of student satisfaction for the potential or training environment dimension.

The academic supervisor dimension ranked fourth (2.531), as most of the phrases in the dimension scored high from the point of view of the internship students. This may be attributed to the importance of the academic supervisor's role in solving students' problems and evaluating them fairly using clear-cut criteria, providing

them with feedback, and encouraging their professional growth. The results also showed that the satisfaction level of students was moderate regarding the number of visits by the academic supervisor (3 visits during the training period). They also showed moderate satisfaction regarding the adequacy of the academic supervisor's visits to determine the performance level of the trainee student, which means that the academic supervisor may be present fewer than three times during the training period, and his visits are not sufficient to determine the performance level of the trainee student. This result is consistent with that of Al-Ali (2017), who indicated minor problems in internships related to academic supervisors. The findings are also in agreement with Al-Sharaa's (2019) study, whose results showed that the academic supervisor was the lowest dimension in the internship problems faced by students. Further, Fakhro (2016) indicated that one of the problems faced by field education students is the lack of sufficient visits by the academic supervisor to students in internship programs to assess them appropriately.

The academic background dimension came at the end of the list ($M = 2.387$), although its rating level was also high. The reason for this may be ascribed to the fact that the academic background helped students learn the characteristics and abilities of children with disabilities in light of the theoretical studies that were addressed in the special education program. The observation may also result from their knowledge of modern teaching strategies, which helped them learn how to develop multiple educational aids to meet the needs of PWDs, and their willingness to work in the field. The results of the current study also showed that the phrase *The theoretical side was compatible with the practical one* and had a moderate rating level in students' evaluation of the academic background of the special education program. These results are consistent with those of Al-Ali (2017), who confirmed the existence of a difference between a theoretical study and a practical one. However, the findings are contrary to what was reported by Fakhro (2016), who referred to the incompatibility of the theoretical side with the practical side, since students feel a big gap between the two sides due to the disparity between theory and practice during the study phase.

The results also showed that students moderately rated their knowledge of practical field experiences before starting their internships. Students reported a moderate level of satisfaction with the adequacy of micro-teaching in teacher

training, which means that the students need to increase the periods of micro-teaching during the theoretical academic study period.

Results of the Second Question

To answer the second study question, “Are there statistically significant differences in students’ views on internship programs in special education according to gender, specialization, university, GPA variables?” the researcher used several tests and methods depending on the target variable.

Differences Due to Gender

To determine the differences in the views of students of special education on internship programs that are attributed to gender (males and females), a t-test was used for the two independent groups. The results detected significant differences at the 0.01 level in the views of male and female students of special education on internship programs in all dimensions and the total score due to the gender variable for the benefit of females. However, the difference related to the fourth dimension (training environment) was not significant.

The results are consistent with those of Al-Ali (2017) and Al-Adwan and Hamdanah (2018), whose findings revealed statistically significant differences in the academic supervisor dimension for the benefit of females. This may be due to the argument that females are more capable of the academic theoretical aspect of the special education program and are keener to know everything related to the internship program from the academic and field supervisors and more motivated to achieve the desired benefit of the training. Accordingly, females achieve higher grades in the internship phase, which confirms their mastery of internship outcomes. Females also view internships not only as a requirement but also as a process with humanitarian aspects that aim to educate PWDs and meet the individual differences among them.

Differences Due to Specialization (Learning Disabilities, Autism, Mental Disabilities, Hearing Impairments)

To assess the differences in the views of students of special education on internships attributable to specialization (learning disabilities, autism, mental disabilities, hearing impairment programs), the researcher used non-laboratory tests due to the large discrepancy in the preparation of specialization categories in

addition to the Kruskal–Wallis test. According to the results, statistically significant differences were found at the 0.05 level in the total score for the views of students of special education on internship programs due to the variable of major specialization. To identify the direction of the differences, a Mann–Whitney post-test was conducted, which revealed the existence of differences between learning disabilities and autism in favor of learning disabilities, while there were no differences between the remaining specialization categories.

This result is consistent with those reported by Aletwey (2016) and Hussain (2010), whose findings confirmed that most student teachers expressed their satisfaction with the effectiveness of the program for preparing teachers of students with learning disabilities. This may be attributed to the nature and characteristics of learning disabilities, as teaching children with learning disabilities is much easier than teaching those with developmental disabilities, such as autism. The observation may also be due to the appropriateness of the internship environment for students as they received their training in public schools, the high compatibility and understanding between them and the academic and field supervisors, and their mastery of the internship outcomes, which means they are professionally ready for the future.

Differences Due to University (14 Saudi Universities)

Differences in the views of students of special education on internship programs attributed to their specific universities (Umm Al-Qura; Prince Sattam; Taif; King Saud; Najran; Imam Abdul Rahman bin Faisal; Jazan; Jeddah; Taiba; Shaqra; Muhammad bin Saud Islamic; Northern Border; Noura bint Abdul Rahman; and Al-Baha) were also assessed. For this, the researcher used non-laboratory tests due to the large discrepancy in the number of university categories, in addition to the Kruskal–Wallis test. According to the results, there were statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level in the overall score due to the university variable. To determine the direction of the differences, a Mann–Whitney post-test was conducted, which revealed differences between the University of Umm Al-Qura and Taif University, with students from the former reporting higher ratings. Students from Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University also reported higher ratings than those from the universities of Um Al-Qura, Taif, and Jeddah. Similarly, the ratings were higher among students from Northern Border University than

those from the universities of Umm Al-Qura, Taif, Jeddah, and Taiba.

The researcher ascribed the above results to the differences related to the university’s special education programs, as well as differences in personnel, curricula, special education services, and specialized centers, which are essential elements in preparing student-teachers.

GPA (Excellent, Very Good, Good, Pass)

To determine the differences in the views of students of special education on internship programs attributable to the GPA (excellent, very good, good, pass), the researcher used non-laboratory tests due to the large discrepancy in the number of university categories in addition to the Kruskal-Wallis test. According to the results, there were statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level in the total score of the views of students of special education on internship programs due to the GPA variable. To track the direction of the differences, a Mann–Whitney

post-test was conducted, which revealed differences between the category of students with the “excellent” grade and those with “good” in favor of the former. However, no differences were detected between the other categories. This is due to the motivation of the excellent-grade students to fulfil the internship program requirements and benefit from their field experience to achieve the learning outcomes. However, this result is contrary to previous findings by Al-Ali (2017), whose study showed no statistically significant differences due to the GPA variable.

Results of the Third Question

To answer the third study question, “Do the educational outcomes meet the requirements of the labor market according to Vision 2030 from the point of view of internship students in Saudi universities?” the researcher calculated the frequencies, percentages, arithmetic averages, standard deviations, and ranks of the results of the students’ responses.

Table 4.

The mean, deviation, and relative importance of the responses to the requirements of the labor market according to the vision of 2030 from the point of view of internship program students in Saudi universities.

| Requirements of the labor market according to Vision 2030 | Mean | SD | Weight | Level |
|---|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| | 3.517 | 1.092 | 70.33 | High |

* The table was created by the researcher

According to the results, there are high rating levels for the compatibility of education outcomes with the requirements of the labor market in accordance with Vision 2030. This is due to the fact that the field of special education is the field of employment, and there will continue to be a constant need for it, whether through public or private special education institutions. However, this result differs from those of Aref, Hijazi, and Abdel Hamid’s (2018) study, which indicated that the rate of graduates’ satisfaction with learning outcomes was moderate (very good). Similarly, the observations contradict those of Yusuf and AlBanawi (2016), who detected a gap between the education system and the labor market in the KSA with a consistent increase in the rate of unemployment among graduates.

Conclusion

The current study concluded that the level of students’ evaluation of the internship program was high due to its success in meeting the goals for which it was set. It also showed the students’ eagerness to benefit from this critical period,

which contributed to the efficient preparation of special education teachers and students’ readiness to accept various disabilities in the field and overcome them. This also confirmed the efforts of the field supervisor, who guided and evaluated students to meet the desired goals since the good relationship between the supervisor and the students encourages them to raise students’ efficiency. Furthermore, the study concluded that internship students perceived statistically significant differences (with higher scores for females) in the dimension of the academic and field supervisor, academic background, and application stage. Moreover, significant differences were also found in the variable of specialization with specialists in learning disabilities reporting higher, due to the nature of the disability and the efficient preparation of teachers of students with learning disabilities. Regarding the university variable and its impact on the efficiency of the internship program, significant differences emerge between several universities based on the different programs, faculty members, and teaching methods evaluation methods among these universities. Finally, the study revealed that the outcomes of

education were compatible with the requirements of the labor market in accordance with Vision 2030, through which the government sought to develop the education sector and provide high-quality education for PWDs, by raising the efficiency of teachers through the training programs provided to them.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Prepare students of special education for the field from the first years of the program, by providing continuous field visits, which help in giving them a good idea about how to teach PWDs and their readiness for it.
2. Develop a standard manual for field training among the special education departments in Saudi universities, emphasizing the importance of setting clear-cut criteria for evaluation during the internship phase.
3. Increase the duration of internship to more than one semester, so that students can meet its goals and outcomes.
4. Make use of the results of the current study in improving and developing the internship programs in Saudi universities.
5. There is an urgent need for the Ministry of Education to work alongside the Ministry of Labor to support the compatibility between the requirements of the labor market and the number of graduates from the Special Education Department.
6. Develop the curricula of special education programs in order to satisfy the students' cognitive desires and help them know the field in its true applied form.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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