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Investigating the high school teachers' attitudes in Dushanbe City in the field of exceptional children's growth

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Abstract

This research is a descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study and is conducted at regular high schools of Dushanbe City during the school year 2016-17. The data of this study is collected through the questionnaire prepared through investigating the available articles and research in Tajikistan, foreign research and extracting the questions of questionnaires, which were attached at the end of articles, and creating a few changes in them and adding several questions. The numerical data is scored through Likert method in this study. The statistical population consists of all regular high school teachers in Dushanbe City with exceptional students in the classrooms. The statistical sample consists of 186 high school teachers at regular schools of Dushanbe City. Pearson correlation coefficient is applied for significant test of main and subsidiary research hypotheses. Based on the results of this research, enhancing the social relationships with exceptional students can increase the teachers' understanding of these students and thus creating more positive attitudes toward the exceptional students.

Keywords: Attitude, growth, exceptional students, social relationship, understanding

1- Introduction

The study on the communities indicates that like other components of nature, the human population has varied structures and despite the apparent homogeneity, there are numerous differences among the members in the each community even small ones. These differences may appear in apparent dimensions such as skin color, sense of power or the amount of enjoying the God-given talents such as intelligence, emotions and physical abilities or be created due to the effect of environmental factors such as accidents and diseases which lead to the limitations for person. According to the available statistics, about 12% of people in each community are different from others; in some cases, this ratio has been up to 18 percent. For instance, the Australian Bureau of Statistics classified about 18 percent of individuals into those with disorder. This rate includes 1 to 2 percent of children with severe disorders and they were previously placed at exceptional schools. Adding other disorders such as learning disorders and behavioral problems to this definition indicates



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that the numbers of students, who are suffering from disorders at regular schools, are reported at the levels of 15% to 16% (Loremn, 2001).

One of the serious problems still existed in some of the small communities is to ignore these differences, thus this fact is less taken into account in designing and organizing the social infrastructures. Undoubtedly, the education is the most important social institution which has been encountered with this problem since past and faced with this contradiction whether the educational system's task is only to pay attention to education of a few number of elites who are going to take the control of country or education of all children and students beyond their differences? Undoubtedly, the existence of this diversity make the governments' tasks much more difficult in planning and implementing the education policies because on the one hand they need to respect this diversity and difference and on the other hand, maintain at least the unity which is essential for survival of any society. (Jenkinson, 2000)

Perhaps, the major reason for ignoring these differences is the lack of adequate and appropriate knowledge about the features of this group of population; typically, the exceptional children's needs are not being identified and it is supposed that they would have nothing to provide for society. Ignoring these children's opportunities for learning reduces their growth and also exacerbates their exclusion (UNESCO, 2001).

The research literature, methodology and findings are presented as follows. The conclusion and suggestions are presented after brief investigation of research findings.

2- Literature review

This section presents the theoretical principles and research literature.

Theoretical principles

Historically, the theory of growth is rooted in the philosophy and history of human wisdom because the human aim of life is to grow towards desirability and excellence, or in a more complete word, movement towards improvement. The retrogression or moving towards the ruination is the contrast point to the growth. Obviously, the historic and prehistoric man has always moved towards the goodness for his growth due to his nature, despite the fact that his intellectual and physiological conditions have also provided the retrogression for him. However, the human nature is more powerful for moving towards the growth and desirable excellence because the human fights for survival and life not for ruination and death. On the other hand, the growth has been considered by authors in several aspects. In general, the physical, social, moral, and mental growth is considered in the psychology, but this study covers the social growth and moral judgments. In terms of age, the growth belongs to not specific ages and continues from the birth to the death of human life (Biabangard, 1993).

The study on the psychologists' opinion indicates that the issue of change is the common point for all presented definitions of growth. As Philip Rice considers the growth as the development occurred in our life (Rice, 1996). According to this definition, the growth covers any development in the anatomy and physiology as well as the mental and intellectual fields. However, the philosophical



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perspective of each intellectual sect has made different perception of growth theory and its initial definition, for instance, according to John Locke's specific analysis and his special human look, based on which learning and imitation are defined as the development, he considered the growth as the development and changes which are created due to the human contact with the environment and contribute to learning and experience.

Locke's purpose of providing this theory is to oppose to dispositionists' ideas based on which the human is created perfect and the whole perfection is given to him and the human thinking and way of dealing with nature and society may lead to the discovery of perfection; however Locke considers the human mind as a white paper which shape learning; in other words, the human does not discover his perfection, but learn them and create in himself (C. Crain, 1997). As observed, the "change" is the common axis of mentioned definitions and the authors and philosophers' differences have been the sources of change. The Aristotelian empiricists consider the experience as the origin of changes, while the Platonic subjectivists (originality of heredity) introduce the gradual discovery of innate talents as the source of changes.

It seems that according to Philip Rice's theory, the growth is based on the development in each individual's physical and mental fields whether it is the result of learning or the genetic and biological development and differences in the causes and stimulus of growth among the thinkers will make no problems in the nature of growth definition. Thus, it can be concluded that psychologists agree that the growth is the continuous changes in the man's mind and body, but they still disagree about the causes of changes; in this regard, two environmental sects have been created and based on the nature and learning orientation according to the effect of heredity.

Most of the experts emphasize on the importance of teachers, students and their parents' positive attitude, so that they introduce the teachers' positive attitude as the most effective factor on the success of integrated education programs (Cornoldi et al. 1998; Cook and Semmel, 1999; Hodge, Davis, Woodard, Sherrill, 2002; DePauw, and Doll-Tepper, 2000; Duchane and French, 1998). They argue that the teachers' attitudes are the most important cases among the various groups and even can be considered as the one of the most important factors affecting the success or failure of the educational integration programs.

The teacher in the educational system is as the center of creating the programs and policies design at the higher levels. The teacher's lack of sufficient in understanding these systems and lack of proper implementation of these programs not only prevent the objective of educational system, but also can divert an educational system from gaining its main principles. (Ziaei, 2003)

As noted, the teachers should know the students or learners' characteristics and this will be achieved only by investigating the psychology of growth. As we know, the psychology of growth studies the individuals' cognitive, emotional and social characteristics at different ages and it indicates how a person becomes consistent with its environment at any age and what abilities it has; moreover, it investigates the psychology of growth for development and growth principles.



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The teacher's pedagogical skills and knowledge is his another professional feature. This feature, which has more adaptive and art aspect, help the teacher to understand and utilize the teaching methods and techniques, educational aids, appropriate educational space and environment, design and implement the educational plans, and evaluate the students' education. The teacher's familiarity with various types of teaching and applying the pedagogical skills during training create the educational aims easier and in shorter term. Because it was previously believed that if a person knows something, he can teach it to others. In other words, the teaching skill was the requisite for teaching. While the knowledge is not enough to teach, but other conditions- the teacher's pedagogical skills and knowledge- should be existed in this regard. Therefore, the teaching skills and educational knowledge are the cases with greatest impact in teachers' work (Vin, 1996). The attitudes can be indirectly learned from other people or through social learning. Furthermore, they can be gained directly or through personal experience. These attitudes are usually stronger that what is obtained by the help of social learning (Baron and Byrne, 1994).

The overall purpose of this study is to investigate the correlation between the social relationship and understanding the exceptional students with teachers' attitudes towards their growth.

Khanjani and Bahari (2004) investigated 448 teachers' attitudes at regular schools, 81 teachers at exceptional schools, and 116 ones at both schools in a study entitled as "Evaluation of teachers' attitude at regular, exceptional and combined schools in the field of integrated education of exceptional children in East Azerbaijan province". Their results indicated that the exceptional teachers educated in the fields of educational sciences and the primary and high school teachers had more positive attitude than other participants. The results of research by Behpajouh and Ganji (2004) indicated that the exceptional teachers' attitudes towards the mentally retarded students and their educational integration were more positive than the regular teachers' attitudes. The results also indicate that the regular and exceptional teachers, who had more social contact with mentally retarded students, have more accurate information about them, higher level of education, have passed relevant in-service training courses and are younger; in general they have a more positive attitude. The results of Mostafavi's study (2003) also indicate that the regular school principals have more negative attitudes toward the integration of blind students than the exceptional schools. Utilizing Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory and Edwards's questionnaire, Wakefield et al (1975) investigated the relationship between the teachers' personalities and attitudes and concluded that the teachers' attitudes towards the students are largely under the influence of their personality variables. The results of research by Sweatt (2000) also suggest that there is no relationship between the teacher's expectations and his attitudes towards the students and their achievement. Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) have shown that the teachers of mentally retarded student have more positive attitudes towards the inclusive education program than other groups probably due to the teachers' direct contact with students. This result is also consistent with the research by Behpajouh (1992). This study investigates the effect of social contact on the college teachers' attitudes towards the mentally retarded students and their educational integration. The obtained results indicated that the teachers, who were trained to



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teach students with learning difficulties and had knowledge about the integrated programs for students with learning difficulties as well as experience in social contact with these kind of students, had more positive attitudes and emotional reactions to the mentally retarded students.

3- Methodology

For implementing the research, a list of regular school teachers in Dushanbe City was taken from exceptional education management. And then the subjects were systematically selected from obtained list. The author was presented in the entire process of completing the questionnaire by teachers to provide the required guidance. After collecting the questionnaires, all information and data were entered in SPSS software in order to analyze the information.

Materials and Methods

This study is a cross-sectional descriptive-analytical research.

Statistical population

The statistical population consists of all regular high school teachers with mentally retarded students in classrooms in Dushanbe city.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is a correlation between the teachers' social relationship with exceptional students with their attitudes towards the students' growth.
2. There is a correlation between the teachers' understanding of exceptional students with their attitudes towards the students' growth.
3. There is a correlation between the social relationship with exceptional students and understanding them.

Statistical Sample and sampling method

The statistical sample consists of 186 regular high school teachers with exceptional students in their classrooms in Dushanbe City. Referring to the sampling framework, the teachers were selected by systematic sampling.

Data collection tools, validity and reliability

The study is conducted at regular high schools of Dushanbe City during the scholastic years 2011-12. The questionnaire is the data collection method in this study and the research questionnaire is prepared through investigating the available articles and studies in Tajikistan and foreign studies.

The research validity refers to the accuracy of indices and criteria provided for measuring the target phenomenon. The t-test-retest was done in order to measure the reliability of attitudinal questions in the questionnaire, thus the research questionnaire was distributed and collected among 10 teachers participating in the study and then it was given back to those teachers after two weeks and



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the correlation coefficient of overall scores of attitude and six areas of attitude for both tests were calculated by Pearson Correlation method; on this basis, the reliability of test for general attitude and the attitude in each area (cognitive growth, emotional growth, moral growth, and social growth) was obtained equal to 0.979, 0.951, 0.955, 0.959, and 0.959, respectively, at the level (P-value=0.000) indicating the high reliability of test.

Reliability refers to the repeatability, stability and consistency feature in measurement tool and examines that to what extent the measurement tool can crucially measure the required concept at any time. In order to ensure the content validity of data collection tool (questionnaire) in this study, the content validity procedure is applied and the values of Cronbach's alpha for general attitude and items (questions) of each attitude areas were obtained equal to 0.809, 0.769, 0.946, 0.914, and 0.963, respectively, and then this questionnaire was given to 10 teachers, scholars and authorities as the referees in teaching the exceptional children and they were asked to study the questionnaire and express their opinion about the questions and whether the questions examine the attitude or not; and then the ambiguities were modified or removed from the questionnaire and the items were added and considered.

4- findings

The statistical calculations were done after filling and collecting the questionnaires, reviewing the responses, coding the questionnaires and entering the data; for some of the questions not responded by teachers, the average score of target scope was considered for question without response. Table (1) shows the status of teachers' attitudes towards the exceptional students.

Table (1) Mean, median, mode, standard deviation and variance of scores for teachers' general attitude and the attitude in different categories

Trained Groups	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Variance	Range	Min	Max
General attitude towards growth	61.5	60.5	56	18.01	324.457	100	23	100
Attitude towards cognitive growth	59.9	61	63	10.55	111.413	56	24	80
Attitude towards emotional growth	59.9	61	65	8.01	64.180	47	28	75
Attitude towards moral growth	49	49	54	7.75	60.208	41	26	67
Attitude towards social growth	58	59	59	7.35	54.142	35	35	70



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Based on the data of Table 1, the minimum score of 23 and maximum score of 100 are obtained for teachers' general attitudes. The mean, median, mode, standard deviation and variance of general attitude scores are equal to 61.5, 60.5, 56, 18.01, and 324.457, respectively.

The minimum score of 24 and maximum score of 80 are obtained for the attitude towards the teachers' cognitive growth. The mean, median, mode, standard deviation and variance of attitude scores towards the cognitive growth are equal to 59.9, 61, 63, 10.55, and 111.413, respectively.

The minimum score of 28 and maximum score of 75 are obtained for the attitude towards the emotional growth. Furthermore, the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and variance of attitude scores towards the emotional growth are equal to 59.9, 61, 65, 8.01, and 64.180, respectively.

The minimum score of 26 and maximum score of 68 are obtained for the attitude towards the moral growth. Furthermore, the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and variance of trained group teachers' supporting scores are equal to 49, 49, 54, 7.75, and 60.208, respectively.

The minimum score of 35 and maximum score of 70 are obtained for the attitude towards the social growth. Furthermore, the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and variance of trained group teachers' relationship scores are equal to 58, 59, 59, 7.35, and 54.142, respectively.

Hypothesis Test

First hypothesis: There is a correlation between the teachers' social relationship with exceptional students and their attitudes towards the students' growth.

Table (2) First Hypothesis Test

	Correlation	Social communication rate
Attitudes towards the exceptional students' growth	Pearson Correlation value	0.298 **
	Significance level	.000
	Total	186

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used in order to investigate the correlation between the teachers' social relationships with exceptional students and their attitudes towards the students' growth. The obtained results are presented in Table 2. Pearson coefficient indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between the teachers' social relationships with their attitudes towards the students' growth (Sig: 0.000), thus the first hypothesis is confirmed.

Second hypothesis: There is a correlation between the teachers' understanding of exceptional students and their attitudes towards the students' growth.



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Table (3) Second hypothesis test

	Correlation	Understanding rate
Attitude towards the exceptional students' growth	Pearson Correlation value	0.607 **
	Significance level	.000
	Total	186

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used in order to investigate the correlation between the teachers' understanding of exceptional students and their attitudes towards the students' growth. The obtained results are presented in Table 3. Pearson coefficient (0.607) indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between the teachers' understanding of exceptional students with their attitudes towards these students' growth (Sig: 0.000), thus the second hypothesis is confirmed.

Third hypothesis: There is a correlation between the social relationship with exceptional students and understanding them.

Table (4) Third hypothesis test

	Correlation	Understanding rate
Rate of social relationship	Pearson Correlation value	0.321 **
	Significance level	.000
	Total	186

According to the Table 4, Pearson's correlation coefficient (0.321) indicates the statistical significant correlation between the teachers' social relationship and their understanding of exceptional students. In other words, the more the teachers have relationship with the exceptional students, the more their understanding of these students' abilities is increased; thus the third hypothesis is confirmed.

Model Fitting

The following figure shows the fitted research model through Amos software as well as identified path coefficients. Chi-square coefficient value is equal to 1646.7 with degrees of freedom (524).

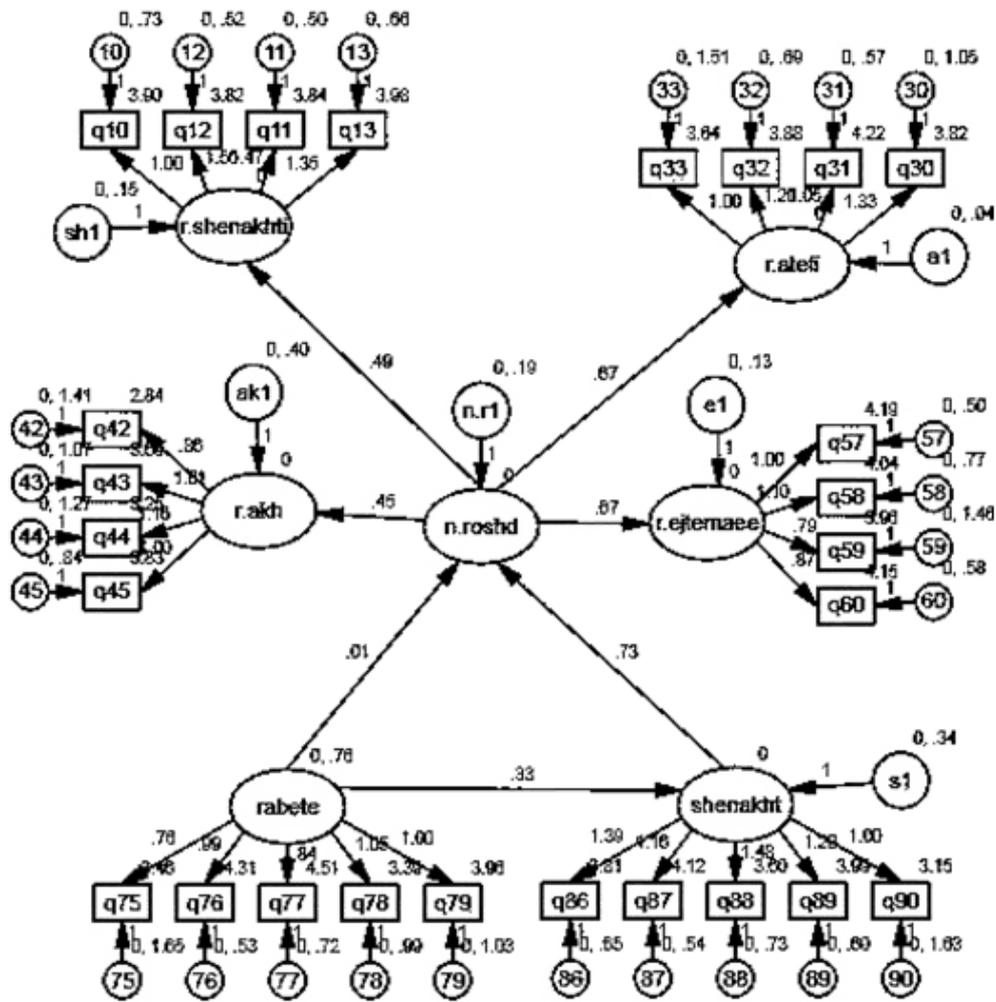


Figure (1) Research model

5- Conclusion

This study investigated the teachers' general attitude and their attitudes in different areas towards the exceptional students' growth. The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of social relationship and then the teachers' understanding of exceptional students on the teachers' attitudes towards these students' growth in different cognitive, emotional, moral and social areas. Based on the results obtained in this study and according to the research findings section, there is a



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significant correlation between the social relationship with exceptional students and understanding their abilities and the teachers' attitudes towards the exceptional students' growth. In other words, communicating with exceptional students and more understanding of their abilities can affect the teachers' positive attitudes towards these students' growth; this result is consistent with findings in several studies for instance by Khanjani and Bahari (2004), Behpajouh and Ganji (2004), Mostafavi (2003), Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) and Behpajouh (1992) and confirms the obtained results of these studies. According to the results of most of these studies, the teachers, who have social relationship with exceptional students and more understanding of them, will have more positive attitudes towards these students' growth.

Based on the results of this study, there is a significant relationship between the teachers' attitudes and their social relationship with exceptional students. The similar results by Behpajouh (1992), who examined the teachers' attitudes and their relationship with exceptional students, are consistent with the results of this study and confirm them.

According to the results of this study, there is a positive significant relationship between enhancing the teachers' understanding of students and the positive attitude towards these students' growth. These results are consistent with the findings by Khanjani and Bahari (2004) and confirm the results of this study.

Furthermore, the research findings indicate that if the teachers' relationship with students is enhanced, their understanding of exceptional students' abilities will be increased following the teachers' more positive attitudes towards these students' growth. This finding is not consistent with the study by Wakefield et al (1975), arguing that the teachers' attitude is affected by their own personalities, and also reject the findings of this study.

The results of this study indicate that the increase in social relationship with exceptional students can enhance understanding of these students and consequently cause a more positive attitude in teachers towards the exceptional students' growth. According to this finding, the following suggestions are offered in line with improving the teachers' attitudes towards the exceptional students' abilities and growth in the cognitive, emotional, moral, social fields.

- 1) Holding the classes and participatory workshops;
- 2) Teachers' participating in sport programs with exceptional students;
- 3) Holding the classes of doing the interpersonal skills for exceptional students;
- 4) Teachers' participating in group games with students;
- 5) Creating the discussion groups for teachers and students;
- 6) Providing the necessary knowledge and training for all individuals who are involved in this field including the teachers, principals and parents to enhance understanding of exceptional students;
- 7) Holding the training courses throughout the year for all teachers at regular schools.



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