

## Evaluation of Right to Education Capacity Building Project

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### **Summary of the study**

*The resource rooms project had been carried out by the ministry of education and higher education at 2005. It is directed to students with mental disability and learning difficulties. The number of the resource rooms was 3 on 2005 while its about 87 room for the school year 2013-2014. During 2012 - 2014, the ministry, through the general directorate of counseling and special education (GDCSE), offered several training programs that were directed to special education supervisors (SEs) and inclusive education counselors (IECs) and resource room teachers (RRTs). The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the quality assurance mechanism of teaching methods in the resource rooms and integrated classes; to determine established procedures for training of newly appointed teachers for resource rooms and integrated classes; and to determine the sustainability regarding capacity development in special education issues. To achieve the study objectives, the qualitative paradigm was used where field observation was carried out and eight RRTs were interviewed. In addition, three SEs were interviewed separately, and 16 ICSs were interviewed through two focus groups, two policy and decision makers in the MOEHE were interviewed, and three of the staff in DSSE who are responsible of planning, implementing and following-up the training programs. The data was collected during the second semester of the 2013-2014 academic years. The results showed that teaching in RRs follow similar pattern and that there is no diagnosis for students' learning difficulties in the RRs. The results indicated that RRT received limited support from parents and school Mathematics and Arabic language teachers. RRTc. IESs, SEs asked GDCSE to study the training programs carefully so that to avoid offering similar training programs and make sure that the training programs include practical training experiences. The recommendations include the necessity to provide students with supportive teaching in their regular classrooms and when they become fifth graders, and the necessity to modify the structure of RR program so that the number of needed classes for the students are determined based on students' needs and learning difficulties, and to make sure that the training programs include practical training experiences.*

### **Introduction and study objectives**

This study contributes to GDCSE and SOIR efforts that aim to improve the quality of teaching offered to students with intellectual disabilities or academic problems through RR project. According to 2013-2014 statistics, there are (87) resource rooms RR. The recourse room project aims to achieve the following:

- Provide personal programs for students with learning difficulties (intellectual disability, learning difficulties, slow learning).
- Provide school teachers with support from RRT to support those students' learning.
- Provide parents with support and counseling to facilitate their children follow up.
- Provide students with psychological and social support (Handbook for special education teacher, p. 12, 2013).

This study aims to determine the benefit gained by RRTs, IECs, SEs from the training programs which were offered during 2012- 2014, to determine the quality of teaching methods which are used in the RRs,. It also aims to determine the ministry readiness to design and implement training programs for newly appointed RRTs without having external support. To achieve these objectives, the study used the qualitative paradigm in data collection.

It is worth mentioning that the training programs which were offered during 2012 and 2014 include programs in speech problems, learning difficulties, using drama and music in teaching students with special needs, and using computer in teaching by using power point presentation.

### ***Research questions***

1. What are the established procedures for following up the work in the resource rooms and integrated classes?
2. Have the special education supervisors and inclusive education counselors received sufficient training?
3. What further improvement might be needed?
4. Are acquired methods of using music, drama, and educational aids in use by the teachers?
5. Are acquired methods for teaching Arabic and mathematics and doing mathematics in use by the teachers?
6. What are the established procedures in place for training of newly appointed teachers? And what further improvements might be needed?
7. What mechanism is in place regarding human resources and routines?

### ***Identifications of used terms in the study***

Following the definition of the terms used in the study as used in the Handbook for special education teacher ( p. 7-12). Resource room RR: the resource room project was initiated on 2005 with 3 rooms. The resource room is a classroom equipped with instructional materials and educational games and furnished in a different way from regular classrooms. The students attend the RR to learn Arabic language and mathematics for certain hours weekly depends on the academic level and spend the remaining time learning in their regular classrooms. The RR teacher teaches her students and assesses them based on individual educational plans correspond with their capabilities and needs. Students learn in the RR individually or in small groups. The RR aims to achieve several objectives such as providing students with learning difficulties individual programs (intellectual disability, learning difficulties, slow learning). (Handbook for special education teacher, p. 12, 2013).

Disability: total or partial disability for congenital or non-congenital reasons. This disability is permanent and could be in any of the senses or physical or mental or psychological abilities to the extent this disability limits the learner's ability to meet the ordinary requirements. Speech problems: Defect in the development or growth of understanding and use of spoken and written symbols which can include sounds, compositions, and meaning.

Speech disorders: Defects in one or more of the voice disorders or severe hoarseness or pronunciation, such as substitution or deletion or addition, and other disorders, or fluency disorders such as stuttering or speak quickly.

Special needs: as the individuals who have special needs in general differ by members of the community.

Learning Difficulties: disturbances in one or more of the basic psychological functions that include understanding and using the written or spoken language, and they appear in the hearing or thinking or talking or reading or writing or arithmetic disorder, all of which are nor resulted of intellectual or audio or visual or other disabilities.

Individual Educational Plans: plans designed specifically for a particular student in order to meet his or her educational needs. These plans include the intended learning objectives goals that must be achieved within a specific period of time.

### ***Research methodology***

In order to answer the research questions, the research used the qualitative paradigm through the following:

**First: field visits and classroom observation.** Eight schools were visited in Tubas, Nablus, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. Two to three classes were observed in each school and then an interview was conducted with the resource room teacher, and another short interview was conducted with the school principal, Arabic Language teacher, and mathematics teacher.

**Second: interviewing policy makers and other parties who participated in planning and conducting evaluation and developing capacity project.** Two policy makers and three employees, who participated in planning, implementing and following-up the training programs, were interviewed.

**Third: Interviews with special education supervisors, and education counselors.** Three out of four special education supervisors were interviewed individually, and 16 counselors in two focus groups were interviewed.

**Fourth: Reviewing relevant documents.** These documents include annual plans and progress reports in addition to the Handbook for Special Education Teachers in Palestine.

**The study population and sample**

The study population consisted of educational policy and educational decision-makers in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and from the employees of special education department, SESs, IECs, RRTs. Table (1) shows the detailed sample of this population for the interviews.

**Table # (1): The participants in the study**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>The nature of the interview</b>	<b>Number</b>
Policy and decision makers: The general director of educational counseling and special education The general director of educational supervision	Individual interview with each of them	2
The employees of special education department (the director of special education department, the head of special education programs) An employee from SOIR	Individual interview with each of them	3
Special education supervisors	Individual interview with each of them	(3) out of (4) were interviewed
Inclusive education counselors	Two focus groups were conducted	(16) out of (25) IECs participated in these focus groups.
Resource room teachers	(16) Classes were observed and (8) teachers were interviewed.	(8) teachers out of (87) were observed and interviewed

The majority of RRTs are specialists in primary education as they form 72.2% of all RRTs, while the percentage of RRTs who specialize in special education is only 12.6% of RRTs. Also, most of RRTs are female, where the percentage of female teachers is 94.9% of the total RRTs

**Data analysis**

The qualitative data, which include the observation and the interviews, was analyzed by extracting core ideas emerged in the interviews or from the classroom observation, and these core ideas were discussed after combining them in themes.

**Study results**

**First: field visits, classroom observation and interviews with RRTs, mathematics teachers, Arabic teachers, and school principals.**

**1. General description for field visits**

Eight schools were visited from four district areas where 16 classes had been observed. These classes focused on Arabic language and math skills. The number of students in each of these classes ranged between one and four and these students represent different levels and classes. For example, it is possible that students from 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades attend together a class in the RR since their achievement level in the Arabic language or mathematics is similar so they are taught similar language or mathematics skills. The visited RRs have similar physical environment. They are all divided into several corners, such as the day and date corner, the classroom rules corner, the Arabic language teaching and learning corner, mathematics teaching and learning corner, and the games corner. The RRs teachers usually begin the classes by welcoming students, and asking them questions about personal cleanliness, the day and the date, classroom law for that day (such as I brush my teeth in the morning and evening, I sit quietly in the classroom, I sleep early to wake up early).

After the previous activities, the RR teacher starts the implementation of activities to achieve the learning objective of the class using several teaching methods such as drama, music, computer, and competition games between students. Usually, the teacher use entertaining activity, such as athletic activity, between the learning activities.

At the end, students are asked to complete a worksheet with the help of teacher and then complete another worksheet individually to assess the student's mastery of the skill of the subject matter and then give them another worksheet as homework. The RR was designed to support students in the primary grades (1-4) through helping them to acquire three key skills in the Arabic language and mathematics, which are reading, writing and arithmetic. To make it clear, some Arabic Language lessons that have been observed, have focused on teaching students how to distinguish the shape of the letter at the beginning, middle and end of the word.

Others, however, have focused on reading or spelling two –syllable words. On the other hand, teaching in the resources room relies more on using tangible materials like models, posters, educational games and real life situations. An example of authentic situations used in the room is role playing of buying and selling that learners engage in to learn the target concept. The presence of some older students was sometimes noticed in the resources room, in schools that have higher grades than the fourth grade. For example, a sixth grader was noticed in one of the resources' room classes, and by asking the RR teacher, she clarified that the student has been visiting the room since she was in the first grade. The teacher added that these older students are usually given nonacademic tasks that fill their time, engage them, promote their self-esteem, and at the same time reduce the burden on their classroom teacher.

During field visits, it has been noticed, that students who use the RR are highly motivated. They come to the class before the due time, interact very well, respond to the teacher's directions, and they are willing to learn. Schools usually start many initiatives that involve students of the resources' rooms, such as engaging them in the school's day start activities or in the 'Open Day' activities, which, no doubt, raise their feeling of self-confidence.

It has also been noted that RRTs make notable efforts in preparation, following-up either with students or with the implementation of many activities during the limited period. RRTs are usually very willing to help the students, but sometimes do not recognize the most appropriate means to do so. One of the teachers expressed that by saying:

*"I really wish I could help my students more; but I sometimes don't know how. I need more resources to accelerate the learning of some students like Asma' who is a slow learner. Second grade students improve very well; their progress is more noticeable than the students of higher classes, whose progress ratio is less, specially, due to the differences between the curriculum they study in the classroom and that they go over in the resources' room".*

Finally, it was noticed during these field visits, that only one of the teachers uses the same book used in the classroom as a resources room book to avoid making a gap between what is taught in the classroom and what is taught in the resources' room. While the other seven teachers who were observed, use variety of worksheets to teach the target concepts, skills and educational competencies scheduled for that period.

## **2. Results of interviews with RR teachers whose schools were visited and their classes were observed**

Teachers in the observed classes have between 3-9 years of experience in the field as RR teachers. They work with a number of students between 18 and 23 students distributed on classes from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> basic grades. These kids attend 3-5 classes per week according to their needs and cognitive and academic abilities.

The teachers clarify that they follow up a variety of students who were diagnosed as 'slow learners' or learners with 'learning difficulties' without specifying the type of difficulty or impairment. However, there are other students with intellectual disabilities or both intellectual /physical ones. A "Support and Transfer Committee" which consists of the Arabic language teacher, mathematics teacher, school principal and the students' counselor transfer students to the RR. The committee uses an assessment report to diagnose each case. Reviewing these reports shows that the comments and phrases used by the committee to describe the cases were general and don't diagnose the exact learning difficulty each student have. For example, most of the reviewed reports included the comment: "the mentioned student needs individual follow –up and need to be transferred to the RR". Another report by the committee that recommends transferring a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade student to the Resources' Room has included the phrase "she asks a lot of questions, keeps talking about home affairs, acts like babies and often cries".

RR Teachers explained that they were enrolled in several training sessions during the past two years, such as drama and music courses, computers based-teaching, special courses in speech therapy and language teaching. The teachers commended these training courses as tools that helped them much in communicating with kids and leading them to express themselves.

When being asked about the obstacles RR Teachers face, they highlighted the paperwork burden as the most challenging. They complained about the number of planning forms they need to fill, which imply much of written work. For example, they apply the assessment tool three times a year to each student; design an annual plan for each student, a quarterly model plan for each case, which is an individual educational plan for each student in Arabic language and mathematics. Moreover, they design an annual case study form and write an evaluation summary.

Moreover, teachers have four meetings a year with parents or caregivers and that requires filling in forms about these meetings results, besides filling another form concerned with parents visits to the RR. When they attend a class with their kids, teacher fill in another form called "Parents follow up in the Resource Room."

About the impact of using the RR on the target students, the teachers indicated that the most palpable progress is achieved with those who suffer "a delay in academic progress", but the least is achieved with those with mental disorder or learning difficulties. For example, a third grader was being taught in the RR for one semester (first semester in the school year) in Arabic language. At that time she didn't recognize Arabic letters that hold similar characters like (ظ, غ, صض), afterwards she joined her classroom with a relatively good performance compared to her classmates. And another success story which was documented along the observation period, a second grade boy who left the R.R after a year, during which he was able to master the language and mathematic skills required in that stage. On another hand, one of the cases was a girl suffering from cerebral palsy. She is now in the fifth grade and had joined the RR since the first grade and still learning the first grade skills. (she has mastered the Arabic letters, she can write and read simple words, mastered numbers, subtraction, addition within two decimals and the skill to hold the pen),

At the same time, the majority of the teachers weren't familiar with the nature or type of the learning difficulty their students have and they often use general, unspecific words to describe a case. For instance, they would use statements like "they forget a lot, they don't focus, their comprehension is slow" to describe learning difficulties

Despite realizing how important the training is, RRTs feel training is not enough for them to meet their students' needs due to the lack of an actual diagnosis of the students' needs. Therefore, some RR teachers feel unable to help students to modify their behavior and to overcome the academic and social problems.

Concerning the roles of other parties like students' counselor, Arabic language teachers, mathematics teachers, parents, Special Education Supervisors 'SEs', Inclusive Education Counselors 'IECs' in supporting the RRs learning, the RRTs clarify that the role of the students' counselor is confined to being a member in the follow-up and transfer committee. Regarding other teachers' role, they think that math and Arabic teachers don't care enough about following up with the target students and what they learned in the RR, as their main concern is to follow up with the majority in the classroom who need to cover the formal curriculum. At the parents' level, RRTs believe that parents' follow up to the academic, health progress is poor, and some of them reject transferring their kids to the RR. As for Special Education Supervisors SEs and Inclusive Education Counselors IECs, the interviewed teachers stated that their role is limited to supporting and encouraging RRTs and students, especially that they seldom visit schools.

### **3. Results of interviews with school principals and teachers of the Arabic language and Mathematics in the visited schools**

Three of the interviewed school principals did not recognize exactly what the aim behind the RR was, and wished to be better informed about the RR Program so that they can follow up with the RRTs. One of the principals stated that RR teaching should not be limited to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade curriculum, but should also focus on enhancing reading/writing skills.

School teachers stated that they follow up with the target students, however, not to the degree that enables them to interact normally in the formal curriculum. Teachers also indicated that RR impact on students' learning is very limited due to the gap between what students learn in the RR and the actual skills they need to master in the formal curriculum. On the other hand, acquiring some language and mathematic skills in the RR doesn't necessarily mean that the RR students became able to follow up or study the formal textbook. Therefore, math and Arabic teachers suggested that there should be a bridging link between what students learn in the RR and what they learn in the classroom.

## ***Second: Results of the interviews with various groups who shared in the planning and implementation of the capacity building project***

As previously mentioned, two interviews had been carried out with policy-makers and decision-makers in the Ministry of Education 'MoEHE'. Three of the interviews had been made with the staff involved in the planning, implementation and follow-up the project of human resources' development. These interviews have questioned the type of support provided to RRTs and to their students after they complete the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The interviews debated over how training focus and topics are determined and to what degree do these meet the needs of RRTs, SESs and IECs. The interviewees confirmed that RRs Program aims at upgrading the skills of RRTs, SESs and IECs. The program also aims at providing the teachers with teaching methods, introduces them to the types of disabilities, and trains them to deal with students with special needs. Moreover, the program seeks to train teachers to build relationships with the local community and with parents, which would help students to learn better because of home's support to school.

Training needs are determined by RRTs, SESs and IECs, or by the General Directorate of Counseling and Special Education (GDCSE) who collect their observations to decide training preferences and needs. Students who take priority over others in joining the RR are usually students who suffer from learning difficulties "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological functions which may include understanding written or spoken language and appear in form of difficulties in hearing, thinking, talking, reading, writing or doing arithmetic operations, all of which are not mental disabilities, hearing or seeing impairments or others "(Guide of Special Education Teacher in Palestine.2013, p 0.9). The process of transferring students into the RR is the responsibility a committee of support and transfer. A committee that organizes regulates and legitimize the transfer process, but without a true diagnosis of the students' learning difficulties.

It was noticed that some officials in the Ministry of Education does not proclaim this vision about the RRs program. For example, the General Directorate of Supervision and Educational Training (GDSET) conducts training for class teachers without coordination or arrangement with General Directorate of Counseling and Special Education (GDCSE) to provide the training for RRTs. However, GDSET provides training for of Arabic language and mathematics teachers according to three levels: treatment, reinforcement, creativity. According to GDSET's vision, Arabic and Math teachers are qualified to work with RRSs to complete the work of the RRTs. Therefore, GDSET is interested in overcoming the academic weakness in the classroom while GDCSE addresses the problem of under achievement resulted from simple intellectual disability or academic problems through the RR Program. Currently, there is no special training program for RRTs, but in case of deciding about one in the Mo EHE, it will become possible to train these teachers or design new training courses such as preparatory courses for novice teachers.

GDCSE doesn't possess qualitative indicators about the impact of the RR program on the students involved. All what they have are the annual reports with quantitative data on the number of trainees, the period of training and the number of students in the RRs. Consequently, there are no final summative evaluations of learning in the RRs, this is only done through the daily and annual reports filled out by the teacher. Moreover, there is no information at the GDCSE about the number of students who graduate annually from the RR after achieving the desired educational goals. Participants also mentioned that before and after any training program a pre and post evaluations are being made for the participants in the training program. Generally, the trainees, in general and teachers in particular shift their attitudes and orientations towards RR and its impact on the learning process. In addition, participants are evaluated by supervisors or Special Education Supervisors 'SESs' by dividing the trainees into two groups, the first achieved the training goals, the other who needs to join an extra training course towards achieving the goals. This seems as a useful principle for future criteria for choosing the trainees.

Participants in the interviews highlighted some weaknesses in the RR Project. For example, there is no current support provided to students after the fourth grade and the only support could be found stems from the professional and ethical commitment of the teachers themselves. Support for RRSs can be provided by learning support departments, but these ideas still need to be studied and approved by officials in the MoEHE, where there is a need for some administrative procedures to support and follow up with a student who moves to a new school. According to the interviewees, the responsibility to support RRSs relies upon parents to do during summer vacations or in the case of changing school. Other interviewees said that poor annual planning leads to confusion. For example, the inconsistency, sometimes, of dates of the training programs offered by the GDCSE and other training programs offered by institutions in the same domain such as QADER Foundation.

This is sometimes doubles burden on the SESs. Similarly, there is a weakness in coordination and coherence between the RRs project and other training activities offered by MoEHE.

In addition, there is a weakness in the follow-up in schools since IECs do not participate in all training programs and therefore cannot follow up and support RRTs as presumed. The interviewees declared that the role of SESs is limited to support RRTs and help them to apply what they have learned in training workshops. IECs participate to help in that as they attend all the training programs and visit teachers twice a month; so they have more contact with RRTs. SESs make the annual evaluation of RRTs year performance with help of school principals. However, during the year 2013/2014, the RRTs' evaluation report was changed to suite the nature of their work in the resources rooms.

### **Third: Results of interviews with the administrators of special education and inclusive education counselors.**

Three of Special Education Supervisors were interviewed and two focus groups were conducted with Inclusive Education Counselors. Participants of the first focus groups were eight IECs from Directorates of the center and south, the second focus group had eight IECs from the northern Directorates. Participants' had between 2-17 years of experience.

#### **1. Results of interviews with IECs**

The IECs discuss variety of issues concerning the RR project and suggest ideas that may improve the RRs program. Following the main issues resulted from these interviews.

##### **1. Nature of IECs work**

- IECs perform a variety of tasks, they supervise RRTs, to raise their skills, and they interact with local community and build networks with some of the relevant institutions to support schools in general and RRs in particular. Moreover, IECs do some administrative tasks like the follow up to students' integration and transfer, as well as, follow up parents' portfolios. As a result of their altitude of tasks, the IECs think that their number is little compared the task they perform.
- IECs visit teachers and follow-up with them more often than SESs do. (Officially, they have to visit RRTs twice a month, but actually, and due to work pressure, they visit only 3-4 times during the whole semester). IECs keep up with the SESs feedback about teachers, but at the same time, do not participate in evaluation of teachers' performance and this is critical to their role in the follow-up to the RRTs.
- SESs are required to write monthly and annual plans, but sometimes they have to put some of their activities off to attend meetings at the ministry and this happens very often towards the end of each academic year. (It seems that in this time of the year, each project wants to assert the planned activities) .Thus SESs believe the GDCSE have no annual planning for training programs.

##### **2. Regarding training programs**

- The IECs believe training programs should include practical procedures, applicable to work with special needs' students, not only theoretical ones such as visits to schools and centers specialized in special needs. They also believe training should take the form of actual practice in classes. The absence of practical training made learning in RRs works well with slow learners more than it works with mental disabilities, especially if we know that most of the training courses that are given to teachers don't focus mainly on learning disabilities, but rather on teaching strategies. What makes it more complex is the idea that RRTs are specialized in elementary education and not special education. Despite IECs' insisting on the importance of music, drama courses and methods' designing courses, they believe that these courses are not related to learning difficulties, but can provide TTRs with teaching strategies that would be useful with slow or weak learners but not those with learning difficulties.
- IECs indicate that training sometimes deals with recycled topics that represent no new. For example, teachers didn't benefit from a workshop on planning since the topic was a focus of many previous workshops. The reason for repeating familiar topics is according to them, that training agendas are not decided according to teachers' needs but as decided in GDCSE plans.
- According to IECs, not all training courses achieve their aims. For instance, teachers didn't benefit from drama and music courses and didn't activate what they learnt in classes as part of their teaching strategies.

School counselors think they still need further training on activating the 'Educational kit" and deciding aims and strategies.

- There is a need for collecting more qualitative indicators and investigating about the impact of training programs, since all the collected indicators are quantitative data that don't specifically reveal the impact on trainees. In general, IECs see that training programs helped teachers in RRs to evaluate students, identify their learning problems and provided them with the necessary skills to teach ignored students who don't master the basic skills in Arabic and Math, but at the same time, didn't provide teachers with the necessary tools to teach those with mental or receptive problems.

### 3. Regarding General Directorate of Counseling and Special Education (GDCSE):

IECs think that GDCSE should hear more from SESs and RRTs and feedback in the following areas:

- There should be clear instructions of how to follow up students in RRs in schools that students move to. This would be possible through keeping up with the student's portfolios in the new school he moved to.
- IECs think that performing various activities during one class period distract students' attention and does not help to achieve the planned educational goals.
- Taking teachers in consideration as IECs believe that teachers are burdened with loads of paper work.

### 2. Results of interviews with Special Education Supervisors "SESs"

Three of each four SESs have been interviewed. The interviews focused on the mechanism to follow up RRTs and the type of technical support SESs provide teachers with. SESs visit teachers twice a year and novice teachers are visited 3-4 times, the first visit is supposed to be guiding and supporting one. SESs follow up 16-27 RRTs who follow four different educational directorates.

The following are the most important things that have emerged through these interviews.

#### 1. Concerning Resources Room Program

- Special education supervisors suppose that the main goal for RR is to qualify students and enhance their academic skills and abilities in Arabic and Mathematics towards integrating them academically in their classrooms. SESs think that most RRSs are those underachievers or slow learners but not students with learning difficulties. All the three supervisors unanimously agreed that transferring of students to the RR without a real diagnosis of the type of their learning difficulties would restrict the RRTs to support them or teach them effectively. Some SESs believe RR Project is a successful one, since it targets students in the basic education who are still in the stage of formation and building basic skills. Moreover, RRTs in general are very willing and able to improve their performance as well as being encouraged to feedback about students in the RR and the improvement they make. However, SESs think that for students to benefit on the long run there should be a learning support inside their formal classrooms especially with the disparity between the level of skills learned by the students in the resource room and the level of other students who study the formal curriculum. This problem is highlighted when RR students go to the fifth grade. These students would have had basic skills in the Arabic language and math, but not the same prerequisites for learning formal Arabic and Math textbooks other students have. SESs also pointed to the variations in RRSs levels and indicated that the students who make the noticeable progress in achieving the learning objectives are the underachievers.
- Special education supervisors pointed to the importance of the existence of reciprocal visits among the teachers as part of their training program.
- No studies or data collection of indicators were made to monitor the progress of students in resource rooms.
- Special Education Guide needs to be edited to fit with the assessment tool of the new Educational Kit, in addition to a preparation model form or educational plan to be included in that Guide in order to integrate theoretical and practical sides of the Guide.

#### 2. Concerning training programs

- Supervisors indicated that training programs are being planned to suite RRTs' needs. However, Some supervisors pointed out that part of the training programs content is just a repetition under different titles and that these training programs do not complete each other's
- Training programs are not always fruitful. This happens because the content of the training is not always sufficient. For instance, teachers didn't benefit from drama and music courses and didn't activate what they learnt in classes as part of their teaching strategies. This may happen also due to the poor follow up in the part

of GDCSE. For example, training was conducted to train a staff on applying “Wechsler Test”, but because of poor follow up, the test hadn’t been used in diagnosing the problems of the students to determine the most appropriate ways to teach them.

- SESs think it is difficult to figure out the impact of different training programs on students learning because that depends on the nature and abilities of the learner himself. It is also difficult to recognize the impact of RR Program on students learning because of the short period they spend in the Resource Room.

## Results Discussion

### First: Learning in the resources Room

1. Teaching in the RRs follows one single pattern. The class starts with warming up activities , then the lesson continues with explanation of either numbers or letters using several methods and learning strategies, , then, the teacher distributes a worksheet to be done at home.(three copies of similar work sheet are given to the student. The first to be done with teachers’ help, the other is done individually as an assessment, the third is to be sent home for parents to follow up). The above pattern was noticed in all RRs that had been visited regardless to differences in students’ needs or problems they have. RRTs vary their teaching strategies in response to having unspecific learning difficulties mostly. The data reveals that the support and transfer committee is not a diagnostic committee; therefore, the decision to transfer the students into the Resource Room is not based on a real diagnosis of the true learning difficulty the student has. It is useful to diversify teaching strategies, but that should fit with the learning difficulties students have. For example, strategies used with students who have seeing-verbal impairments do not necessarily fit with those who have speech difficulties or with calcification of the cerebral cortex.
2. Some students who have Down syndrome or who suffer from cerebral palsy are being sent to the RR, where teachers may spend a whole school year to teach them some basic or pre-school skills. Other students who joined the RR have hearing impairment, speech difficulties and physical disabilities. Therefore the category of students benefiting from the RR are not necessarily the one identified in the special education guide (p 0.16) and this indicates the diversity of cases followed up in the RR. The examples tackle a case of a student who spent only one semester and achieved progress ,while in other example the student spent four years and achieved only very little portion of the goals. These examples do not refer to a simple variation in the achievement of the objectives, but to a large disparity between the students, which makes it more difficult to work of RRTs; therefore, there should be a reconsideration of the types of learning difficulties that are transferred to the Resource Room.
3. One of the issues that has risen in the collected data is the issue of the assessment of RRSs. Student performance and learning in the RRs is not taken into account in their evaluation process. They are evaluated according to their performance in the formal classrooms regardless to the progress they make in achieving the aims scheduled in the RR. It would be more useful to review the evaluation process of RRSs to fit with the educational goals students achieve. It is necessary to note that the students come to the Resource Room during school hours and often come to this room during the Arabic language or mathematics classes and miss those classes. So, what is the value of assessing students in a content that they hadn’t learned?

### Second: Planning, implementation and the adequacy of the training programs and support for teachers in the RRs.

Training topics are determined based on the observations ESEs and IECs collect during their supervisory or guidance visits to schools and in coordination with the principals in the GDCSE. Most of the comments from RRTs, SESs and IECs have focused on the necessity for more practical training that stems from the reality of RRTs and their work.

Practical training that is relevant to teachers concerns and reality is necessary for them to practice new techniques in their classes and grow in their profession. The importance of training appears when it comes to the fact that 22% of RRTs are special education graduates while 72% are qualified on basic education. It is not surprising to have these teachers – as fresh teachers- lacking knowledge or experience to deal with intellectual disabilities or learning difficulties. It is necessary for these teachers to possess theoretical knowledge about the categories of students with special needs and the types of learning difficulties, but it is also important for them to learn how to translate this theoretical knowledge into educational practices that support and teach these groups of students.

The current training programs provide RRTs with general strategies and methods that are applicable for teaching all categories of students at the basic level, and are not necessarily dedicated to those with learning difficulties.

At the same time, building learning communities among teachers is vital for their professional development and exchanging effective teaching practices. Thus, it's worthy for the GDCSE to launch 'learning communities initiative' at the educational directorates' level and to organize monthly or quarterly days for teachers to discuss issues related to their students' learning in the RRs and share the successful stories.

The need for activating the annual planning at GDCSE level appeared in the data. The annual planning also requires coordination between the GDCSE and other institutions that pose training programs for RRTs, SESs and IECs. Such coordination may help synchronous training programs not to conflict in dates and helps to involve all the target groups in the relevant programs. Teachers, for example, expressed a desire to put training programs at the beginning of the school year, which will help them to make use of the training focus during the school year. IECs commented that they did not participate in the offered training programs as a result of the work pressures or conflicts in trainings agendas that all resulted in weakening the follow-up to RRTs. Planning in GDCSE is made at the annual level, but without informing SESs and IECs out about these plans, previously. There should be coordination between the various institutions that offer training for RRTs, SESs, and IECs to avoid any future conflicts that may result in training schedules, or conflicts in the training plans and to avoid the repetition in the training topics. Besides, the importance of launching training programs that take into account the previous experience of the trainees, enrich and modulate it..

Of other things that have emerged from the data, that RR Program don't encourage the role of the students' counselor at the school and didn't strengthen her/his relationship to RRTs for enhancing students' learning. The work of the students' counselor does not fully agree with the statement about his tasks in the special education guide for example, "one of his roles is to follow up the educational achievement of RRSs". (P40). There was also apparent dissatisfaction among IECs regarding their role in the resource room project. A discrepancy was noticed in the role and performance of IECs due to the absence of a clear policy about their roles. So, IECs follow-up RRTs according to their personal visions and that would naturally follow the nature of the relationship between SESs, IECs and the Educational Directorate. IECs would not necessarily participate in all training programs of RRTs. Moreover, the background of some of them is not basically in education and do not have experience in education, therefore; unable to advise RRTs in teaching Arabic language and mathematics. In addition, IECs, don't take part in evaluating RRTs' performance, though, required to visit her/him twice a month. What was mentioned highlights the necessity for clearer policy for GDCSE regarding the roles and positions of IECs in the RRs programs and in the follow up process to RRTs.

Finally, the collected data reveal poor coordination between the General Directorate of Counseling and Special Education (GDCSE) and General Directorate of Supervision and Educational Qualifying. GDCSE directs RRTs while the other targets the rest of schoolteachers, including Arabic and math teachers. Consistency in training programs between the two general directorates may help increase coordination and cooperation between RRTs and Arabic/math teachers in a way that facilitates the follow up of the RRSs and enhance their learning. This need rises in the light of what RRTs report regarding the poor follow up of Arabic language and mathematics teachers for the RRSs.

### **Third: The impact of RRs on student learning**

The data points to a poor follow-up to RRSs by parents and Arabic language and math teachers, which showed a negative impact on student learning in RRs. The integration of the roles of these parties is essential to achieve the goal of the Resource Room. Procedures of learning in the RR requires active parental role and encourages their accompanying to their kids during the class, but there is a need for higher parents' presence and participation in the RR to foster their support to the project and their children. Similarly, cooperation between RRTs and the teachers of Arabic and mathematics should increase. There is a need to think about specific strategies in the future to raise the level of cooperation.

There is no final shortcut assessment to evaluate students' learning in the RRs and there are no quantitative indicators about the academic progress of the students. Students are usually transferred to the RR to learn skills from the lowest grade, while the actual evaluation in the classroom covers the skills he is required to master in this age in the formal curriculum. Student's evaluation is done by the end of every class on the class' focus skill, and so their learning is daily documented. However, the impact of leaning in the RR is not being measured on the long term or long-term learning.

Moreover, there is no data available on the exact number of students who graduate from RRs annually after achieving the planned educational goals. The data available is the number of students who are currently in the RR, but an actual follow up doesn't take place to know the percentage of goals that have been achieved during the school year.

All the interviewees unanimously asserted the necessity for 'support programs' for students who leave RRs after the fourth grade. Currently, priority to having students in RR goes to second and fourth grade students. Consequently, students in higher classes lose the learning support they used to get until the fourth grade, which may negatively affect their ability to keep their newly acquired skills and knowledge due to the absence of the follow-up factor. For example, a teacher worked on one of the students who made a good progress over three years, but because of being neglected in the school he moved to, he lost most of skills he had learned before. It is useful to think about other sources of learning programs to support students after the fourth grade, such as 'learning support programs'.

### ***Continuity of Resources Rooms in the future***

Talking with policy-makers and decision-makers in MoEHE revealed that the ministry has, or in the process of approving many decisions regarding RRs. For example, policy-making committee is studying the idea of appending RRs to schools construction schemes and rejecting any future building plans that don't include a RR in their constructions. Above that, during 2014, RRTs who will get employed in the ministry will be added to the directorate's annual staff formations. Therefore, the ministry has announced job applications for many disciplines such as language and speech therapy, special education, elementary education or child education. There are also community calls to keep RRs especially from parents of the students who are benefiting from RRs and who act like a wall that resists any attempts to close these rooms in the future.

At the same time, however, employing new RRTs is not connected with vacancies required to fill but with the governmental fund available to hire them, especially that priority in placement goes to classroom teachers because of limited financial fund. There are currently (65) RRs equipped by the local community or non-governmental institutions, but still waiting the appointment of teachers for these rooms. In comparison, (20) RRTs have been employed during the academic year 2014-2015. GDCSE doesn't have a plan for training these novice teachers despite having a qualified staff that is capable of training them. GDCSE didn't even name any training threads or allocate budget for qualifying them.

One of the issues still under investigation at the meantime is a proposal about the mechanism of evaluating RRSs. These students are currently being evaluated through the same assessment tools used with other students in the formal classroom. They are still subject to the rules of completion, success and failure used with their normal mates. A new proposal is being discussed now to change the criteria of evaluating RRSs learning.

In the end, there is a need for discussion on the level of the educational policy and decision makers, about the need for the existence of the RR at schools. As well as about the concept of the integrative teaching. Stage teacher's competency is also an issue to discuss, whether they need to upgrade their skills and got qualified to deal with and teach different students' levels and takes into account the individual differences or just transfer students who face learning difficulties to the Resources Room.

If there is a trend towards continuing RR's project, there should be approval for some policies that support its existence, such as learning evaluation system and a program to support learning of RRSs after the fourth grade.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Recommendations regarding students' learning**

1. Enhance students' learning at resources rooms requires continuous support for them in their regular classrooms in addition to the academic support they have in the resources rooms. In addition, there is a need for other academic supportive programs for RR students after finishing 4<sup>th</sup> grade or when moving to other schools.
2. Activate the role of school educational counselor in terms of following the students of RR (their current role is limited to being a member in the transfer committee). In addition, they should have role in following the students of RR after finishing 4<sup>th</sup> grade or when moving to other schools.

3. Study in depth cases of students who are transferred to the RRs and thus determine the educational plan, including the number necessary for the student weekly classes based on the needs and the nature of the learning difficulty they have.

#### **Recommendations regarding Resource room's teachers**

1. Activate the use of formal curriculum in the RR so that to reduce the gap between what students learn in the RR and what they should learn in their regular classrooms.
2. Study the forms that the RRT have to complete daily, weekly, quarterly and yearly and see how the number of these forms could be reduced.

#### **Recommendations regarding the general directorate of counseling and special education**

1. Reviewing the policy of students' nomination for RR and the characteristics of those students. Currently, this room is specified for all students with learning difficulties. However, low achievers benefit from RR more than other students with other learning difficulties.
2. Reviewing the policy of GDCSE regarding IECs' role in terms of RRTs follow-up and evaluation, and their participation in the training programs.
3. Reforming the structure of RR project so that the number of classes students have at RRs depend on the nature of learning difficulty they have ( For example, the students take 4 classes weekly in the RR. This number of classes may satisfy the needs of students who are low achievers but not the students who have other learning difficulties).
4. Modifying the Handbook for special education teacher in light of the application of the educational kit next academic especially that this handbook is needed by RRTs, IECs, and SESs.
5. Coordinating between different parties that offer training programs and avoiding repetition in the offered training programs.
6. Making sure that the training programs include practical part that illustrate the implementation of these training programs in a way correspond with RRTs' needs and contexts. This could happen by using RRs as training sites and building communities of learners from RRTs in which they exchange experience and this will contribute to their professional development.
7. Organizing a work day for principals whose schools have RRs to represent the objectives and methods of work of RRs and to develop a mechanism with them to support and follow –up students' learning in RRs.
8. Developing indicators to assess the effectiveness of training programs offered to RRTs, IECs, and SESs.
9. Providing IECs and SESs the GDCSE annual plan so that they consider it while planning their yearly activities to avoid scheduling conflict.
10. Reviewing the assessment policy for RR students so that their performance in the resource room is a part of their formal assessment.

*This work was done to the General Directorate of Counseling and Special Education/Ministry of Education and Higher Education and to the Swedish Organization for Individual Relief (SOIR)*

#### **References**

- Handbook for special education teachers in Palestine.** (2013). Ministry of Education and Higher Education, The General Directorate for Counseling and Special Education.