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The Role of Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Education in Basic Schools in Kurdistan Region-Iraq

Assist. Lecturer: Adnan Abdulkareem Abdulqader Gorani*

Duhok Polytechnique University

adnan.gorani87@gmail.com

&

Assist. Lecturer: Najmuldeen Shamsulddin Mahmood

Salahaddin University/ College of basic Education

najeem.mahmood1969@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study is conducted to investigate the teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. The participants are teachers from primary schools who have at least one student with special needs learning within the ordinary class. The study aims to clarify the teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and to identify the difficulties of implementing inclusive education, in addition, to showing the role of regular and special education teachers in promoting inclusive education. To achieve the aims of the study, it is worth eliciting the answers from the teachers' feelings towards inclusive education and finding the challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education in the basic schools in the city of Duhok. The study structure is based on both primary and secondary sources. The first one is a questionnaire used to collect data from the teachers' opinions and attitudes, and the second one is the sources from various books, journals, and research articles related to inclusive education. The study also includes the views and thoughts of the researchers as they have experiences in the field. This study has tried to provide some

* **Corresponding Author:** Adnan Abdulkareem, **E-mail:** adnan.gorani87@gmail.com

Affiliation: Duhok Polytechnique University- Iraq

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information regarding teachers' perceptions, challenges, and concerns about implementing Inclusive education in the basic schools in the Kurdistan region. An integrative questionnaire is used as a study design to investigate the teachers' attitudes. 15 teachers have responded to the questionnaire, namely 8 inclusive education teachers, and 7 regular teachers. These samples are taken by using systematic random sampling to give a fair and equal chance of selection for both types of teachers. The findings indicate that even though some opportunities support inclusive education, regular teachers do not support the idea of having students with disabilities in their classes. The regular teachers do not feel comfortable having students with disabilities in their classes. Consequently, there is a challenge to impede the implementation of inclusive education. Overall, it can be concluded that the teachers lack the awareness, knowledge, and adequate training to be supportive of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Inclusive teacher, Students with disability

دور المعلمين في تنفيذ التعليم المدمج في المدارس الابتدائية في إقليم كردستان

عدنان عبدالكريم عبدالقادر

جامعة التقنية دھوك

و

نجم الدين شمس الدين محمود

كلية التربية الاساس / جامعة صلاح الدين

المستخلص

أجريت هذه الدراسة لبحث توجهات المعلمين نحو التعليم المدمج. المشاركون في الاستبيان هم معلمون/معلمات من المدارس الابتدائية الذين على الأقل لديهم طالب واحد من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة داخل الصف العادي. تهدف الدراسة إلى توضيح توجهات المعلمين نحو التعليم المدمج والتعرف على صعوبات تنفيذ هذا التعليم، بالإضافة إلى بيان دور معلمي التعليم العادي والخاص في تعزيز التعليم المدمج. ولتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة يجدر استخلاص الإجابات من آراء المعلمين تجاه التعليم المدمج وإيجاد التحديات التي تواجه تنفيذ التعليم المدمج في المدارس الابتدائية في مدينة دھوك. يعتمد هيكل الدراسة على المصادر الأولية والثانوية. الأول عبارة عن استبيان يستخدم لجمع البيانات من آراء المعلمين ومواقفهم، والثاني عبارة عن مصادر من مختلف الكتب والمجلات والمقالات البحثية المتعلقة بالتعليم المدمج. حاولت هذه الدراسة تقديم بعض المعلومات المتعلقة بآراء المعلمين وتحدياتهم ومخاوفهم بشأن تنفيذ التعليم المدمج في المدارس الابتدائية في إقليم كردستان

العراق. تم استخدام استبيان تكاملي كتصميم دراسة للتعرف على توجهات المعلمين. وقد استجاب 15 معلمًا للاستبيان، وهم 8 معلمين من ذوي التعليم المدمج، و7 معلمين عاديين. وقد تم أخذ هذه العينات باستخدام الاختبار العشوائي لإعطاء فرصة عادلة ومتساوية في الاختيار لكلا النوعين من المعلمين. تشير النتائج إلى أنه على الرغم من أن بعض الفرص تدعم التعليم المدمج، إلا أن المعلمين العاديين لا يدعمون فكرة وجود طلاب ذوي إعاقة في فصولهم الدراسية. أي أن المعلمون العاديون لا يشعرون بالارتياح لوجود طلاب ذوي إعاقة في فصولهم الدراسية. وبالتالي، هناك تحدي يتمثل في عرقلة تنفيذ التعليم المدمج. بشكل عام، يمكن الاستنتاج أن المعلمين يفتقرون إلى الوعي والمعرفة والتدريب الكافي لدعم التعليم المدمج.

الكلمات الدالة: التعليم المدمج، المعلم الخاص، تلاميذ ذوي الإعاقة

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PROBLEM

The term inclusive education to most extent is quite new for our teachers and even to the Ministry of Education (MoE) in KRG-Iraq, therefore, our education system does not have enough knowledge and expertise in this regard. This has negatively affected the process of implementing the strategies of inclusive education in the basic schools. First, Basic school teachers do not know how to treat the children with special needs due to the lack of knowledge and training. Second, some basic schoolteachers hold negative attitudes to inclusive education. In brief, the problem that this study is trying to uncover is that the majority of the teachers do not understand the main goal of the inclusive education which tries to include the students with disabilities within the regular class, more specifically, the teachers who have not received any awareness or training on the goals and objectives of the inclusive education have negative attitude towards inclusive education. Therefore, there are various challenges that this study tries to uncover to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education. The current studies regarding inclusive education do not deal with the attitudes of basic schoolteachers toward inclusive education. Basic schoolteachers have difficulties in implementing inclusive education in regular classes.

1.2 THE AIMS

This study aims to; identifying the challenges of the process of inclusive education that affect the implementation; discovering the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education; exploring the role of regular and special education teachers in promoting inclusive education.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the aims mentioned above, these research questions have been formulated:

1. How do regular and special education teachers feel about inclusive education?
2. What are the best opportunities for inclusive education in these schools?
3. What are the challenges that teachers face in the implementation of inclusive education?

1.4 THE LIMITS

The study depends on both primary and secondary sources. The researchers have selected various books, journals, and research articles for the primary sources. For the secondary sources, the researchers have used a questionnaire to collect data from the teachers' views and attitudes, who have at least one student with special needs in their class. In addition, the methodology of the study also includes the views and thoughts of the researchers as they have experiences and are engaged in the implementation of Inclusive Education.

1.5. THE VALUE

The current attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education, (learning of students with disability (SWD) in regular education classrooms), could help to develop solutions that can be implemented to improve inclusive programs. This study will seek the teachers' background and capacity, whether they have had proper training or support to work in an inclusive setting, and how they feel towards inclusive education. This study will provide some information regarding teachers' views, challenges, and concerns about the implementation of Inclusive education in the primary schools in the Kurdistan region. There are two main benefits of this study: first, to determine if teachers are supportive or non-supporting of inclusive programs. Second, I will make recommendations to address teachers' attitudes with the possibility of sending a copy of the outcomes of this term paper to The Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan Regional Government, to consider the strategies and policies of inclusive education.

2. SCOPE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The term special education needs cover a wide range of students who have a learning difficulty, which calls for special educational provision. Inclusion in education is recognized as a basic human right and the foundation for more justice and equal society (Forlin, 2013). These needs include; 1. Students who have difficulties in learning than the majority of students of the same age and level; 2. Students with a disability that hinders them from making use of the regular educational facilities that have been provided for the students from the same range; 3. Students who need extra support and specific provision because they have abilities significantly ahead of their peers. "Some children appear to grow normally until they face the academic demands of school. These learners cannot make their way to continue compensating for the added content-learning demands. Their performance problems are sometimes rooted in reading disorders" (Barazanja, 2022).

While inclusive education often means learning will be most effective in the same class or group, we need to consider what specific learning support and interventions are most appropriate in individual contexts (Council, 2013).

Generally, the term inclusive education can be defined as a learning process of both children with and without disability in the same classroom, using appropriate materials that meet their various needs, learning, and participating in the same lessons. In an inclusive school, students with disabilities do not study in separate classes; instead, teaching methods, materials, and the school environment are adapted to apply to all students. Therefore, inclusive education is in the interest of everyone, and everyone's single involvement is similarly valued.

2.1 IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN KURDISTAN REGION

The Inclusive Education Program of the Kurdistan Region Government with the support of inclusive learning materials and staff training, early intervention, and inclusive education has stated the implantation of the program. The early intervention and inclusive education practices were launched in 2004, the Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan Region Government-Iraq developed the inclusive education Program in 2007, in collaboration with the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Program has been supported both financially and technically by UNICEF to reproduce the process of inclusive education, which includes the early intervention centres, developing materials, and training staff. In early 2007, the initial steps towards an inclusive education program were made (Alborz, 2013).

2.2 FACTS AND FIGURES

The Pilot Program was conducted in Dohuk, Hawler, Sulaimania, Kirkuk, and Koya in 2004, while in 2007 the Program improved and reached 316 children through 42 schools and 62 teachers; by 2010, the number had increased to head 2,051 children throughout 318 schools, and 400 teachers. In the same year, the program was supported by more activities, which included seven awareness-raising seminars in addition to a school campaign, also six early intervention centres have been opened. In addition, the manual of the training program and curriculum has been modified, illustrated, and translated into the local language to be feasible for the teachers (Chesterton, 2008).

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Upon reviewing related literature, it is necessary to review the international view of the concept of Inclusive education and to take a historical background of the research account that has been conducted in this field to highlight the concept as a practice.

Based on Mustofa Kamil (2014), in his study entitled "Education Empowerment Model for the Disabled Students", which was conducted to investigate the challenges faced by the Schools for Special Education in their work to enable people with disabilities to be empowered. The study was meant to describe the stages of the empowerment of disabled groups through schools for special education and present an appropriate educational model, as well as to identify the challenges. The study concluded with the fact that the education empowerment model can lead to developing strong people living with disabilities that allow them to advocate for their own needs. The study added that this empowerment model can contribute to the improvement of knowledge and skills of people with disabilities (Kamil, 2014).

According to Dr Shazli Hasan Khan's study about Fostering Inclusive Education through Community Development in India (Khan, 2013), stated a range of challenges confronting the school system while including children with different needs. The study concludes with some recommendations such as capacity building for inclusive education must include the community via conducting awareness-raising activities. The study values the role, legislative framework, and community mobilization and involvement to meet the needs of children with disabilities in both formal and non-formal settings.

According to the two studies, there has been a shortage of the provision of support which is essential for the effective implementation of inclusive education. However, there is a sort of contradiction in the studies conducted. Therefore, it is worth recommending

additional research to elaborate on all the aspects, factors, and stakeholders that contribute to the success of inclusive education.

To conclude, this study has explored a sort of contradiction amongst the teacher's view, therefore, the researcher suggests further studies to find out the reasons that associate this contradiction.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researchers have circulated questionnaires to 15 teachers from Duhok Provinces. They were teachers from different basic schools; the teachers were regular in-service and Inclusive education teachers. The researchers selected the participants randomly; however, the researchers aimed to choose two kinds of teachers; this is because the inclusive teachers have profound background knowledge in the field of inclusive education. In addition, it is expected that inclusive education teachers will have different points of view from the regular teachers. Other variables that have been considered to obtain more specific results such as the age of teachers, years of teaching experience, whether they teach inclusive education or not, and if they have been trained on how to deal with the students with disabilities in regular classes.

The tool used in this study is a questionnaire, which is developed to include the items that are necessary to gather relevant data that are important to contribute to the purpose of this study. The questionnaire consists of two parts: part one of the questionnaire is dedicated to general information and specific background of the participants which are essential to understand the environmental surroundings of the respondents.

Part two of the questionnaire includes 13 items with Likert-type scales. The scales ranged from; Disagree (D), Agree (A), and Neutral (N).

Regarding the validity of the questionnaire, it has been shared with the jury members who have experience in the field and hold PhD degrees.

The items have been created to address different areas that affect the teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education implementation. For example, the items address the impacts of inclusive education implementation on the education system, whether regular teachers have been trained to adapt to teach students with disabilities, and how the teachers support the implementation of inclusive education. The impact of inclusive education on regular teachers, if it boosts regular teachers' instructional effectiveness, and how it affects the learning environment in the regular education setting. The items are systematically formed to use different ways that seek the participants' attitudes. Out of 13 items, 9 items have been developed to indicate positive views towards the implementation of inclusive education and the availability of materials and resources. At the same time, 5 items have been developed to indicate the negative views on the inclusion of the SWD in regular and public education settings. The purpose of this formation is not to get the teacher's responses directly towards or against inclusive education but to allow them to respond without bias. The questionnaires have been sent online through a LINK of the Google Form to those teachers from the schools that implement inclusive education, and the schools that have at least one student with a disability involved in the learning process. The questionnaires have been sent to both regular education and inclusive education teachers. Teachers then filled in the questionnaires through the Google form and submitted them directly. The questionnaire includes instructions on how to fill in the questionnaire, it has been designed in such a

way that does not allow to retrieve any personal information to keep the respondents anonymous so as not to skew the teachers' responses. The data was collected automatically by Google sheet, and then the researchers used the percentage statistical to analyze the data electronically through the Microsoft Office/ Excel application using the below equation. The number of responses divided by the total number of participants multiplied by 100: $(\text{responses} / \text{participants}) \times 100 = \%$.

3.1 DATA COLLECTION

For the quantitative data, an interpretive research analysis has been conducted. Because the purpose of the interpretive research is to understand the setting and the background from the perspective of the participants. Responses to the items have been typed exactly and separate analytical research analysis has been conducted. The logic that has been applied is inductive reasoning because data has been gathered first and then integrated inductively to generate interpretations. The questionnaire was sent out through a Link to the Google Form to each teacher, and then teachers filled in the questionnaires. 7 questionnaire forms have been received from regular education teachers and 8 backed from inclusive education teachers.

4. DISCUSSION

1. Item One

Responses to item one of the questionnaires show that 40% of the basic schoolteacher agree disagree that both children with and without disability should be educated together in a regular class, whereas 47% of them agree with the idea. 13% of them stay neutral.

2.Item Two

60% of the teachers agree that normal and disabled students could benefit from inclusive education. On the contrary, 13% of them show their disagreement to the idea. 27% of them remain neutral.

3.Item Three

On the one hand, 53% of basic schoolteacher say that inclusive education has a positive effect on the social and emotional development of students with disabilities. On the other hand, 13% of them, disagree with the item. 33% of them show their neutrality.

4.Item Four

73 % of basic schoolteachers agree that the needs of students with disabilities can be better served in separate settings, while 13% of them show their disagreement with the idea and remain neutral.

5.Item Five

67 % of the basic schoolteachers agree that inclusive education programs lead to promote student's understanding to accept individual diversity, whereas 33% of them remain neutral.

6.Item Six

More than half the basic schoolteachers (67%) agree that children with severe disabilities should be educated in special school, whereas 20% of them disagree with the idea and 13% of them remain neutral.

7.Item Seven

60% of the basic schoolteachers mention that inclusive education looks good theoretically but 13% of them say that it does not work well practically. 27% of them stay neutral.

8. Item Eight

53% of the basic schoolteachers reject that there are sufficient supportive resources and professional pedagogies to back inclusive education in public schools, whereas 27% of them agree with the idea of the item and 20% of them stay neutral.

9. Item Nine

33% of the basic schoolteacher disagree that they have been trained to use different teaching methods to meet the needs of the students with and without disabilities, whereas the same percentage (33%) agree with the item. 33% of them remain neutral.

10. Item Ten

27% of the basic schoolteachers agree and disagree that they have enough knowledge and skills to educate the students with disabilities in regular classes. The rest (47%) remain neutral.

11. Item Eleven

47% of the basic schoolteachers express their agreement that they feel comfortable to have students with disabilities in their classes, whereas 27% disagree with the idea and 27% of them remain neutral.

12. Item Twelve

47% of the basic schoolteachers agree that inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classes has negative impacts on the teaching and learning process, whereas 27% of them disagree with that and 27% of them stay neutral.

13. Item Thirteen

53% of the basic schoolteachers agree that having students with disabilities in regular classes boosts their instructional effectiveness, whereas 33% of them disagree with the item. 13% of them remain neutral.

Overall, In the light of the above results, most of the teachers hold positive perspectives to inclusive education. They also believe that inclusive education programs promote students to understand and accept individual diversity. Moreover, they hold the opinion that inclusive education leads to students' academic improvement regardless of their disability. Additionally, they think that inclusive education has a positive impact on the social and emotional development of student with disabilities. However, they do not agree to have students with disabilities in their class. It seems that there is sort of contradiction in their opinions on this regard.

Regarding the availability of resources and professional pedagogies to support inclusive education, more than half the basic teachers are in the opinion that there are not sufficient supportive resources and training programs to support the implementation of inclusive education. So, the findings of the study match the findings of the study conducted by (Khan, 2013) which encourages capacity building programs. The study also is in parallel to the study carried out by (Moutofa Kamil, 2014) which concludes with some challenges such as the lack of knowledge and skills within the educators and teachers who teach students with disabilities. This study highlights some new findings including that more than half the basic schoolteachers are in the opinion that inclusive education cannot be

implemented practically. While, they hold the positive view regarding inclusive education programs promote students to understand and accept individual diversity. Despite having a generally positive attitude toward inclusive education programs, teachers feel that the behaviors of some students with disabilities take away from instructional time and they do not have the time to implement inclusive education effectively. Most of the basic schoolteachers believe children with disability should be educated in separate special schools, and the needs of students with disabilities can be better served in separate settings, that is they need special education. The overall results are shown in chart no. 1.

Table No. 1 The Results of Study

Sr.	Questions	Percentage %		
		D	A	N
1	Both children with and without disability should be educated in regular class?	40 %	47 %	13 %
2	Inclusive education can help both students with and without disabilities to get academic improvement.	13 %	60 %	27 %
3	Inclusive education has a positive effect on the social and emotional development of SWD.	13 %	53 %	33 %
4	The needs of students with disabilities can be better served in special schools.	13 %	73 %	13 %
5	Inclusive education programs promote students to understand and accept individual diversity.	0 %	67 %	33 %
6	Children with severe disabilities should be educated in special schools.	20 %	67 %	13 %
7	Inclusive education looks good theoretically but does not work well practically.	13 %	60 %	27 %
8	There are sufficient supportive resources and professional pedagogies to support inclusive education in public schools.	53 %	27 %	20 %
9	I have been trained to use different teaching methods to meet the needs of the students with and without disabilities.	33 %	33 %	33 %
10	I have sufficient knowledge and skills to educate the students with disabilities in regular class.	27 %	27 %	47 %
11	I feel comfortable to have students with disabilities in my class.	27 %	47 %	27 %
12	Inclusion of students with disabilities in regular class has negative impact on the teaching and learning process.	27 %	47 %	27 %
13	Having students with disabilities in regular class boosts teachers' instructional effectiveness.	33 %	53 %	13 %

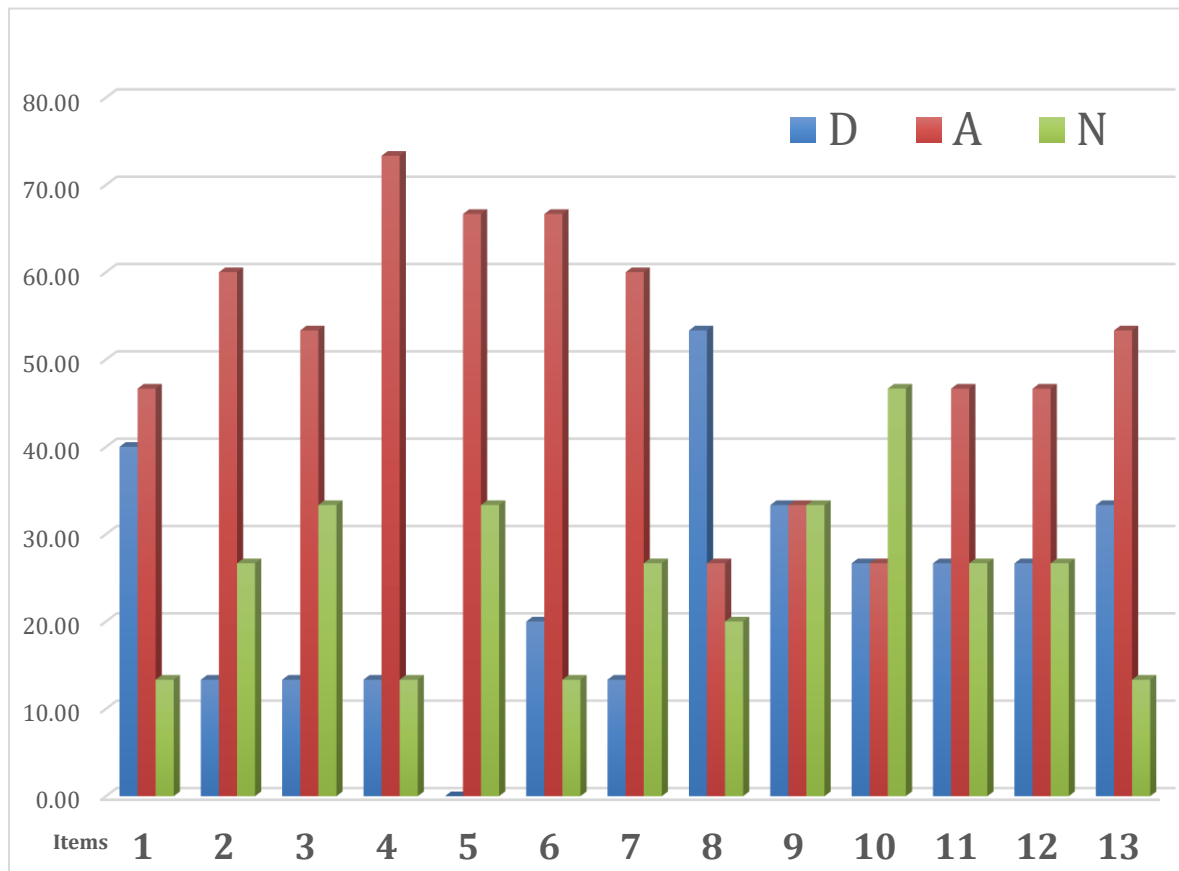


Chart No. 1 The Results

5. LIMITATION OF DESIGN

Generally, the development of the questionnaire is quite effective, however, there are some limitations in the sampling and selection of the participants, the teachers who have participated in the questionnaire are not enough to get the desired results. This can be regarded as a limitation of the findings of the study. This does not allow the analysis to elaborate on the distinction of results.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to find out teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education on the inclusion of students with disabilities within the regular education settings. According to the study outcomes, it has been noticed that inclusive education implementation is mostly shown satisfaction amongst both regular education and special education teachers, however, the regular teachers do not accept the inclusion of children with disabilities, and they are frightened of the negative impact of the inclusion on the whole of lesson. The questionnaire has helped the researchers to obtain unbiased views of the teachers about teaching SWD in the inclusive classroom. On one hand, the most important issue, which has been observed, is that only regular education teachers have negative attitudes towards

teaching the SWD in regular education classrooms. On the other hand, the inclusive education teachers who have received training courses have had different attitudes, and they feel comfortable and confident in teaching the SWD in regular education settings. It can be said that the regular teachers do not have enough knowledge and awareness, in addition, the regular teachers have not received training that can help them to support inclusive education.

Due to the outcomes and the findings that have been obtained from the study. It has become clear that most regular teachers agree the fact that disabled children may take advantage of emotional and psychological support, and they can get academic improvements if they are involved in regular classrooms, on the contrary, most of them have a negative attitude toward implementation of inclusive education in the regular classrooms. Thus, it seems that there is some sort of contradiction in their attitudes. Hence, it is recommended that further future studies to highlight the potential reasons and motives behind this gap.

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