

What Is Published About Special Education In Arab Countries? A Preliminary Analysis

[10.5339/qfarc.2014.SSPP0316](https://doi.org/10.5339/qfarc.2014.SSPP0316)

Clayton Keller, Ph.d.; Maha Al-hendawi

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR :

clay.keller@qu.edu.qa

Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

Abstract

The use of research-based educational practices when serving students with disabilities is an essential component of special education policy as, if such a research foundation is missing, policies are compromised. Because of government funding that has supported individual and programmatic research efforts for decades, much of the special education research base used throughout the world comes from the United States. Does such research, though, automatically transfer to the context of special education services in Qatar and other Arab countries? Standard assumptions about educational research suggest that the answer might be, not necessarily. What literature from Arab countries, then, is available to guide policy makers, researchers, administrators, and educators in the Middle East and North Africa?

This QNRF-funded Undergraduate Research Experience Project: (a) identified the published literature on special education in the Arab world, (b) indexed it, and (c) conducted preliminary analyses of important characteristics of the journal articles to provide a broad yet detailed preliminary characterization of the body of work that exists about special education in Arab countries.

Using five library catalogs, three electronic databases in Arabic—EduSearch, Shamaa, and Al Manhal—and two in English—EBSCO's Academic Search Complete and PsycArticles—the project identified 1,916 unduplicated items about special education for Arab students: 1,247 journal articles, 408 books, 186 theses, 58 reports, 8 book chapters, 2 artworks, 1 conference proceeding, 1 newspaper article, and 5 other items.

Results from the analyses of the journal articles indicate that: (a) there is indeed a literature, (b) it is research-based, (c) to a large extent it deals with educationally related topics, and (d) it is quickly increasing over time. The amount of literature, though, is relatively small when one takes into consideration the size of the Arab world. A 2009 study of 11 special education journals in the United States found 6,724 articles over a 19-year period, whereas this project only uncovered 1,274 over a longer period of time from a less restricted number of journals. In addition, it appears that there may be large gaps in the Arab scholarly literature on special education in regards to specific countries and regions of the Arab world, disabilities, and age groups.

The project also raises important questions about the implications of what literature is available and to whom, questions that speak directly to the challenges of being aware of and understanding the issues about special education in the Arab world as Qatar and other Arab states make the transition to knowledge-based societies. For instance, how does the Arab special education literature that is available in Arabic differ from that published in English, and what does that mean for educational leaders who can only access material in one of the languages? As it is much more difficult to export the results of searches from the Arabic databases than it is from those in English, what might be the effects on conducting systematic reviews from those sources? And what steps can be taken to remedy such differences in Arab special education knowledge accessibility?