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Enhancing Learning Disability Identification in Saudi Arabia (A Qualitative Study)

Hassan Alwadei
Assistant Professor, Special Education, College of Education and Arts, University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia
Email: Halwadi@ut.edu.sa
https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0882-0542

ABSTRACT

Instructional coaches play a crucial role in supporting teachers with the referral and evaluation processes for identifying students with learning disabilities (LD) in Saudi Arabia. They also assist students in navigating daily learning and assessment activities. This study examined the perspectives of instructional coaches regarding the current LD identification model, its effectiveness, and the feasibility of implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) as an alternative framework. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 instructional coaches, the study evaluated the strengths and limitations of Saudi Arabia's existing identification practices. The findings revealed significant concerns regarding the accuracy of current methods and the risks associated with misidentifying students. While MTSS is not yet utilized in Saudi schools, the results suggest it could offer a more comprehensive and reliable approach to addressing students' academic and behavioral needs. The study emphasizes the importance of culturally and linguistically appropriate practices and advocates for the phased implementation of MTSS, supported by robust teacher training programs. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of LD identification challenges in Saudi Arabia and highlights the potential of MTSS to improve outcomes, offering practical recommendations for policy and future research.

Keywords: Learning Disability, Identification in Saudi Arabia.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning disability's (LD) origins can be traced to the early 19th century when scientists found a link between brain injury and an individual's use of language (Wexler, 2017). Over the last two centuries, research into LD has led to discoveries and the development of approaches for helping students with disabilities. In Saudi Arabia, LD is a recent phenomenon with its being recognized as a special category in 1996 (Al-Quraini, 2011). This was an important step as it led to the adoption of methods of intervention programming and identifying students with an LD.

Reliable and ethical identification methods for LD poses a lingering challenge. According to Al-Medlij et al. (2019), unreliable and unethical identification methods can lead to overidentification or under-identification of learners with an LD, resulting in false positive and negative student cases. Since the early 1900s, IQ tests have been used to identify learners with an LD. However, more recently, their efficacy has been questioned (e.g., Fuchs et al., 2003). IQ tests are questionable because they ask unethical questions (e.g., What does a US Senator do?). Standardized tests such as IQ ask questions about comprehension when reading decoding is the issue. IQ tests are not reflective of classroom activities and practices (Lyon et al., 2017). The use of IQ/achievement discrepancy makes the focus on eligibility rather than instruction. Since its inception, the IQ discrepancy model has proved problematic for many reasons. For instance, researchers point out that the model makes it hard to identify learners with LD early enough for interventions to be effective (Restori et al., 2009). Most young learners who experience reading, writing, comprehension and other associated educational deficiencies rarely demonstrate the achievement discrepancy required to be eligible for special education under the IQ discrepancy model. As such, they can even go for years without their LD being recognized. The model waits for learners to fail to introduce interventions (Restori et al., 2009). Other researchers point out that the IQ discrepancy model's ineffectiveness derives from the degree of IQ-Reading discrepancy does not always relate to the severity level of a student's LD (Kavale, 2005). Such objections discredit the model's use in the early identification of children's LD.

One alternative to IQ tests is to use classroom-based activities and assessments to define students' skills over time (Berkeley et al., 2020). If they are not making good progress nor meeting grade level expectations, then a series of intervention sessions could be offered. These are the core components of what is known as Response to Intervention or multi-tiered systems of support RTI/MTSS (Sugai and Horner, 2009). Heartland, Iowa, first employed RTI in 1980 for providing intervention programming for students who struggled with reading; the paradigm has evolved into a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) paradigm to pair academics with behavior given how the two are so intertwined.

RTI employs curriculum-based measurement to universally screen students for early identification of learning problems and provides intervention programming to help students improve in their skills and hopefully not need consideration for special education (Berkeley et al., 2020). Educators have called for RTI to be implemented in Saudi Arabia including Bagasi (2018) and Al-Quraini, (2011). RTI evolved to now be

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MTSS: multiple tiers, universal screening of all students to detect academic problems and progress monitoring.

Overview of Learning Difficulties in Saudi Arabia

It has been 60 years since the government set up the Department of Special Learning in 1962 (Alqurani, 2011). Only deafness, intellectual disabilities, and blindness were included. LD was added as a special category in 1996 after the Department of Learning Disabilities (DLD) was created in 1995 (ALMedlij & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2019). The recognition of LD as a special category in Saudi Arabia was important as it paved the way for identifying students with an LD in elementary schools, leading to a rise in the number of students who required special education services. In addition, the growing number of students with an LD has led to research about their identification and placement (ALMedlij & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2019).

Saudi Arabia is utilizing the term learning difficulties instead of learning disabilities. The definition of LD in Saudi Arabia does not differ considerably from that of the United States, Canada, Australia, and India. According to Alawfi (2017), LD refers to the neurological conditions that make it impossible for an individual to store, process, or create information (Alawfi 2017). Abed and Shackelford (2020) indicated that, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education (2002) defined Learning difficulties as,

> disturbances in one or more of the basic psychological processes involving the understanding and use of written or spoken language that appear in disorders of listening, thinking, speaking, reading and writing (spelling) and mathematics, which are not due to mental, audiovisual or other disabilities, or other types of disabilities, learning conditions or family care (p. 4).

The 2002 definition of LD contributed to the government of Saudi Arabia, represented by the Ministry of Education, by improving the education of students with LD who continue to face many challenges. There was a pronounced shortage of educators with the training to help manage students' programming (Battal, 2016). Over time, most universities have created special education departments, leading to the training of an adequate pool of homegrown educators to provide special education services, including for students with an LD. In 2005, the establishment of the King Abdulla Foreign Scholarship played a role in the education of Saudi nationals in foreign universities in different fields, including special education (Almedlij & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2019). The program increased the number of specialized Saudi professionals providing students with the relevant special education services. Consistent with the definition of LD, educators are trained to specifically handle LD as a special category. Today, Saudi Arabia has more educators who can manage programming for students with an LD.

Students' being stigmatized for having a disability persists in schools and society. In response, the Saudi government, through the Ministry of Education, established Learning Disabilities Day in 2009 to deal with the negative attitudes toward LD in society (ALMedlij & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2019). The aim was to raise awareness about the problem and empower society and institutions to create an inclusive environment

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that is friendly to people with LD (Alquraini, 2011). The day was accompanied by a campaign dubbed "I know my difficulties." All learning institutions were mandated to participate in the campaign and other activities during the day (Almedlij & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2019). Centers of special education services, special education departments of universities, and learning difficulties associations take responsibility for observing this day. Many activities are offered such as brochures to the public to raise awareness of LD. Also, seminars, professional development, and consultations are given during the day. These days are usually held in malls to reach out to different groups of society. It has been one of the most notable efforts by the government to improve the lives of learners with an LD.

The Saudi government continued to support the field of LD by creating several programs. One of the most important was the setting up of the Rules and Regulations of the Special Education Programs in 2001 (ALMedlij & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2019). The aim was to help students with disabilities get access to adequate services in rehabilitation and education (Aldabas, 2015). Intervention programming increased and ensured that more resources were directed towards meeting students' needs.

Another recent development was the release of a guidebook by the Ministry of Education to facilitate providing services to students with LD. The "Teachers Guide for Learning Difficulties in the Primary Stag" includes what LD educators in Saudi Arabia need to know about the services available for each subtype of LD and how to manage students' programming (Poch et al., 2022). The guidebook includes social, technical, psychological, medical, and language/speech services. Releasing this guidebook was an important step in the providing teachers ideas and strategies to help students with an LD.

Learning Disability Eligibility Determination Procedures in Saudi Arabia

The identification of students with an LD is a complicated and multifaced process (Hayes et al., 2018). To determine the eligibility of students who require LD services, Saudi Arabian educators apply a series of best-practice procedures, which are described in the following sections.

Screening and Identification

Instructors, as they teach, observe students' behavioral and academic characteristics and their effect on performance. When there is a consistent link between this manifestation and dual discrepancy, the teacher referral to an in-school team to consider assessing for a possible LD (Teachers' Guide,2020 KSA Ministry of Education). Observing and assessing students' progress in classroom activities is part of the screening and identification process.

Assessment

Educators complete a multidisciplinary evaluation with students to determine if they are eligibile for placement in special education services. The first test assesses a student's intelligence using an IQ test (Teachers' Guide,2020 KSA Ministry of Education). Second, educators assess the student's developmental abilities, such as motor skills, to determine whether a learning disability exists in the student's case.

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Third, norm-referenced tests are administered, and their purpose is to compare the learner with peers. The fourth assessment process is the administration of criterion-referenced tests of academic skills, reading, writing, and math (Teachers' Guide,2020 KSA Ministry of Education). In reviewing research articles and other sources, no more specific information could be found about what Saudi Arabian educators use in completing multi-disciplinary evaluations in addition to IQ. Curriculum-based assessments include observation of the student in a teaching-learning setting, interviewing the students, and conducting a case study for a particular learner.

Determine the Current Level of Performance of the Student:

The Saudi Arabian teachers' guide indicates that the IEP must reflect a student's present levels of performance. Student performance in comparison to grade level expectations is the main factor determining whether they are eligible for disability services (Teachers' Guide, 2020 KSA Ministry of Education). Implementing assessments such as functional behavioral assessment strategies can offer insights that describe the student's behavior through the following methods:

- Describe a student's current academic, psychological, behavioral, and social performance level.
- Describe a student's current level of performance includes strengths and needs in various aspects.
- Implement the assessment to the student's environments. Being cognizant of the student's environment while complete the test(s) while analyzing and discussing the results.

According to the Saudi Arabia's teacher's guide (2020), each teacher of students with an LD must create an IEP for each student receiving services that includes accommodations and modifications per the student's needs and levels of ability. Also, the IEP should include assessment results, educational strategies, and other tools that can help the student. Students with an LD often receive their learning in the resource room. Also, general and special education teachers must collaborate in many areas, such as referral, IEPs, managing students' progress, and communication with students and their families.

The Teacher's Guide (2020) provides learning strategies to teach students with LD (e.g., reading, writing, math, and general learning strategies). So, the strategies are chosen based on "well-known evidence-based strategies" of the United States for students with an LD. These strategies include instructional techniques such as self-regulated strategy development, teacher modeling, and peer-mediation techniques. In addition, the guide indicates that teachers of LD are not restricted to these strategies in teaching; they have the choice to use what they deem as appropriate strategies for their students (Poch et al., 2022).

Alquraini (2011) indicated that Saudi Arabia's diagnosis and assessment processes are still lacking in determining students' eligibility for special education. Referral does not begin early enough and usually starts when the child goes to school; consequently, the opportunity to obtain early intervention for students with disabilities and their families will be low. Besides, public schools and special education personnel can

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experiences challenges with having peronnel to be part of multidisciplinary teams asl well as educators' training and interpretation knowledge of adaptive behavior scales, IQ and academic assessments appropriate for the Saudi cultural standard. Schools psychologists tend to be the sole person to determine a student's eligibility for special education services based on their IQ scores and teachers' observations. Based on Alquraini's comments, the procedures for determining students with an LD are not based on a multidisciplinary team's discussion and recommendations. It is recommended that Saudi Arabia work to change educational practices so that multidisciplary assessment including curriculum based measurement (CBM) and intervention programming be the core elements of students' consideration for special education and placement to better achieve best practice.

An LD Intervention and Identification Alternative: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

By the late 1970s, educators were becoming increasingly frustrated with the IQ/achievement discrepancy method of LD identification. Its wait-to-fail approach to assessment and intervention programming was leaving teachers to wait until the end of third grade to initiate a student's referral. If a referral was not initiated until a later grade, the assessment and identification process would take an even longer timeframe. Delays in the process could also be exacerbated due to a lack of school psychologists to complete assessments in a timely manner or parents procrastinating in signing assessment-approval forms.

In 1980, The Heartland Education Association initiated an alternative method to better help students in early elementary grades with intervention programming and hopefully not need referral and special education placement. The district's response-to-intervention approach offered students small-group intervention programming in reading, progress monitored the students' skills over time, and had in-school teams review each student's data and what next-steps programming should be. Other educators and researchers liked the RTI concept and advocated that it become educational policy and an option in educational law.

In 2000, President George W. Bush convened the President's Commission on Special Education in Washington, DC, to review special education practices. Berdine (2003) indicated that significant value could be found in the findings and recommendations made by the commission. The commission provided the opportunity for a framework for landmark federal legislation that could considerably alter the American public education landscape. Its major recommendations have continued to guide education in the United States.

The key practices of an RTI model were universal screening of all students three times per year to determine which students could benefit from intervention programming, progress monitoring students' skills during these interventions, and using this data to determine which students were dually discrepant (i.e., low ability and little or no progress over time). RTI's focus on academics (reading, writing, and math) led to a new iteration of the paradigm to include the factor and interaction of a student's behavior with academics: multi-tiered systems of support.

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Berkeley et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review of websites of all the fifty state education agencies to explore how states interpreted RTI a decade after the finalization of the IDEA regulations and found substantive progress of most states towards adoption of an MTSS model. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2006), educators developed various RTIs versions to have between two and four tiers of instruction with the type and nature of academic instruction changing at each tier. Instruction becomes more intensive as the learner moves across the tiers. The increase in intensity may be facilitated by using scripted, more teacher-centered, and systematic instruction, frequent instruction, additional duration of instruction, relying on more experienced instructors and their expertise, and students being in smaller groups (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Another key aspect of MTSS was to provide students with high-quality core instruction. As one example of a next step, Harlacher et al. (2014) suggested that the second tier be in addition to core instruction and in a group of five to eight students. Baker et al. (2010), indicated that the second tier primarily be opportunities for the students to learn and practice skills learned in the core tier. Jimerson et al. (2015) indicated that if the instruction in tier two is not adequate in meeting the needs of the students, students should be provided with tier three instruction. Tier three should be more explicit, of longer duration, and with smaller groups.

Defining Features of MTSS

MTSS has several key features. Harlacher et al. (2013) emphasized the need to employ evidence-based practices. MTSS practices should offer students the best chance at success by using what works. The second key feature of MTSS is the use of data to facilitate decision-making (Braun et al., 2018; Harlacher et al., 2013). Previously, educators made decisions primarily with standardized tests and supplemental/anecdotal data from classroom activities and teachers' observations. MTSS can help addresses these issues by ensuring that data is used to allocate resources and align instruction and curriculum to assessment. Therefore, students' curriculum-based measurement data are used to make high stake decisions. An instructional match is a key characteristic of MTSS. Harlacher et al. (2013) indicated that MTSS offer students access to support has the relevant intensity, targets specific skills, and improves student performance. Multiple instructional tiers offer a range of intensity to match a learner's needs. The tiers also ensure that skills deficits get the right level of support. If the instruction provided does not lead to growth in learning, adjustments can be made or additional supports can be put in place until the targeted growth is achieved. Schoolwide use and teacher collaboration are other characteristic features of MTSS. It promotes increasing collaboration among educators by ensuring isolation and silos and schools are deconstructed. These features of MTSS effectively provide LD instruction and interventions.

METHODOLOGY

Creswell (2012) defines research design as "a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue" (p.2). It is a

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framework of a researcher's techniques and methods to conduct research. Therefore, it is a blueprint that guides data collection, measurement, and analysis. I chose the semi-structured interview method because I wanted to prepare questions for the interviewee to start with and ask follow-up questions during the interview if needed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This type of method helped me understand the instructional coaches' perspectives of the current diagnosis and use of MTSS for students with an LD. In my study, 12 instructional coaches of students with an LD were invited as participants.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What are the Saudi Arabian LD instructional coaches' perspectives toward the current model to identify students with LD?
2. What are the Saudi Arabian LD instructional coaches' perspectives toward using MTSS as an alternative model to identify students with LD?
3. Do Saudi Arabian learning disabilities instructional coaches support adopting MTSS practices in schools as improvement over their current methods?

Participants

The participants selected for this study were 12 instructional coaches of students with an LD. These instructors were from different regions and different educational districts of Saudi Arabia. A sample size of 12 is adequate for the exploration and understanding of participant perspectives and experiences (e.g., Guest et al., 2006).

Due to a paucity of research about the issue, interviewing people with experiences in the provision of LD services can be an effective way of collecting data about the current methods of identifying students with LD and the feasibility of an alternative such as MTSS. LD instructional coaches, as participants, can be relevant to the scope of this study as they interact with special education policymakers. Also, they know more about the process(es) of identifying students with LD given their daily experiences in working with these children.

RESULTS

This study investigates the traditional approaches for identifying students with learning disabilities (LD) and determining their eligibility for Special Education services in Saudi Arabia. Instructional coaches in Saudi Arabia offered their perspectives about the existing approach for identifying students with LD and the potential utilization of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) as an alternative method within the Saudi Arabian context. The insights from the instructional coaches' perspectives on conventional methods and the MTSS model offer valuable information for evaluating whether Saudi Arabia should persist with its current identification approach or transition to newer methods for identifying students with LD.

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To attain the goals and objectives of this study, I collected the data by using semi-structured interviews with 12 LD instructional coaches from different regions in Saudi Arabia.

Participants

To develop a list of possible participants, I contacted the General Administration of Education in Saudi Arabia to obtain Saudi school districts' contact information. I then composed a WhatsApp/email message about my research topic, purpose, the approximate interview time, and the asking for their participation in my study. As each participant replied with their agreement, I sent them a WSU Qualtrics link to do the survey (see Table 2) via WhatsApp.

Table 2
List of WSU Qualtrics Questions

Qualtrics Questions
1. What is your gender?
2. Which region do you work in?
3. How many years of experience do you have?
4. What is your highest degree completed?
5. What is your age?
6. How many hours of professional development do you have?
7. How many of these hours were about MTSS?
8. Do you have other certificates? Please name them here.

Table 3 provides the demographic information for each participant.

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Table 3
Participants' Demographic Information

Participant #	Cisgender	Age	Years of Teaching Experience	Highest Degree Completed	Total Hours of Professional Development about MTSS	Certifications
P1	Male	35 - 44	16	Masters	0	Yes
P2	Male	45 - 54	21	Bachelor	0	No
P3	Female	35 - 44	18	Masters	0	Yes
P4	Male	25 - 34	11	Masters	0	Yes
P5	Male	45 - 54	24	Doctorate	30	No
P6	Male	35 - 44	15	Bachelor	0	Yes
P7	Male	45 - 54	24	Bachelor	0	No
P8	Male	35 - 44	20	Masters	0	Yes
P9	Male	25 - 34	13	Masters	0	No
P10	Male	35 - 44	13	Bachelor	0	Yes
P11	Male	35 - 44	20	Bachelor	0	No
P12	Female	45 - 54	22	Bachelor	4	No

Current Practices in Identifying LD in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, screening and referral are the primary methods for initiating the process to identify students with an LD. While the Ministry of Education's (2020) guidelines provide specific standards, such as the contrast, exclusion, and Special Education criteria, concerns have been raised about their implementation. This is particularly true for the tests used in the diagnostic process, which, despite assessing both academic and developmental skills, face criticism for their lack of standardization and potential inconsistency. As a result, educators advocate for a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach, highlighting the need for collaboration and accurate tools to ensure proper identification and support for students with an LD.

Effectiveness and Challenges of Current Methods

The interview data from educators in Saudi Arabia reveals a variety of opinions about the effectiveness of the current method for identifying students with LD. While some participants deemed the method partially effective, a significant number raised concerns about its accuracy, comprehensiveness, and practicality. There was a

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consensus about a substantial risk of misidentification. Some participants viewed the current approach as overly reliant on a single LD teacher, advocating for a multidisciplinary approach that offers a more comprehensive assessment. Others emphasized the importance of early intervention programs and a better understanding of learning disabilities versus academic delays. Additionally, some participants raised the potential emotional and social repercussions of misidentification, like bullying and psychological distress, as concerns. The diversity of opinions suggests the need for a more reliable and holistic system for diagnosing students with LD in the region.

Barriers to Supporting Students with LD

Participants identified various obstacles in dealing with an LD. A primary concern was the lack of awareness and understanding of LD among stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and administrators. This lack of awareness often results in uncooperative attitudes from families and educators, creating challenges for those trying to support students with an LD. Another significant issue highlighted was the unwillingness of some families to accept the presence of an LD, fearing stigmatization. There was also a noticeable absence of resources and support, with LD teachers often shouldering most of the responsibility.

Perspectives on Integrating MTSS

Despite the evidence of not utilizing the MTSS model in Saudi Arabian schools, most participants familiarized themselves with and appreciated its principles, often through training courses or independent studies. A significant consensus highlighted the potential of MTSS as superior to current teaching methods, particularly for its thoroughness in addressing both academic and behavioral needs. While there was widespread acknowledgment of MTSS's potential benefits, the key emphasis revolved around its careful adaptation to the Saudi context. Participants underlined the importance of linguistic and cultural adjustments, the significance of phased implementation starting with early grades, and the crucial role of continuous professional development for teachers. Some believed the MTSS already aligned well with the Saudi educational system, suggesting that extensive modifications might not be essential but rather emphasize raising awareness and proper training. Overall, while the potential of MTSS is acknowledged, its successful integration hinges on thoughtful adaptation, gradual implementation, and robust teacher support.

Challenges in Implementing MTSS

Participants identified several challenges and obstacles hindering the implementation of MTSS in Saudi schools. Prominent concerns included anticipating additional burdens and responsibilities for teachers, which could lead to resistance to change and potential burnout. Another significant issue was the lack of sufficient teaching staff, particularly specialists such as psychologists, making it challenging to cater to individual student needs. Financial constraints were highlighted, emphasizing the initial implementation costs and ongoing expenses related to curriculum adaptation and infrastructure modifications. The time and effort required for proper

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implementation were also deemed significant, indicating a need for proper scheduling and support. Lastly, training emerged as a significant concern, emphasizing the distinction between mere training sessions and ensuring teachers are qualified to handle the MTSS framework.

DISCUSSION

Challenges in Identifying Students with LD

Identifying students with learning disabilities (LD) in Saudi Arabia presents several challenges due to outdated and culturally biased methods. The widespread use of IQ tests, criticized for their reliance on culturally irrelevant content, often leads to inaccurate results. Al-Medlij et al. (2019) highlighted how these practices result in misidentification and inappropriate educational placements. As Fuchs et al. (2003) noted, IQ tests often reflect cultural and linguistic biases that fail to accommodate non-English-speaking students. This issue is exacerbated by the lack of diverse norms in test design (Lyon et al., 2017).

Alternative approaches like curriculum-based measures (CBM) offer progressive, classroom-relevant assessments. Berkeley et al. (2020) emphasized how CBM aligns with frameworks such as Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). These methods prioritize universal screening, regular monitoring, and early intervention, potentially reducing the need for special education services (Sugai & Horner, 2009). However, their implementation in Saudi Arabia remains limited despite recommendations from educators like Bagasi (2018) and Al-Quraini (2011).

Current Identification Practices

The identification process in Saudi schools typically begins with screening and referrals, involving teachers, counselors, and parents. According to Alnaim (2016), teachers rely on academic records, classroom performance, and observational data to identify students with potential LD. However, the accuracy of this process depends heavily on teacher training and their ability to differentiate LD from other issues, such as emotional or socioeconomic factors. My findings support earlier research, such as Al-Quraini (2014), which stresses the importance of obtaining parental consent and fostering trust to improve transparency in the identification process.

Despite the existence of structured criteria, including the Contrast (IQ discrepancy) and Exclusion standards (Lyon et al., 2017), their inconsistent application undermines reliability. Teachers often misinterpret symptoms, leading to over- or under-identification. Furthermore, the absence of multidisciplinary teams in Saudi schools remains a significant gap, as such teams could offer a more comprehensive evaluation by involving psychologists, social workers, and specialized educators (Alnaim, 2016).

Perspectives on MTSS as an Alternative

The potential of MTSS to transform LD identification is significant. Participants in my study recognized its benefits, particularly its emphasis on academic and behavioral support within a structured, tiered framework. Universal screening and

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data-driven interventions address student challenges early, reducing the likelihood of academic failure (Sugai & Horner, 2009). However, MTSS implementation in Saudi Arabia faces several barriers. Cultural and linguistic adaptations are essential to ensure compatibility with local norms and languages. Participants also expressed concerns about resource constraints, including the need for training, infrastructure, and specialist staff.

Key Challenges and Recommendations

The current system for LD identification in Saudi Arabia suffers from several limitations:

Inadequate Resources: Many schools lack standardized assessment tools and specialist support, such as psychologists and speech therapists. This shortage hinders the accurate identification and support of students with LD (Alahmadi & El Keshky, 2019).

Teacher Training Deficits: Teachers require practice-based training to understand and implement effective identification methods. Leko et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of structured learning experiences and feedback in professional development programs.

Resistance to Change: Teachers often resist adopting new models like MTSS due to fears of increased workload. This highlights the need for leadership to build confidence through clear communication and ongoing support (Regan et al., 2015).

To address these issues, the Saudi education system must adopt inclusive, culturally relevant tools, strengthen collaboration among specialists, and invest in professional development. Engaging families in the process can further enhance outcomes by ensuring a holistic approach to support.

Limitations and Future Research

This study faced limitations, including reliance on virtual communication and limited participant diversity. Future research should focus on observational studies to capture real-world practices, explore the role of instructional coaches, and evaluate the long-term impact of MTSS in Saudi schools. Additionally, policy reviews could address systemic barriers and propose strategies for more effective LD identification.

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