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PhD Dissertation Defense

Entitled

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR THE PRACTICE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

by

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Abstract

The number of students with disabilities in regular classrooms is increasing. In 2020, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) introduced a new policy with the goal of promoting inclusive education in all public schools. Although the UAE government is committed to the education of children with disabilities, the role of school leaders is vital to the successful implementation of inclusive education in schools. While school leaders have been found to be the main agents in steering inclusive practices, their contribution to practices in schools in the UAE context remains empirically unresearched. The objective of this study was to explore elementary school leaders' contribution towards the enactment of inclusive education in schools. The study was guided by a heuristic inclusive education leadership framework, which is a strength-based leadership conceptual model focusing on the role of school leaders under transactional, transformational, and instructional leadership within a school context. The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The first phase involved the collection of quantitative data ($N = 151$) from school leaders, which was followed by in-depth qualitative data interviews ($N = 10$) to develop insight into experiences. The Heuristic Inclusive Education Leadership Scale, developed for this study, was used for data collection in the first phase. Furthermore, the quality of inclusive practices was measured using the Quality Scale of Inclusive School Development (QUIS-S). The study provided theoretical support for the heuristic leadership model that guided the study (see Paper 1). The findings of the study showed a significant relationship between the tenets of the heuristic leadership models (transactional, transformational, and instructional) (see Paper 1). The results provide support for the heuristic inclusive leadership model as a valuable training model for school leader training in the UAE. Demographic variables, such as educational qualifications, also provided additional insight into school leaders (see Paper 1). Additionally, a relationship was found between school leadership and inclusive practices (see Paper 2). However, participants were ambivalent regarding both school leadership and inclusive practices (Paper 3). Follow-up qualitative data showed that school leaders demonstrated an in-depth understanding of their role in fostering inclusive practices in schools. For instance, school leaders emphasized that effective collaboration is needed for the successful implementation of inclusive education. In conclusion, the study highlights the need to redefine inclusive education leadership and the provision of appropriate training for school leaders in the UAE. Specifically, the study concludes with a recommendation for contextualized training programs, policy adaptations, and continued research to enhance leadership capabilities for successful inclusive practices in the UAE.

Keywords: inclusive education, leadership, UAE elementary schools, school leaders, mixed methods approach, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, educational policies, learning environments.