

Shaza Ismail¹ & Mariam Saad
Faculty of Educational Sciences
Saint Joseph University- Beirut, Lebanon¹

A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF SELF-DETERMINATION IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A LEBANESE MODEL

Abstract

Promoting self-determination for students with a learning disability is a fundamental aspect of inclusive education. During the last decades, the emphasis on self-determination emerged from the self-advocacy movement and empowerment for students with a learning disability. Self-determination is to teach students to act as the causal agents of their own lives, and to function independently. This preliminary study, examined the association between self-determination skills and students' feelings about their disability, perception of the school and family attributes, and capability in goal setting and formulating an action plan to attain goals. This is an innovative study since no information is available about the significance of self-determination in inclusive schools in the Lebanese context. The sample comprised 122 students ranging from the third to the twelfth grades. The study employed a mixed methodology using qualitative and quantitative design. The results of the semi-structured interviews indicated increased awareness of rights, and low level of learned helplessness. Implementation will proceed with pretest-posttest research design to measure further impact on the aforementioned skills and attainment of academic goals. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: causal agents, inclusive education, learned helplessness, self-advocacy, self-determination.

1. Introduction

The construct of self-determination has emerged in the last few decades as an impetus for students with disabilities to become empowered to advocate for themselves and to plan for productive lives in society. There has been substantial progress towards promoting self-determination as the movement to inclusive education gains momentum after the amendments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004. The modifications accentuated the application of individualized education programs (IEPs) in the general education classroom under the section [Sec.602 (a) (19), 1414(d)] (Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, & Agran, 2004; Lee et al., 2008; Wehmeyer et al, 2017). Furthermore, specific decrees of the law entailed the integration of self-determination skills in the general education curriculum (Konrad et al., 2008). The emphasis is that educators make concerted effort to deliver instructions in self-determination to facilitate students' post-secondary education, transition planning, and independent living (Shorgen, & Ward, 2018; Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenshark, & Little, T. D. 2015). The law required development of measurable goals to document post-school performance, thereby strengthening the relation between transition planning and after school success. This mandate will enable students to request for accommodations to facilitate this transition process.

¹ Email: sh1793319@gmail.com

Self-determination is considered a fundamental aspect of the curriculum in order to prepare students with learning disabilities to assume responsibility for their own learning, to play a major role in planning their future, and to function independently (Shogren, & Ward, 2018; Wehmyer & Palmer, 2003; Powers et al, 2012; Shorgen et al, 2015). Substantial research has implicated a relationship between self-determination and post-school outcomes, and quality of life (Lachapelle et al., 2005, McDougall, Evans, & Baldwin, 2010; Wehmyer & Palmer, 2003).

Students with learning disabilities lack understanding for their problems, and exhibit learned helplessness because of low internal locus of control (Woodcock, and Vialle, 2010) although they are usually cognizant of type of their difficulty. Conversely, students who exhibit self-determination tend to accept their learning difficulty, they are able to explain it, as well as understand how it influences them. They are willing during and after high school to seek support services that are required to achieve success, and demonstrate determination to overcome barriers that will certainly come along their learning process and future (Getzel, & Thoma, 2008). It is important to examine the effectiveness of self-determination instruction to create self-directed learners capable of pursuing future goals, in order to enhance self-efficacy of students with learning disabilities.

Since Al-Kawthar High School adopts inclusive education to offer services for students with learning disabilities, the purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of self-determination instruction on the ability of students to articulate how they perceive their abilities, and how others do, and what are their needs to achieve better results?

The results will add new information to literature related to self-determination in inclusive settings, and would help to improve pedagogical practices in our endeavor to provide research based interventions to increase students' self-image and self-efficacy.

2. Review of Literature

The field of special education has witnessed the enactment of more than one law since its inception in 1960. The most influential of all is the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 and 2004. (Lee, Wehmyer, Palmer, Soukup, & Little, 2008). New provisions have been added so students with learning disabilities have access to the general education curriculum. The law mandated that students with learning difficulties have long term goals and short term objectives, and curricular and instructional adaptations to make progress towards general education curriculum to insure optimal participation in the teaching learning process (Denny & Daviso, 2012; Wehmyer, Field, Doren, Jones, & Mason, 2004).

A plethora of research has documented that students with learning disabilities will most probably have access to the general education curriculum through inclusive education (Lee et al., 2008; Soukup, Wehmyer, Bashinski, & Bovaird, 2007; Wehmyer, Lattin, Lapp Rincker, & Agran, 2003). Also in the reauthorization, there is emphasis on providing transition services exemplified by both academics and functional curricula [Sec.602 (34) (A)].

Self-determination is one discipline of popular practice in inclusive education to improve academic performance and to address transition services (Burke, Shogren, Wehmyer, Antosh, & LaPlante, 2019; Trainor, 2002; Wehmyer & Schalock, 2005). Evidence-based practices have shown that self-determined students with learning disabilities achieve academic goals (Burke, Raley, Shogren, Adam-Mumbardó, Uyanik, Hagiwara, & Behrens, 2018; Raley, Shogren, & McDonald, 2018; Shogren, Palmer, Wehmyer, Williams-Diehm, & Little, 2012), and continue to perform positively in afterschool outcomes such as in employment and community integration (Shogren, Wehmyer, Palmer, Rifenshark, & Little, 2015).

2.1 Self-Determination and Students with Learning Disabilities

Self-determination is a psychological concept that has been in literature since the nineteenth century. Five principles constitute the underlying foundation for self-determination competency, relatedness, freedom, support, responsibility, and autonomy (Deci, & Ryan, 2000; Pennell, 2001). The emphasis on these principles developed from the genuine desire of individuals with disabilities to be perceived as human beings first.

Concurrently, proponents and researchers of disability self-advocates moved the self-determination movement forward (Wood et al., 2005). As such, self-advocacy became a component of self-determination. Self-advocacy comprises knowledge of one's learning disability, awareness of rights, responsibilities, and accommodations. Likewise, it includes the ability to speak up for needs and accommodations (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2018).

Several conceptualizations have been formulated to define the construct of self-determination because of underlying theories (Wehmeyer, 2003 as cited in Palmer, 2010). All definitions endorse the conception as the element indispensable to make responsible decisions regarding one's own life. Wehmeyer (1992) surveyed the psychological and educational literature to propose an initial definition of self-determination for use in special education, suggesting that self-determination: "refers to the attitudes and abilities required to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to make choices regarding one's actions free from undue external influence or interference" (Wehmeyer 1992, p. 305). Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998) summarized several of those definitions in the following comprehensive definition:

Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults (Field et al., 1998, p. 2).

Afterwards, Shogren et al (2015), proposed the "Casual Agency Theory," to be the reconceptualization of self-determination. Self-determination is defined as a:

".....dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one's life. Self-determined *people* (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals. Self-determined *actions* function to enable a person to be the causal agent in his or her life" (Shogren et al., 2015, p. 258).

A "dispositional Characteristic" is a permanent propensity used to illustrate differences between people when they act or think in a specific manner, but postulates effect of contextual variables. Depicting the dispositional descriptive aspect of self-determination renders it observable and measurable across and within individuals as the ecological factors change.

Within this context, research outlined self-determined behaviors that contribute to better understanding of students' ability to understand and accept their difficulties, to decide for themselves, and to direct their own lives. The fundamental components include the following: (1) Choice-making skills, (2) Decision-making skills, (3) Problem-solving skills, (4) Goal-setting and attainment skills, (5) self-management, (6) self-advocacy, (7) self-awareness, and (8) self-knowledge (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 2000; Denny & Daviso, 2012).

Fostering these self-determination skills hypothetically can, promote accessibility to the general education curriculum in more than one way. For instance, goal setting, problem solving, decision making, and self-management can serve as curriculum enhancement to improve academic achievement (Champers et al, 2007; Lane et al, 2008; Shogren, Palmer, Wehmeyer, Williams-Diehm, & Little, 2012; Raley et al, 2018), as well as participation in IEP meetings (Martin et al, 2006).

A meta-analysis conducted by Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, and Wood (2001) of 22 studies across 100 group interventions comparisons. Results revealed a median size effect of 1.38 for increase in self-determined behavior. In comparison, results of 18 single subject interventions yielded a median percentage of “non-overlapping data, PND” of 95% with range of 64% to 100%. Seven of the interventions had a PND of 100%, suggesting strong effects.

The study by Shogren and his associates (2014) used a cluster or group-randomized trial control group design with switching replication to examine the effect of SDLMI on achievement of academic goals and access to the general education program. The sample consisted of 312 high school students with learning disabilities. Results indicated a significant difference between control and treatment group on the Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) for academic success. The least square means of the control and experimental groups was 44.78 and 50.51 respectively at the $p < .05$ level. Observation results of access to the general education program indicated a significant gain from score intercept and slopes from baseline (3.6, 0.35), and at the end of year (5.1, 0.37) at the $p < .05$ level.

Lee, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Williams-Diehm, Davies, and Stock (2012) examined the impact of the components of self-determination using the “Whose Future Is It Anyway?” program on self-determined behavior and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy denotes the “conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce a given outcome” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). Students completed a questionnaire that included items such as knowledge of rights, ability to participate in IEP meetings, specifically if their rights at the IEP meeting will be acknowledged when given the opportunity to speak up. Standard multiple regression analyses for the AIR Self-Determination Scale and efficacy questionnaire revealed positive effect on self-determined skills and self-efficacy over other variables as intelligence quotient, and the Whose Future Is It Anyway-Knowledge Test. The unstandardized regression coefficients (B), the standardized regression coefficients (β), the semi-partial correlations (sr_i) and R , and adjusted R . R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(8,159) = 8.775, p < .001$.

A study by Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, and Martin (2000), indicated significant differences between pre and post intervention using the Self-Determination Learning Model of Instruction. Results of the paired-sample T-tests on two scales of self-determination were ($p=.046$), and ($p=.029$) on the Arc’s Self-Determination Scale, and the Nowicki-Stricklan locus of control scale respectively. Analysis of variance for the Goal Attainment Scale revealed a mean score of 49.13. This showed that 25% of the standardized GAS scores equaled 50, while 30% of the scores were more than 50, indicating that teachers rated 25% of the objectives as have being achieved as expected. More than 30% of teachers’ ratings of progress indicated that students had exceeded expectations in their goal achievement. Overall, slightly over 80% of students made at least some progress toward their goal, and 55% achieved their goal or exceeded it.

Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, and Soukup, (2012) examined the effect of self-determination intervention using different programs among which is SDLMI on improvement of self-determination scores of students with learning disabilities. They employed a randomized trial, control and experimental group study of 371 students from 14years old through 20years. Data analyses utilizing ML-LGM to report results. Results on the AIR-Student form was used to measure self-determination skills revealed a remarkable increase on the AIR-

S scores across time ($F(1, 446) = 32.10; p < .0001$), significant intervention group effect ($F(1, 365) = 8.62; p < .005$), and a significant intervention group by time interaction ($F(1, 446) = 6.70; p = .01$). The intervention group showed an increase that is substantially more positive on the AIR-S over time considering primary status and slope.

Multiple regression analyses (Shogren et al., 2013), examined the effect of personal and ecological factors on self-determination. The ecological factors included time inside the regular classroom, goal for the future, goal setting experiences. For the concern of this study, result of goal setting is portrayed. The multiple regression coefficients (b), adjusted R^2 and model fit statistics (F) were all significant at $p < .001$ for 8.846, .222, and 15.307 respectively.

Despite of emerging evidence on self-determination and inclusive education, most research examined secondary students and post-secondary effects of self-determination. In an attempt to address this dearth, this study examined the effect of self-determination intervention on students' feelings about their disability, perception of school and family attributes, and capability in goal setting and formulating an action plan to attain goals.

3. Methodology

A mixed model of quantitative and qualitative research design was used because it in accordance with the framework of this research. As referred to earlier, self-determination is a construct within the families and society at large to empower children with learning disabilities to advocate for their rights and to take actions to lead autonomous life. Thus, scrutinizing one entity either from the family or the school, would not have led to full understanding of how these entities contribute to enhance self-determination. Besides, quantitative data from the AIR scale alone would not meet the foremost goal of self-determination of giving the students the chance to express about strengths and limitations, and challenges that obstruct their plans for attainment of goals.

3.1 Participants

The sample included 122 students ranging from third grade to 12th grade receiving special education services and instruction in the general education classroom. The pool constitutes 81% (122/150) of the total number of students. They receive support sessions outside the regular classroom for three hours of thirty two hours per week ($9\% = 3/32$). The results of standardized testing reveal that students from third through seventh grade reveal language and reading problems. The pool of participants did not include all 150 students because of recurrent absenteeism due to different medical reasons. Middle school level students were the largest group (36.9%, $n=45$). Table 1 provides descriptive information and describes the distribution of students across grades.

Table 1
Descriptive Information of the Participating Students

Characteristic	N	%	Age
Gender			
Males	73	59.9	
Females	49	40.1	
Grade			
3	12	9.8	8years, 10months
4	14	11.4	9years, 7months
5	10	8.1	10years, 5months
6	8	6.5	10years, 9months
7	10	8.1	12years, 5months
8	13	10.6	13years, 8months
9	22	18	14years, 7months
10	12	9.8	15years, 6months
11	11	9.0	16years, 8months
12	10	8.1	17years, 3months

3.2 Procedures

This study is the first step in an attempt to examine the role of self-determination skills in inclusive classrooms at Al-Kawthar High School as one of the 15 schools of Al-Mabarrat Association. Hence, to ensure fidelity of implementation, special education coordinators and teachers were trained on self-advocacy and self-determination skills. Training covered theoretical background about the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) model and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) - Student Form, and activities during each phase of the SDLMI model before the intervention phase.

Intervention was implemented in successive phases from September to February 2019. The first phase was a training period for students on self-advocacy skills which are other important feature pertinent to self-determination. Next, training targeted self-determination skills. Sessions were conducted in groups of four to eight students contingent on students' characteristics.

The second phase aimed to fill the AIR Self-Determination Scale as a pre-test to determine the level of perceptions and awareness to personal and environmental factors that impact self-determined behavior. It was supposed to be administered as a post-test to measure effect of self-determination training on students' awareness and actions. However, it was not possible to complete this stage due to school closure as a consequence of COVID-19 outbreak.

The third phase included training on the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI). It was embedded in the daily program for a fifty minute session. Teachers applied activities and worksheets adapted from The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction- Teacher's Guide (2019) for two to four sessions for each student. For example, worksheets included questions pertaining to "what is my goal," "what do I want to learn or improve," and "What must change for me to learn what I don't know?" "What can I do to make this happen? 'What can I do to remove these barriers?" and then activities on revision of plan as self-evaluation.

Throughout the process, teachers employed strategies such as brainstorming, self-talk, and think aloud so students express their feelings and thoughts, and discuss steps of their plans. Teachers mainly took the role of facilitators, and advocates during each phase of the SDLMI. For example, they guided students to express their feelings by using open ended questions, simulations, and reflective writing.

The fourth phase encompassed individual sessions for each student for the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted by the coordinators of the special education program. It is necessary to mention that interviews were conducted in parallel to application of activities.

Moreover, a workshop was conducted to introduce parents to self-determination and its importance in fostering self-confidence and self-efficacy. In addition, individual parent conferencing was going on when issues emerge pending students' responses during different activities.

3.3 The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction

The model is an empirical validated program to promote self-determination for students with learning and intellectual disabilities as well as students without learning disability (Agran, Blanchard, & Wehmeyer, 2000; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003; Shogren et al., 2014; Palmer et al 2004; Shogren et al, 2019, Wehmeyer et al, 2012). It is implemented in three instructional phases where the student poses a question and teachers lead the discussion through problem-solving. Questions in each phase aim to teach students to set goals, put an action plan, and evaluate and modify their plans by identifying barriers and facilitators. The ultimate goal is to train students how to self-regulate and self-direct the learning process.

During the process, teacher's role is to provide a road map to assist students solve the problem asked in each phase. Teachers apply strategies to train students on self-awareness, goal-setting, choice-making, prioritization of goals and time scheduling, decision making, self-advocacy and goal attainment. The ultimate aim is to teach students to make choices and decisions, to develop an action plan, and to modify and evaluate progress towards intended goals.

3.4 Instrumentation

The AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman, Campeau, Dubois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994) was used to assess self-determination. It includes student, teacher, and parent forms. The AIR-Student Scale (AIR-S) has 24 questions that measure capacity and opportunity scores to yield the level of self-determination. The capacity component includes questions about "Things I do," and "How I Feel," to answer questions about how they feel to perform a self-determined behavior. The opportunity component includes items about "What Happens at School," and "What happens at Home," to achieve self-determined behavior at school and home. The AIR- Educator and AIR-Parent contains 30 questions and 18 questions, respectively. All the scales are rated on a scale of 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The AIR-S and AIR-E were normed on 450 students with and without learning disability. The psychometric properties revealed acceptable reliability and validity in the measurement of self-determination for students with and without disabilities.

3.5 Data Collection

Data was collected from two sources. The quantitative questionnaire aimed to investigate the extent to which students perceive themselves and their relationships within family and school on the AIR scale. The questionnaire was given to all 122 students. The introduction session primarily aimed to build rapport with the students and explain the aim of answering the questionnaire. Most importantly, it was vital to ensure them that it is not a test, and there are no wrong or right answers and it is not graded.

The AIR scale was administered in the resource room. Students were instructed to ask about any difficult vocabulary words to ensure the validity of testing due to their reading difficulties.

The second source is the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are those where respondents answer open-ended questions about research topic. It was selected to be used with students with learning disabilities since it provides a vehicle to use their own language to obtain insights about how they perceive their abilities regarding self-determination skills. It also gives them the opportunity to be active participants in the research process. In the same vein, semi-structured interviews are situations that hold a potential to hear students' "voices," which is the main core aspect of self-advocacy skills. This is an opportunity for students to speak up about strength and weakness points, rights, needs, and perception of significant others about their ability. This would facilitate planning for the road map that guides students to achieve better outcomes (Roberts, et al., 2014).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis by the five coordinators of the special education program. The advantages are that they allow teachers to explain difficult vocabulary terms, and to query more responses and feelings through open-ended questions. In addition, nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures fortify the qualitative features of the data (Jupp, 2006). However, the main disadvantage is the time and effort required from the teachers. Each interview with a student lasted from thirty minutes to one hour. Each interview entailed questions that originated from the AIR Student-Form. Questions covered components of "How I Feel," "What Happens at School," and "What Happens at Home." In addition, students answered open-ended questions in relation to goals they want to work on, and what is the plan and actions to achieve these goals.

3.6 Data Analyses

Interview data for students from third through 6th grades were derived from verbal responses of students. Coordinators of special education department documented answers after training from the first author. Students from seventh through 12th grades wrote down the answers on separate sheets. The process of text analysis included some of the steps presented by Creswell (2014). It involved classification of text to reflect key features of self-determination, and clustered into themes. The quantitative analysis is not detailed in this paper because intervention was interrupted due to the school closure because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

4. Results

The results of the semi-structured interviews revealed a number of personal feelings, and school, and family obstacles and facilitators related to plans and ambitions. Five main themes were identified: (1) personal feelings related to strength and weakness points, (2) what happens at school, (3) what happens at home, (4) present and future goals, and (5) plans and actions to achieve goals.

4.1 Capacity- Personal Feelings

Negative expectations and beliefs with some positive ones emerged from students' answers. The ideas that mostly transpired reflected low self-esteem, low self-regulation of emotions, and external locus of control. One interesting quote was: *"I like to be in a place such as the moon since there is nobody there."*

"Whatever I work, I will not succeed."

"I cannot self-regulate my emotions sometimes, so I unintentionally bother my friends."

"I am not proud with my grades."

"I trust myself."

4.2 Opportunity- School

Certain barriers and facilitators were evident from most responses. The emphasis was on peers. On the other side, positive features appeared with respect to teachers and school in general. Negative feelings were obvious when two students cried when speaking about their friends.

“I am lucky because my teachers love me and help me to succeed.”

“I do not have friends and nobody loves one.”

“Some of my peers do not like me.”

“My teachers encourage me and not my peers.”

“It is good that I attend school so there will be someone to listen to me.”

“I like coming to school; the teachers laughs to me and cares for me.”

“The teacher helps me and I started to participate in class.”

“I want to take the same examinations as my peers, and not adapted ones.”

“I want to change some my objectives in the individualized education program.”

4.3 Opportunity- Home

The most pertinent barriers that surfaced in relation to home were being unloved and unaccepted by family members, and about disbelief in their abilities.

“My parents do not love me as my siblings, and abandon me if asked to.”

“I stay alone at home, and do not speak to anyone.”

“My mother says that I will not achieve anything in the future, whereas my siblings will be successful in the future.”

“I feel like a stranger, and I am forbidden to express my opinion. My mother makes all decisions for me.”

“My parents do not listen to me.”

“My parents ask for chores from my siblings and not me because they think that I cannot.”

“My father does not like me and he wants me to drop out of school and work with him.”

“I like my mother to teach me how to reach my goals.”

“I am no more afraid to tell my parents what I would like to become in the future.”

4.5 What is my Goal?

Most students at secondary level wrote that their goal is successfully pass the Baccalaureate Official Examinations, the wish that principals grant scholarship to continue university studies, and mentioned what they want to become in the future. They want to be doctors, judges, and pilots. One wants to study business administration. The following are examples from their own comments:

“I want to pass the Official Examinations, and succeed in life, and take actions for foster my self-esteem.”

“I want to pass the Official Examinations, and integrate in society so I will learn to act, and plan for employment.”

“I wish to increase my self-esteem, and more community integration.”

Responses from middle school students were in the same line with secondary students. Ninth grade students (n=22) wanted to succeed in Intermediate Official Examinations, to improve reading and writing, to get good grades, and financial aid to continue learning abroad. Six students hoped to discontinue receiving special education services. One student cited that she does not have any goal. The careers they cited included a football player, an engineer, an architect, and bank manager. Answers from third, fourth, 5th, and 6th graders did not differ from that of middle school students.

“I want to improve my English language, achieve all objectives, and so succeed all lifelong.”

“Get financial aid to continue my learning abroad.”

4.6 Action Plan

Analysis of their words revealed different perspectives to achieve goals. More than concept emerged such as, plan for time schedules and organization, effort, hard work, perseverance, patience, frequent practice, ask for help, do not give up, try to study and memorize, concentrate during the lesson, be conscious, and study for the exams. However, responses from third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders indicated that they did not understand what action plan is. This was evident from their answers. For instance, answers were “study well for the scientific topics” “to have friends like my brother,” and “sit quietly.”

5. Discussion

The aim of the study was that promoting self-determination can be used as an instructional strategy to foster self-realization of students with learning disabilities to their weakness and strength points, and to identify their needs to become more independent learners. The study provides important, though certainly initial, information about importance of considering students’ personal characteristics and ecological factors (teachers and parents) to foster self-determined behavior for students with learning disabilities. It extends the research on self-determination beyond middle school, high school, and adulthood to lower elementary.

Another contribution of this study is that it might provide evidence about importance of self-determination in inclusive education in the Lebanese context, especially that contextual variables differ with school characteristics (Rubie-Davies, Flint, & McDonald, 2011).

5.1 Personal Feelings

The personal feelings delineated are in relation with learned helplessness that is one characteristic of students with learning disabilities. Learned helplessness stems from attribution theory, which states that individuals attribute their successes and failures to external and internal factors. It stresses the importance of the belief that persons are the causal agents to achieve expected outcomes (Koles, and Boyle, 2013). Pertaining to students with learning disabilities, learned helplessness is the result of external locus of control because they credit success to external factors such as easy tests or kind teachers. For example, students with reading difficulty believe that this disability cannot be enhanced with practice and effort (Koles & Boyle, 2013).

The answers on personal feelings were the same across all grade levels. For example, the responses *“Whatever I work, I will not succeed,”* and *“I am not proud with my grades,”* reflect learned helplessness, and resonates with research about low persistence level on tasks compared to students without learning disabilities (Bear, Minke, & Manning, 2002; Zisimopoulos & Galanaki, 2009), little chances for good achievement, and low academic self-concept (Tabassam and Grainger, 2002; Nunez, Gonzalez-Pienda, Gonzalez-Pumariiega, Rocés, Alvarez, Gonzalez, 2005).

Given that personal perceptions affect academic performance, the results suggest that by promoting self-determination we can foster academic performance and self-efficacy.

5.2 Opportunity Component

Findings from the opportunity component in relation to school and home revealed that contextual variables of school and home as environmental factors are important to address in inclusive education. This elucidates the functional underpinning of self-determination which states that environment and experiences impact opportunity for learning. (Wehmeyer, & Abery, 2013). Students' responses implicate negative experiences that affect self-determination.

These results point to previous studies, which indicated positive correlations between school support, self-determination, and engagement with self-determination being the strongest predictor of school engagement for students with learning disabilities (Yang, Chiu, Sin, and Lui, 2020). A growing body of research has established a positive relationship between self-determination, inclusion, and access to the general education curriculum (Lee, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, & Little, 2008; Shogren et al., 2007; Shogren, et al 2013; Raley, Shogren, & McDonald, 2018).

In the same vein, students' responses about the regular education teachers reveal negative attitudes towards their disability. This reflects that they might not be encouraged to teach self-determination skills because they think that students lack the capacity to acquire skills leading to self-determination. The attitudinal factor of low expectations will not facilitate implementation of the SDLMI as students will believe that they have few opportunities to exercise self-determination (Shogren et. al, 2007; Zhang, 2001).

The most astounding results were those recounted in the perceptions of students of family attitudes towards their disability. Answers demonstrated deepening feelings of solitude, hope for acknowledgment, appreciation, and love. Hence, these emotions will be an obstacle to foster self-determined behaviors since the family is a main element of the functional theory of self-determination (Shogren, et al 2013; Shogren & Turnbull, 2006; Wehmeyer et al., 2003). Another perspective that supports the role of families emanates from the area of development as parents are at the forefront to teach self-determination skills such as problem solving, self-advocacy, decision making, and goal setting and attainment (Cho, Wehmeyer & Kingston, 2013; Palmer, 2010). As self-determination is a lifelong standpoint, it is vital to develop these skills from the earliest ages until adulthood to project transition goals (Wehmeyer, 2014). Hence, it is essential to examine family attitudes and plan for family-centered awareness programs within the context of self-determination (Hurley, 2010; Morningstar & Wehmeyer, 2008).

Accordingly, this clarifies why individual conferring was conducted with parents to raise awareness on the impact of their attitudes on the child's acceptance of his/her disability, and that they are the primary advocates for the rights of their children in order to ensure a better quality of life.

5.3 What is my Goal and Action Plan?

As shown by the results of "What is my Goal and Action Plan, an outcome that strongly transpired for all students reflects the students' aspirations to continue university studies like their peers. However, anecdotes from third, fourth, and fifth graders indicate the need for more training on the concept of goal setting, and actions required for achieving goals. This reflects the difference between students with and without learning disabilities because Palmer and Wehmeyer (2003) indicated that young children without learning disabilities can set goals. We believe that this has to do with age group, and the fact that the students are not trained before on goal setting, and action plans. Furthermore, both special and regular education teachers ought to engage more in student-centered instruction to improve comprehension of goal setting and attainment. Whereas, answers of the secondary students are in accordance with academic

goal attainment as evidenced in the study by Shogren et al (2012), and are related to the developmental trajectory of self-determination (Palmer, 2010). Another possible reason is that teachers in the regular classroom put more focus on preparation for university, and the belief of the students that they are entitled to this right as well.

Generally, this study added relatively new information different from existing research because we started the investigation from the students' beliefs to prove the importance of implementing self-determination in inclusive education rather than it is preexisting in our regular classrooms to improve academic performance and self-efficacy. Work will perpetuate with the quantitative study to validate the impact of the SDLMI through pre-posttest design on academic performance and self-efficacy once school reopens after remission from COVID-19.

6. Implications for Future Research and Practice

Promoting self-determination is a multifaceted process that requires concerted effort from the school's administration, teachers, and family. As this study is the first endeavor ever to teach self-determined skills in Lebanese context, several implications can be drawn for future research.

Research studies involving single-case design or quasi-experimental studies, and randomized trial control group studies corroborate the efficacy of involvement of students in educational planning on self-determination (Palmer et al., 2012; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Lee, Williams-Diehm, & Shogren, 2011). This actually elucidates the significance for active participation of students in designing of individualized education programs to include self-determined skills. This would entail planning for systematic instruction in self-determination skills (decision-making, goal setting, action plans, etc.). The answers by more than one student to change objectives in their individualized education program and to have examinations like their counterparts support this idea.

Continued work also is going to be in place to train and empower special education teachers to better promote self-determination. Supporting teachers to have high expectations regarding self-determination skills, and equipping them with strategies to foster self-awareness, and all self-determination skills accomplish this. Research suggests that the insufficient training of teachers affect promotion of self-determination (Cho et al., 2012; Wehmeyer, Agran, et al., 2000). In addition, start training regular education teachers because, this would affect perceptions of students about their disability, promote self-determination, and engage more in the learning process. A study by Shogren, Plotner, Palmer, Wehmeyer, and Paek (2014) indicated significant interaction using analysis of variance (ANOVA) between teacher training on SDLMI and perception of student ability and opportunity for self-determination to happen. Thus, practice of self-determination will be infused in all subject areas with involvement of regular education teachers. Further, data suggest strong relationship between self-determination and hours in regular classroom rather than outside the classroom (Lee et al, 2008; Shogren et al 2013). In addition, Zhang (2001) discussed the likelihood that it might be more difficult for students with learning disabilities to show self-determined behavior in general education classrooms because teachers could be less informed to support articulation of such behaviors. In addition, there is a need to implement strategies to foster student self-awareness, and to reinforce the importance of having high expectations from teachers regarding self-determination skills.

Finally, continuous effort is required to support parents to accept their children, and to train them on strategies to enhance self-determination skills. Further, research also suggests an important role for siblings since they are often the best advocates at home and school (Wehmeyer, 2014). Thus, intervention will aim to include siblings in the SDLMI training as it also targets students without learning disability.

Although intervention was implemented for 6 months, promising results emerged regarding implementation of self-determination. In addition, with the advent of inclusive education, disability is not perceived from the “student-deficit” stance, rather from a disparity between the student’s personal characteristics and the requirements of the context (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Forber-Pratt, Little, & Lopez, 2014). Thus, this study contributes to introduce self-determination instruction to reduce the gap between personal ability and environment.

7. Conclusion

The present study extends the research on self-determination for students with learning disabilities in middle and high school classes. However, it expands to shed light on the pertinence of self-determination for lower and upper elementary levels. The findings suggest that self-determination intervention is a gateway for students to communicate their feelings, explain the factors that impede their yearning for acceptance. For example, teachers can address problems mentioned such as difficulty to self-regulate emotions, and include skills mentioned in “Action Plan” in the individualized education program. In addition, as this study showed promising results with students with learning disabilities, we can expand the work to include students with intellectual disabilities and find the differences between these populations.

Furthermore, use of the AIR-teacher and AIR-Parent forms will provide more data on the perception of teachers and parents of the students’ abilities. The AIR-teacher form would provide a deeper insight on teachers’ attitudes and beliefs towards students with learning disabilities. In turn, allow for planning of training on self-determination to cover all component elements. For example, teachers will teach goal attainment from characters of a story, or problem-solving by predicting solutions for the plot. Similarly, training will empower regular education teachers to implement self-determination with all students as a facet of personalized learning where students are held accountable for their own learning.

Results from the AIR-parent form would help to know a variety of family variables that might affect the development of self-determination, and provide the parents with information to be involved in transition planning, especially for secondary students. Also, parent training helps to guide family members to reinforce elements of self-determined behaviour, such as problem-solving or making choices, which could provide direction for adequate parenting.

Nevertheless, completion of the quantitative part would have allowed for further validation of the effect of self-determination instructions. In turn, this might lead to consider self-determination as an educational outcome (Wehmeyer & Schalock, 2001). The ultimate aim is to make informed decisions about curricular and instructional adaptations in inclusive settings to optimize the offered services for students with learning disabilities, which is the epitome of inclusive education.

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