

# **How do Arab Special Needs Students in Higher Education Institutions Perceive the Role of the School Counselor in their Integration into Regular Educational Institutions?**

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## **Abstract**

*The paper discusses the significant role of school counselors in counseling students with special needs in education in the Arab sector in Israel from the perspective of Arab students with special needs in higher education in Israel. Special needs students are citizens in Israeli within the Arab sector who, because they are exceptional due to their impairment, require special attention and services through their education pursuit to enable them to cope in life and contribute their quota in the nation's development. This research paper examines the concept of special needs education, which means special needs children, with identification of the different categories of needs found within the Arab sector in Israeli within the education sector. Also, the research paper examines the meaning of a counselor and the roles and obligations aligned for a school counselor within special needs education. The study methodology was a mixed method which included both quantitative and qualitative parts. The sample of the study composed of 400 participants for the quantitative part out of which 50 also participated in the qualitative part. The study tools were an interview and a questionnaire.*

*The main finding is that the school counselors act as an advocate for the integration of pupils with special needs with the main aim of involving policies to mainstream them in the education system in the Arab sector in Israel. Furthermore, significant impact of the social, family and school related factors on the integration of students within the educational institutions were found. Conclusions and recommendations were made, with the main recommendation being to adopt a special needs policy for all the mainstream schools in the Arab sector in Israel.*

**Keywords:** *Special Needs Students, Higher Education Institutions, School Counselor's role, Integration, Regular Educational Institutions*

## **1. Introduction:**

In the Arab sector in Israel, numerous pupils with special needs need school counselors for both learning and personal needs. School counselors are in demand within the Arab sector in Israel as they are the leaders who promote and integrate the special needs of pupils. School-going

children have personal, educational, and other emotional needs in the school setting (Dallashah & Zubeidat, 2022). The need to have counselors incorporates success as there is stability for the pupils in their personal and school life. School counselors are obligated to promote the integration of special needs pupils. With such high expectations, there is the rise of a transformation process for the schools in Israel to adopt school counselors in their education culture. School counseling in the Arab sector in Israel has experienced services varying from supplemental, ancillary, and marginal integral to school education (Dor-Haim, 2019).

School counselors within the education sector are responsible for being helpers as proactive advocates, leaders, and people who respond to the successful integration of special needs for pupils in Israel. The concept of having school counselors for integrating pupils with special needs in mainstream schools in the Arab sector in Israel attributes to social responsibility by remaining committed to social change concepts (Gesser-Edelsburg & Hamade Boukai, 2019). Also, school counselors' social responsibility involves working as catalysts for societal changes. The social behavior of a school counselor is associated with the professional and moral responsibility utilized in tackling challenges that negatively affect a pupil's psychological development (Bignold, & Anderson, 2023).

School counselors then must take in their responsibilities and roles in enhancing the integration of the special needs displayed by pupils by advocating for their quality services and providing a conducive environment. Similarly, school counselors should create an environment within the school settings, and act as resourceful people for the regular teachers, parents, pupils, and the administrator when it comes to meeting special needs (Reese, 2021).

School counselors, as people set to promote integration, also fail to fulfill other school expectations, such as improved pupil performance and overall institution performance. Having school counselors within the education system, then it becomes the role of the school counselors to collaborate with parents, pupils, other professionals, and the administration (Cohen & Majid, 2020). Due to the complexity of the school counselor's responsibilities, they must adopt the most effective approaches to attain their work aims and objectives and consider other stakeholders in the school institution.

MoEd (Ministry of Education) in the Arab sector in Israel provides protocols and guidelines that direct school counselors to be included within the education system. Also, within the guideline and protocol, the MoEd advises the school counselors to consider the multi-

systematic perspective in the school inclusion policy (Noi, 2023). School counselors within the school setting are required to enhance the awareness of special needs in schools by coordinating, centralizing, and supporting the inclusion system through the possible different components (Majadley, 2020). In the respective schools within the Arab sector in Israel, the school counselors maintain ongoing inclusion and get involved in the decision-making process.

Supporting works on higher education integration shed light on how difficult it is for school counselors to adapt to the demands of a society that is rapidly changing in terms of its workplace's diversity (Gleason, 2020). The requirement for great work performance, which permeates every aspect of an individual's life since it affects every role we play, has led to changes in counseling needs especially in higher education integration especially in Arab students. Due to this, the school counselor's duty has evolved to encompass more than just higher education placement assistance. Even while choosing the right career is of the utmost significance, career counseling now addresses a wide range of challenges, including mental health problems that limit career options, workplace changes, and matching workers' needs in a globalized, competitive economy. These problems and many others present a difficult situation for Arab school counselors trying to integrate Arab students into Israel's higher education system (Refaeli, Alnabilsy, & Sold, 2023).

Reese (2021) argues that guidance counselors should be psychologically trained professionals who can normally provide a wide range of practical services to parents, students, and instructors of all students. Thus, the school counselor is a crucial team member or a member of the educational leadership team that offers Arab student's helpful assistance. In a school counseling program, school counselors traditionally offer advice and counseling to students on academic, vocational, and career counseling (American School Counsellor's association-ASCA, 2018). On the other hand, school counselors in Israel do provide students with a variety of higher education-related programs that are intended to help students plan their careers, make informed decisions, and select a career that will lead them into the right vocation so that students will enjoy their work (Astramovich, et al., 2018). As a result, students receive extensive higher education counseling programs (interventions) that demand career and life plans through all levels of education and beyond, as well as school-to-work programs that concentrate on preparing students for the workforce through extensive internship activities in communities and organizations (Moran, et al., 2022). To support Arab students with information and guidance

regarding higher education, academic, and career options, as well as to guide and prepare students for multiple roles within broad industry sectors from the transition from high school to workplace, college, or university is a critical path juncture Badran, Baydoun, and Hillman (2019), it is important to provide higher education integration intervention activities in the classroom. Such actions will make it possible to adapt to the quickly developing technology. As a result, more training and education are required to help students enter the majority of areas, which are more crucial and complicated than ever before, and enable them to make informed decisions (Haleem, et al., 2022).

To expand students' future higher education integration opportunities, guidance counsellors must actively promote broad-based higher education integration that focuses on the interests and skills of each student (Haddock, Cannon, & Grey, 2020). Most students need more accurate information about jobs and careers to base their interests on. As for the maturation of occupational interests, aptitudes, and qualities, work experiences are crucial (Partha, 2020). Arab students in Israel must be encouraged to pursue higher education through short-term job tryout experiences and job shadowing opportunities that entail recording preferences and performance. In order to help students, choose short-term occupations that will lead to long-term career outcomes, the counsellor must provide information on the student's preferences for activities, work surroundings, emotional and monetary rewards, and supervision. Such precise performance data may help the student prepare for the shift by letting them know what kind of higher education, work experience, effort, and time frame will be needed to fulfil their career preferences (Reese, 2021).

Therefore, the counsellor's role(s) is to influence Arab students in Israel's incorporation into higher education. These activities can help students develop the maturity and decision-making skills they need to succeed in career development tasks. They can also be intentional attempts to improve certain aspects of students' career development (Noi, 2023).

The career development interventions the counsellor can concentrate on include higher education guidance, career counselling, career information, career education, career development programs, and career coaching (Perera & Athanasou, 2020). The student will eventually acquire the required skills of being provided with such high-quality facilities because all of these interventions aid people in developing self-awareness, occupational awareness, learning career decision-making skills, job search skills, coping and adjusting to job stress, problem-solving

skills, and others (Sanger & Gleason, 2020). Counsellors can help Arab students explore their higher education and job options and gain knowledge by doing this. According to Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, and Suman, (2022), school counsellors can support stronger family collaboration by collaborating closely with parents to improve family-school communication and by giving parents the knowledge and attitudes they need to support their students in making wise career decisions. Their parents' beliefs influence students. School counsellors can engage with students to address confidence, self-assurance, self-worth, and positive attitudes, according to Astramovich, Hoskins, Gutierrez, and Bartlett (2018). School counsellors can play a significant role in raising students' self-efficacy about their capacity to excel in higher-level course material and pursue careers in mathematics in collaboration with teachers and parents.

The results of the study will thereby support inclusion in Israel and help school counselors, administrators, and parents embrace and provide opportunities for special education students to learn in regular classrooms. The project will give school counselors and the school community as a whole the knowledge they need to comprehend contextual factors—other than learning and teaching resources—that affect school counselor responsibilities in integration and to propose solutions. The results of this study may assist Israeli policymakers in addressing the social, familial, and cultural barriers preventing the inclusion of students with special needs in Arab schools. The results of this study can be used by educational specialists, the government, and other stakeholders, such as school principals and administrators, to enhance and review educational policies pertaining to students with special needs. Another noteworthy aspect of this study is that it offers crucial data to sponsors, funders, and other organizations that can be used to support the economically disadvantaged special needs students in the Arab sector and increase the resources available to school counselors. The study raises awareness about the crucial role of school counselors in the integration process and thereby indirectly contributes to improving special education in Israel. In addition, highlighting the differences between the Arab and Jewish sectors can assist the MoEd and the government in understanding the need to equally allocate additional funds to schools that practice integration. between the two sectors in terms of integrating students with special needs in Israel.

## 2. The Study Methodology

For the purpose of this research, the researcher employed a mixed method approach in ensuring that the data was collected and analyzed using the right tools. Quantitative research methods focused on the collection and analysis of numerical data. These methods were used to test hypotheses, establish cause-and-effect relationships, and make generalizations about the study population. Mixed-methods research combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study. To make the research findings more effective, the researcher combined both qualitative and quantitative research approaches since the research was targeting knowledge from different domains and expressed in different forms to increase the quality and reliability of the findings obtained. However, there was an explicit definition of the research methods used as the researcher did not employ all the approaches in gathering data.

## 3. Results:

*There is a significant relationship between the impact played by the school counselor in integrating Arab students into higher education in Israel.*

The participants were also asked, what is the impact of the school counselor in the integration of Arab students into higher education in Israel?

Preference was given to the respondents to indicate the impact of the school counselor on the integration of Arab students into higher education in Israel. The findings are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of the Impact of the School Counselor in the Integration of Arab Students into Higher Education in Israel*

Role of School counselor	Mean	Standard Dev.
Higher education guidance & counselling	3.75	1.243
Career goals identification	3.71	1.483
Information on future opportunities	3.70	1.500
Higher education decision making	3.48	1.653
Help in self-assessment	3.32	1.601
Higher education awareness day	3.20	1.606
Organized higher education field trips	3.11	1.253
Higher education interest inventory	3.08	1.583
Higher education conference	2.99	1.625
Personality and higher education aptitude test	2.73	1.648
Mean of Means	33.07	13.542

The study found that, among other career intervention activities, higher education guidance and counselling, career goals identification, information on future career opportunities, higher education decision-making, help with self-assessment, higher education awareness day, organized higher education field trips, higher education interest inventory, and higher education interest survey formed the impact of the school counsellor in assisting the integration of Arab students in higher education.

According to Table 36 findings, of the ten (10) roles the school counsellor provided to the students, the majority of the roles (eight) significantly influenced the Arab students' higher education self-efficacy in Israel. With a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 1.243, the responses from the field showed that the students felt that higher guidance & counselling was the intervention activity that benefited them the most in choosing a vocation among the counsellor's duties. The following steps include identifying career goals (mean=3.71; standard deviation=1.483), learning about potential career opportunities (mean=3.70; standard deviation=1.501), self-assessment (mean=3.32; standard deviation=1.601), higher education awareness day (mean=3.20; standard deviation=1.606), higher education field trips (mean=3.11; standard deviation=1.253), and occupational interest inventory (mean=3.08; standard deviation=1.583). According to the table, respondents were unsure of the counsellor's functions in helping them make the desired profession choice, including conducting higher education conferences (Mean=2.99; sd=1.625) and administering personality and higher education aptitude tests (Mean=2.73; sd=1.648). It is implied that the school counsellor's role includes higher education guidance and counselling, career goal identification, information on future career opportunities, higher education decision-making, assistance with self-evaluation, organization of higher education field trips, occupational, interest inventory, higher education conferences, and administration of personality and higher education aptitude tests.

*Table 2: Spearman's Rho Correlation of the Impact of the school Counselor in the Integration of Arab Students into Higher Education in Israel*

Categories		Higher Education Integration	Impact of Counselor
<b>Impact of counselor</b>	Correlation	.086	1.000
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.123	
	N	100	100
<b>Higher education integration</b>	Correlation	1.000	.086
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.123
	N	400	400

The Spearman's Rank Order Correlation was statistically used to test whether there is no meaningful association between the role played by the school counselor and Arab students' integration into higher education. The association between Arab students' integration into higher education and the function of school counselors was investigated using Spearman's Rank Order correlation. The table demonstrated a positive correlation—which was statistically insignificant ( $r_s = 0.086$ ,  $\text{sig}=.123$ ,  $p>0.05$ )—between the function of the school counselor and Arab students' absorption into higher education in Israel. In other words, although the relationship between the counselor's job and its impact on Arab students' integration into higher education in Israel is beneficial, it is not particularly strong.

One of the main themes that were emerged from the interviews in the qualitative part is the role of the school counselor in the integration of Arab students with special needs in regular educational institutions, the majority of the participants said that the school counselor had a significant role in their integration in school, such as: The first role was overcoming social barriers to integration in the Arab sector, the main role that the student in the interviews is working on the social aspect. They described how the school counselor tried to raise the awareness of both the students with special needs and the other pupils at school of the nature of the special need phenomenon and how to deal with it.

On the one hand, the school counselor tried to raise the self-esteem of the special needs students' self-esteem and helped them accept their situation and learn how to deal with it, and develop the required skills to overcome the difficulties they face.

One student said:



*“ the school counselor helped me a lot in dealing with my disability, she enable me to look at myself as a human being, and not define myself through my disability, as she said, my disability is not my identity.”*

On the other hand, the school counselor helps other students to accept the students with special needs and try to treat them as their equals and understand that it is their duty to help the weak because they are part of our community.

A BA student said:

*“the school counselor used to hold meetings and workshops for the whole class on the topic of accepting others and treating different people as equals. This made the who class closer and they treated us much better.”*

on the social level, the school counselor also coordinated between the different factors and the special needs students. Such as they collaborated with other professionals in the education system, such as special education teachers and support staff, to develop effective strategies for promoting inclusion in the classroom. This involved creating individualized education plans (IEPs) for students with special needs, implementing assistive technology, or modifying curriculum and instruction to meet the diverse needs of all students.

In this issue, one student said:

*“ the school counselor made sure that I get all the help I needed, he connected me with therapists for my problems, and provided me number and contacts of places where I could find help.”*

The second role was dealing with the family barriers to integration in the Arab sector. Some of the respondents indicated that the school counselor worked closely with their families to address any concerns or questions they may have regarding the inclusion of special needs pupils in mainstream classrooms. By building relationships and fostering open communication, they were able to better understand the needs and concerns of the family and address them in a constructive and positive manner.

A master’s student indicated:

*“ our school counselor kept in touch with my family all the time, my mom has her personal number and they kept in touch. My mom could send her a message whenever she want and if she needed anything.”*

This includes providing information about the benefits of inclusion and the individual needs of their children. Additionally, others indicated counselors provided support to families by connecting them with resources and services that can help them better understand and support their child's needs. Others also encourage open communication and collaboration between families and educators to ensure that the child's needs are being met both at home and in the classroom.

According to the answers we could see that the school counselors establish positive and open lines of communication with families. Others made an effort to meet with families regularly to discuss their child's progress and to address any concerns they may have. By establishing a relationship of trust and mutual respect, they were better able to work with families to overcome any barriers to integration.

Another strategy proposed by some of the respondents was to provide families with education and resources about special needs and inclusion. This can include workshops, training sessions, and informational materials that help families understand the importance of inclusion and the benefits of supporting special needs pupils in the classroom. By providing families with this knowledge and understanding, they are better equipped to support their child's education and integration.

One student said:

*“the school counselor help me and my family a lot, he always invited my parent to meetings and send brochures with me on the subject of disabilities and learning difficulties.”*

From some answers, we learned that the school counselor provided the parents with constant feedback on their children's progress, they tried to encourage an active involvement of the parents in their children's integration. Other respondents indicated the counselors often held parent-teacher conferences to discuss progress and create a plan to address any concerns that families may have. They also provided workshops and training sessions for families to educate them on the benefits of inclusion and the importance of supporting special needs pupils.

An additional role that was for the school counselor that was mentioned by the students in the interviews was dealing with school-related barriers to integration. These efforts include trying to raise resources to support special needs pupils in the school system and collaborating with school administrators and policymakers to develop policies and programs that promote inclusion and provide resources for special needs pupils. Furthermore, some mentioned that the school counselors also worked to increase awareness and understanding among school staff of the needs of special needs pupils and effective strategies for promoting inclusion in the classroom, they worked with school staff to develop individualized education plans (IEPs) for special needs pupils to help them succeed in the classroom. Others also worked with school staff to develop inclusive classroom environments that prioritize accessibility, diversity, and respect for all students.

According to a Ph.D. student:

*“the school counselors worked very hard to make the school a better place for nitrating students with special needs to learn and develop... for example, our school counselor brought new devices, programs, and activities to help us develop..”*

#### **4. Discussion:**

According to the results of the study, according to the respondents the counselors' main responsibilities included, developing and implementing individualized education plans meant to suit pupils with special needs and help in their integration process, identifying and assessing special needs pupils in their environment, and working on their integration, providing training and support to school staff on dealing with people with special needs and providing support and guidance to special needs pupils and their families. These results indicated that the school counselors were responsible for supporting pupils with special needs and helping them through their learning process. Moreover, according to the participants, it was evident that school counselors were important in regular schools within the Arab sector. Therefore, they were supposed to be included in their teaching process for pupils with special needs. Additionally, the

respondents suggested a number of ways to improve the school counselors' roles to better support the integration of special needs within the Arab sector regular schools in Israel, by providing them with more training and resources, and increasing their collaboration with other professionals, receiving more support and guidance from the school administration. Furthermore, the research findings indicated that they should collaborate with special needs coordinators to help in their quest to offer quality services to pupils with special needs within the Arab sector.

According to previous studies, counselors' roles also included helping pupils in adjusting to schools and communities, understand themselves, enabling pupils to understand and explore interests or values, and helping teachers to work with students. Moreover, school counselors also provide referrals where necessary. In Israel, school counselors are assigned counseling and teaching roles. Counseling topics may range from enhancing learning skills, drug abuse, sex education, and socialization skills hence teacher counselors can extend counseling under teaching assignments (Al Khateeb, et al., 2015; Cainkar & Read 2014). School counselors help pupils in continuous processes in life such as role transformation, redefinition, and clarification (ASCA 2013)

According to the results, according to the findings, there is a correlation between the school counselor's role in impacting Arab students' assimilation into higher education in Israel. This supports Watters' (2010) study, which claimed that a student's success in higher education is strongly influenced by the teacher's (counselor) ability to maintain their interest in them during their entire time in school. This implies, however, that the student will not be able to successfully transition into higher school if the counselor does not utilize an intervention that keeps the student's attention.

The reason for the weak correlation may be that the students did not take the entire program seriously or that the school counselors did not provide the necessary higher education integration intervention services to maintain their interest in the higher education integration in question. Counselors may lack the tools necessary to improve their efforts to aid Arab students in integrating into higher education. Other studies by Reese (2021) revealed that students are unhappy with school guidance counselors' services. Reese discovered considerable differences in the counseling services students required and the ones they received, with career counseling being the most important.

The government, other education stakeholders, and parents should support the school counselor by providing the tools necessary to enhance his work and make it appealing to students so that they will take it seriously because there is a positive correlation and counseling can, therefore, have a positive effect on students' choice of career.

## 5. Conclusion

The counselor impacted Arab students' integration into higher education in Israel. However, the impact of the counselors' work on Arab students' assimilation into higher education was minimal. This may be due to a lack of enough resources, ineffective and inefficient follow-up, and improper counselor-parent consultation over the student's higher education integration choice as opposed to their ability and interest. This might be one of the reasons why some students did not choose the correct career path and ended up working as yogurt vendors in shops or joining the "rebel" group.

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