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THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

by

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Inclusion has become the newest trend in most countries around the world, including Lebanon. This has necessitated that general education teachers deal with students with special needs; however, they are not adequately qualified to do so. Recently, school guidance and counseling in Lebanon has begun expanding and many of the tasks required for students with special needs are expected to be done by the school counselor. In fact, the literature reveals that the counselor’s general role still remains undefined, especially in Lebanon where there are no national standards. The aim of this study was to identify the tasks that elementary school counselors are expected to perform with regards to students with special needs both from the counselors’ and the teachers’ perspectives. The following research questions were addressed: 1) What are the school policies regarding inclusion and how are these reflected in job descriptions of counselors and teachers? 2) What are elementary teachers’ and counselors’ perceptions and expectations of the school counselor’s role in working with students with special needs? 3) How do the perceptions and expectations of teachers and counselors with regards to the counselor’s role in working with students with special needs compare? Analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with elementary teachers and elementary school counselors revealed that teachers and counselors both have little awareness of what the role of a school counselor is. The findings also suggest that the most common theme between teachers and counselors was the need for more collaboration between the two parties. Recommendations for future research and implications for practice are discussed.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Learners with special needs, or exceptional learners, are those that have sensory, cognitive, physical, emotional and/or communication disabilities as compared to average learners. In order to cater to learners with special needs, the field of “special education” emerged which ultimately aims at “finding and capitalizing on exceptional students’ abilities” by providing specifically designed instruction and other related services (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006, p. 13). Within the context of a school, the regular education teacher may be well-equipped in dealing with students with special needs through the use of various materials, equipment and/or instructional methods. However, in some instances the teacher may need consultation from a professional, such as the school counselor. (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006)

According to the law of special education, students with special needs have the right to be placed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) which is defined as “teaching students with disabilities in the same environment as their age peers and do not have disabilities” (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006, p.19). One means of achieving the LRE is through the implementation of inclusion. Inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom is known to be one of the most current legislation enforced in the 1980’s by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Deng, 2008; Greene & Valesky, 1998). This law states that “students with disabilities be automatically assigned to regular education classrooms on a full-time [emphasis added] basis with appropriate
supports and accommodations as indicated in students' Individualized Education Programs” (Planning for Inclusion as cited in Greene & Valesky, 1998, p.68). This is in contrast to the first law of mainstreaming enacted by IDEA which referred to the process of including children with special needs in the regular education setting for part of their education (Greene & Valesky, 1998). Thus, the main difference between inclusion and mainstreaming is the degree of integration of students with special needs in the general education classroom.

Inclusion in Lebanon has been a challenge due to the economic and social changes taking place in the country. Poverty is increasing and this category of people includes the biggest number of children with special needs in Lebanon because they do not have the finances to provide the needed services for children with special needs. Hence, those children are not receiving the help needed to deal with their disabilities, which results in an increase in the number of cases of children with disabilities. The reason behind the lack of data about children with special needs in Lebanon is due to the lack of an agreed-upon definition and categorization system of disabilities. In May 2000, Law 220 was enforced by the Lebanese Parliament which provides a legislative framework for protecting the rights of people with disabilities. Wehbi stated (2006) that “Law 220 addresses the rights of people with disabilities to proper education, rehabilitation services, employment, medical services, sports and access to public transport and other facilities. It also stresses the right to participation in society.” (p. 332). Therefore, it can be argued that although it was not explicitly stated, Law 220 promotes the policy of inclusion in the Lebanese context. Regardless of law 220, many schools still do not accept students with special
needs based on the fact that they feel ill-equipped with resources and trained professionals that are necessary for delivering a proper education to students with special needs. In Lebanese schools, school counseling is also lagging since the counselor’s role remains undefined (Ayyash-Abdo, Alamuddin & Mukallid, 2010; Wehbi, 2006).

According to Greene and Valesky (1998), one of the most important movements towards better involvement of students with special needs is at the inclusive classroom level. Since inclusion is the newest trend, teachers are therefore expected to be more involved when dealing with students with special needs. However, most general education teachers complain about having a lack of knowledge concerning students with special needs (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Heinman, 2001). In fact, teachers have vague and varying definitions of inclusion and they often express feelings of guilt, anxiety, and fear of failure when teaching special needs students (Heiman, 2001). This necessitates the need for teachers and counselors to work together in order to guide students properly towards better success in school (Beesley, 2004; Edhard & Umanksy, 2005; Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005).

Despite the importance of this collaboration, most research articles examine teachers’ perspectives of the counselor’s role in general and not specifically with regards to inclusive programs (Beesley, 2004; Clark & Amatea, 2004). However, with the implementation of inclusion, teachers’ and school counselors’ roles have changed (Greene & Valesky, 1998; Engelbrecht, Swart, Eloff, & Forlin, 2001). Teachers can play a highly important role in promoting successful inclusion of students with special needs (Beesley, 2004; Reiter et al., 2005). According to Winter (2006), although inclusion has lead to
many positive changes for students with special needs, there are still gaps that should be filled regarding teachers’ training programs. In fact, many researchers have found that inclusion is usually neglected in teachers’ training programs (Barton; Booth, Nes & Stromstad; Garner; Jones; Thomas & Loxley as cited in Winter, 2006). Therefore, one of the counselors’ roles may involve working together with teachers in promoting a successful training program that would improve implementation of the inclusive program in their schools (Beesley, 2004; Edhard & Umanksy, 2005).

From my previous experiences as an intern in several schools in Lebanon, as a special education teacher, and as stated by Wehbi (2006), it may be argued that general education teachers frequently complain about working with special needs students without attempting to put an effort with those children. General education teachers do not always show acceptance towards such students (Wehbi, 2006). Therefore, they always refer the child to the counselor so that he/she can deal with the child. Although it may be hard for those teachers, especially if they have not received any kind of training in dealing with those students, they are still expected to try implementing certain strategies in the classroom rather than referring the child to the school counselor whenever the child displays inappropriate behavior. Counselors may play a role in this by providing teachers with certain strategies to deal with students with special needs. In fact, many teachers in Lebanon complain about not having received adequate training to deal with students with special needs (Wehbi, 2006). Nonetheless, teachers should take some part in the responsibility of learning more about those students in order to be able to work with them adequately in the general education classroom. By doing this, teachers would help decrease
the work load of school counselors by saving the counselor time to deal with more significant issues.

**Research Problem**

The call in the Arab world in general, and Lebanon in particular, towards the inclusion of students with special needs in regular education classes began in the 1980s, years after the establishment of IDEA in the United States. However, the implementation of inclusion as defined by IDEA’s standards is still not properly done in Lebanon. One of the major issues in Lebanese schools is that the term “inclusion” has not been well-defined, despite the fact that inclusive and mainstreaming practices have become a popular trend. (Wehbi, 2006)

School guidance and counseling in Lebanon has been growing, especially in private schools (Ayyash-Abdo et al., 2010). However, due to the fact that school counseling in Lebanon lacks national standards, Lebanese counselors do not have a clear job description (Ayyash-Abdo et al., 2010). In addition to this, research in western countries has highlighted the change in teachers’ and counselors’ roles concerning the implementation of inclusion in schools (Greene & Valesky, 1998; Engelbrecht et al., 2001). For instance, it has been emphasized that teachers and counselors should work collaboratively to provide special needs students with the best learning conditions based on their individual needs (Beesley, 2004; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Engelbrecht et al., 2001). This requires that both parties know what is required of themselves and the other party. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and expectations of Lebanese school counselors and teachers of the counselor’s role in dealing with students with special needs. By
exploring expectations the aim was to investigate the role that the participants *ideally*
expected the counselor to play while the aim of investigating the perceptions was to
explore what was *actually* happening in reality from the participants’ point of view.

**Research Questions**

The following questions were addressed in this study:

1) What are the school policies regarding inclusion and how are these reflected in
job descriptions of counselors and teachers?

2) What are elementary teachers’ and counselors’ perceptions and expectations of
the school counselor’s role in working with students with special needs?

3) How do the perceptions and expectations of teachers and counselors with
regards to the counselor’s role in working with students with special needs
compare?

**Rationale**

There are several gaps in the literature regarding the issue of the counselor’s role in
dealing with students with special needs. A review of the literature regarding teachers’ and
counselors’ perceptions reveals that it is highly important to examine teachers’ perceptions
regarding issues related to students in school settings since teachers spend the most time
with students (Amatea & Clark, 2004). In fact, teachers have the ability to improve
counseling services programs by offering their thoughts about such services; however,
teachers are not usually given the importance they deserve in the provision of counseling
services (Wilgus & Shelley as cited in Beesley, 2004). This necessitates the need for taking
teachers’ feedback into consideration, especially in dealing with students with special
needs (Beesley, 2004). Despite the fact that inclusive education has been known for a while now in the United States of America, Europe and some Arab countries, many have argued that little research has been done on teachers’ perceptions of the counselor’s role with regards to guidance and counseling practices related to students with special needs (e.g., Amatea & Clark, 2004; Beesley, 2004; Erhard & Umansky, 2005; Greene & Valesky, 1998; Milsom, 2002; Reiner et al. 2009).

Professional identity of the school counselor’s role has been undefined and is still missing (Paisley & Borders; Sink & MacDonald as cited in Beesley, 2004). The profession of school counseling has only been in Lebanon for around 40 years; however, till present-day there is a lack of national standards regarding the role that a school counselor is expected to play (Ayyash-Abdo et al., 2010). Therefore, the school counselor’s role in Lebanon still remains unclear and this was evident in practice whereby a study conducted by Ayyash-Abdo et al. (2010) revealed inconsistencies amongst counselors’ responses with regards to school counselors’ duties in Lebanon. Despite the importance of defining the counselor’s role, only one such study has been conducted in Lebanon regarding this issue. This study revealed that both counselors and teachers exhibit imprecise ideas about the counselor’s role and that school stakeholders do not have a common understanding of the counselor’s role although they believe that the counselor’s role should include tasks related to students with special needs (Hamzeh, 2008). Furthermore, counselors and teachers emphasized the importance of communication; however, they confessed that communication and collaboration rarely occurred (Hamzeh, 2008). Although this study indicates important findings, the school counselor’s role was explored in general; in fact
no study has been conducted in Lebanon that shows the perceptions of teachers and counselors with regards to the role of the school counselor in special education. Therefore, research is needed in this area.

In addition, although many studies have noted that inclusive practices have lead to a change in the expectations of the counselor’s role (Greene & Valesky, 1998), in practice, their actual roles have not yet progressed which may cause counselors to be ill-equipped in working properly with students with special needs (Beesley, 2004). This supports the importance of examining the perspectives of school counselors on their roles in order to allow them to evaluate their performance with regards to students with special needs. However, little research has been done regarding this issue.

Finally, very little research has been conducted within the Lebanese context about inclusive practices in general, and the school counselor’s role in inclusion in particular (Wehbi, 2006). Since inclusive practices have become a recent trend in Lebanon, and as previously emphasized, studying both teachers’ and school counselors’ perspectives on integrating students with special needs in the general education classroom is essential, it would be important to conduct such a study in Lebanon.

**Significance**

As mentioned earlier, the implementation of inclusive programs has changed the roles of both school counselors and teachers. According to Eloff et al. (2001), there is a lack of teachers that are well-equipped in dealing with students with special needs since inclusion is a recent trend in most countries and most teachers have been trained in working only in classrooms with nondisabled students. Therefore, teachers tend to
experience stressors that prevent them from working properly with students with special needs in inclusive classrooms (Eloff et al., 2001). Hence, when both teachers and counselors are clear about each others’ roles, this will reduce the pressure placed on both since each one will know what is expected of the other. In addition, by collaborating together, counselors can provide teachers with effective strategies on how to deal with students with special needs (Eloff et al., 2001). In fact, research has shown that studying teachers’ perceptions provides counselors with significant feedback that would allow counselors to make best use of counseling services and programs (Witgus & Sheley as cited in Amatea & Clark, 2004). This collaboration would lead to an effective support system that would raise both teachers’ and counselors’ self-efficacy (Greene & Valesky, 1998).

Moreover, it would also be necessary to identify the duties of the school counselor through teachers’ and counselors’ perceptions, since the role of the school counselor remains undefined in Lebanon, as previously mentioned. Once both the teachers and counselors are aware of their own duties and each others’ roles, this will help in creating clear guidelines for the role expectations of both parties, which will ultimately benefit students with special needs. After having identified their roles, both teachers and counselors will become less anxious and they will be able to provide special needs students with the best education in the general education classrooms by catering to their specific needs. “[W]hen schools attend to students’ social and emotional skills, the academic achievement of children increases, the incidence of problem behaviors decreases and the
quality of the relationships surrounding each child improves” (Cummings & Haverty; Elias et al.; Pasi as cited in Clark & Amatea, 2004, p.132).
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the following issues: (a) inclusion, (b) counselors’ and teachers’ perspectives regarding the counselor’s role in inclusion, (c) the importance of teacher and school counselor collaboration, and (d) the effect of teachers’ and counselors’ self-efficacy on the effectiveness of counseling services. Since American school counseling models are the most influential in the Anglophone private school sector in Lebanon, the main focus of this chapter is on developments in the United States.

Inclusion

Special education is the education of students with special needs in an appropriate manner whereby each student’s specific and individual needs are catered for. In the past, schools had the right to refuse to enroll students with special needs on the basis that they were considered “uneducable” (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Because of such discrimination towards children with physical and/or mental disabilities laws were developed to protect the rights of these individuals. In the 1970s, public law 94-142 was established which stated that all children have the right to receive free and appropriate public education in a least restrictive environment. This implies that a child with special needs may receive general education or special education, along with other related services, depending on the child’s needs (Taylor, 2011). The name of this law was changed in the 1990’s into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Initial implementation of IDEA was based on the concept of “mainstreaming” which was defined as the placement of students with special needs in the general education
classroom for part of the school day (Martin et al., 1996). For the rest of the day, they were placed in special education classrooms, or resource rooms, and were provided with other special needs services such as individual counseling sessions. More recently, the concept of “inclusion”, which is the integration of students with special needs within the regular education classrooms on a full-time basis, has become the newest trend (Erhard & Umansky, 2005). These legislations have not only offered students with special needs the right to learn together with their nondisabled peers (Erhard & Umansky, 2005), but have also necessitated that school counselors become more involved in tasks and services related to special needs students (Milsom, 2002). In addition, a major implication of these laws is “the need for all educators to share the responsibility for services provided for all students including those with disabilities” (Williams & Katsiyannis as cited in Milsom, 2002, p.38). Therefore, both teachers and school counselors play important roles in guiding and helping students with special needs.

As for European countries, they are divided into three categories: 1) countries like Spain, Italy and Norway which have developed policies that promote the placement of most children with special needs in the general education classrooms; 2) countries like United Kingdom, Poland, France and Denmark that have used multiple approaches for inclusion, mainstreaming and special needs service systems; and 3) countries such as Belgium and Switzerland where students with special needs are placed in special classes or schools with the majority not being mainstreamed in schools with regular students. (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003)
In Cyprus, there are laws that foster the transition of students with mild cases of special needs from segregated to inclusive classrooms since it is claimed that inclusive classrooms encourage their social, cognitive and affective development. In a study conducted by Koutrouba, Steliou and Vamvakari (2006) with 245 teachers in four provinces in Cyprus about teachers’ perspectives on the inclusion of students with special needs, it was shown that most teachers approved of the law of inclusion. The few teachers who disapproved of the law believed that classroom teaching and learning would be affected for regular students since teachers would need to work with students with special needs and regular students at the same time. They also believed that they lacked equipments to work with students with special needs. Regardless of all these reasons, most teachers favored the legislation because they believed that students with special needs are a priority and that if the transition from segregated to inclusive classrooms was well thought out, it would lead to favorable results. (Koutrouba et al., 2006)

According to Beesley (2004), school counseling programs need to be modified in order to meet the evolving needs of 21st century students since present-day counseling training programs do not provide counselors with the facts and skills needed for them to do their job effectively. Also, since students with special needs are being included in the general education classroom, school counselors’ and teachers’ roles are changing (Greene & Valesky, 1998). In fact, throughout the years, the counselor’s role has been redefined and has broadened (Burnham & Jackson, 2000) in order to meet the needs of society’s ongoing changes (Beesley, 2004; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Schimmel, 2008). As for general education teachers, their roles have been changing due to the new trend of
inclusion which fosters the presence of special needs students in the same general education classroom as their non-disabled peers. In fact, it has been claimed that in schools where inclusive programs are implemented, teachers are having difficulties deciding on the best practices to be implemented in their classrooms (Foote, Kilanowski-Press & Rinaldo, 2010). Therefore, teachers are required to learn new and effective strategies that will enable them to not only deal with the behavioral and academic needs of students with special needs, but to also do so without hindering the learning process of regular students.

Since school counselors’ and teachers’ roles are changing with regards to dealing with students with special needs, it is necessary for both parties to be aware of their respective roles. However, recent literature has shown that both teachers and counselors are unaware of their own roles or the roles of the other party. The following sections provide a review of the literature regarding this issue.

The Counselor’s Role

The role of school counselors remains undefined until present; even school counselors themselves do not have a clear-cut definition or interpretation of their own roles (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Lambie and Williamson (2004) state that “role ambiguity exists when (a) an individual lacks information about his or her work role, (b) there is a lack of clarity about work objectives associated with the role, or (c) there is a lack of clarity about peer expectations of the scope and responsibility of the job” (p.124). Moreover, Myrick (2003) argues that the definition of counselor’s tasks highly relies on the group of people giving the definition because the tasks needed from a counselor to support teachers may differ from those needed from the administrators. It may also be
difficult to set a list of the counselor’s tasks because counselors’ tasks differ from one educational level to another (Stelzer, 2006).

According to Burnham and Jackson (2000), it is necessary that school counselors follow one of the current guidance and counseling program models. One of the most widely accepted comprehensive models of school counseling is the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) national model, which was created by the American School Counseling Association, as a framework for school counseling programs. The ASCA national model focuses on the child as a whole, i.e. academic development, career development, and personal/social development (Reiner et al., 2009; Schimmel, 2009). The model aims at implementing a comprehensive school counseling program through specific appropriate activities. The model lists appropriate school counselor tasks as well as inappropriate school counselor activities (ASCA as cited in Reiner et al., 2009).

Delivering a comprehensive school counseling program requires the counselor to fulfill specific tasks which include individual planning, school guidance curriculum, responsive services, and system support. According to ASCA, the school counselor’s roles as he/she is carrying out the specific tasks just mentioned fall under four main themes which are leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and systemic change. Through leadership, the school counselor works with other school personnel in order to implement reform, as well as guide students in accessing a curriculum that will ensure that they have a bright successful future. This requires collaboration in which the school counselor is expected to communicate with all stakeholders who play a role in students’ success through implementing responsive educational services. In fact, according to the ASCA model,
effectiveness of a school’s counseling program is highly dependent on the extent of teacher involvement. As for the theme advocacy, it implies that school counselors are responsible for the improvement of students’ academic performances and accomplishments. Finally, systemic change highlights the counselor’s role in using important information unique to him/her to study and change any policies or practices, if needed. (Schimmel, 2008)

According to Myrick (2003), a school counselor has six main tasks to perform: individual counseling, small group counseling, large group classroom guidance, peer facilitator programs, consultation with school staff, and coordination of guidance services. Stelzer (2006) also developed a list of ten tasks that the counselors should perform: individual assessment, individual counseling, group counseling and guidance, career assistance, placement and follow-up, referral, consultation, research, evaluation and accountability, and prevention. Burnham and Jackson (2000) conducted a study to explore counselors’ perceptions of their own roles by asking 80 school counselors to fill out questionnaires about their roles. The results of the study showed that most participants reported that their main roles were: individual counseling, group work, consultation, collaboration, referral and assessment. These roles are in fact very similar to those found in the ASCA model and to Myrick’s (2003) and Stelzer’s (2006) definitions which implies that school counselors’ roles are gradually transforming and meeting those of new counseling trends.

Regardless of what the school counselor’s tasks are, it is important for each school to have a well-defined and clear-cut vision of what is expected of a school counselor in order to avoid conflicts among counselors, teachers and administrators (Stelzer, 2006).
Teachers’ Perspectives

Since, as previously mentioned, students with special needs are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), this implies that general education teachers may also be responsible for the delivery of lessons to those students. Hence, general education teachers must not only be knowledgeable of the emotional, behavioral and social problems of students with special needs, but they should also be aware of the procedures required for providing the best education possible such as identification, intervention and prevention methods (Lane et. al as cited in Patternson, 2005). Therefore, the general education teacher, who plays an important role in the pre-referral stage, must be aware that by referring a child to special needs services, he/she could ultimately cause a lifetime change since that child will be labeled as a “special needs student”. (Patterson, 2005)

Teachers can play an important role in supporting school counselors with regards to working with students with special needs. According to Stelzer (2006), teachers are the main element that can help school counselors in delivering school guidance and counseling program, hence taking their perceptions into consideration is necessary. A study conducted by Beesley (2004) examined the level of satisfaction of 188 certified teachers in southwestern USA concerning school counselor services. Surveys were used to collect data on the teachers’ perceptions, and results showed that teachers play a significant role in providing accurate feedback on the school counselor’s effectiveness. In addition, it was also shown that teachers were satisfied with the services that school counselors provided in their school settings which entailed getting involved in directing special education services. (Beesley, 2004)
Another study done by Clark and Amatea (2004) showed different results. The study was conducted on 23 teachers in southeastern USA in order to examine their perceptions and expectations regarding school counselors’ services and contributions. The study also examined reflections of graduate students on their future work as school counselors based on the data collected from the interviews they conducted with teachers. Data collected from teachers’ interviews and reflections of graduate students were analyzed and categorized into several themes. Results revealed that teachers felt the need for school counselors to become more involved in classroom-related tasks including: dealing with aggression, problem solving, and establishing a positive environment. Another major concern was that teachers reported the need for the counselor’s support in working with special needs students. Teachers believed that counselors must provide resources for students with special needs, make referrals, and work with those students and their families. (Clark & Amatea, 2004)

Reiner et al. (2009) addressed two research questions in their study regarding the extent to which teachers believed school counselors should and are engaging in responsibilities defined by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model. Data was collected through questionnaires that were filled out by high school teachers regarding the appropriate and inappropriate tasks, as identified by the ASCA Model, which the school counselor should and is engaged in. Similar to the results of the study conducted by Milsom (2002) which addressed the same issues, teachers noted that although they may help and support school counselors in delivering guidance and counseling lessons, there was no collaboration between teachers and counselors regarding
this. Overall, the results showed that teachers believed that school counselors should work more closely with teachers in order to guide students through their development and that many school counselors were involved in inappropriate tasks that were considered to be clerical.

Similarly, Skutley (2006) conducted a study on 25 middle school teachers in the United States in order to examine teachers’ perceptions of the counselor’s role using a survey containing eight short questions. Results showed that teachers encouraged small group counseling, followed by individual counseling, then classroom guidance as priorities of the counselor’s role. Results also revealed that teachers believed that the guidance program at their school should involve more frequent small group counseling, that counselors should be visible outside the counseling department and that more staff is needed.

With regard to general education teachers’ perspectives of their own roles in dealing with students with special needs, previous research suggests several concerns that teachers have. A study conducted by Foote et al. (2010) on 71 teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms in New York aimed to examine the type of in-class support that teachers receive from school staff. Results revealed that although co-teaching was the most helpful type of support for a least restrictive environment, it was not often used. Teachers stated that they received small group instruction, one-to-one support and planning, which are not done on a continuous basis. Overall the teachers felt the need for more training, more in-class support, smaller classroom sizes and less severe cases in inclusive
classrooms in order to be able to deal with students with special needs more effectively (Foote et al., 2010).

Conversely, a study conducted by Leatherman (2007) on eight teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms revealed that most teachers had positive attitudes about teaching students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. However, six of the teachers expressed their need for additional workshops and training about special needs to learn how to educate students with different cases. All teachers in this study believed that for their inclusive classrooms to be successful, they needed more support from all school staff. (Leatherman, 2007)

**Counselors’ Perspectives**

In order to determine the role of school counselors, it is also important to examine school counselors’ perspectives, especially since teachers and counselors’ perceptions differ with regards to the role of the school counselor (Schlieve, 2003). However, a lot of research conducted with school counselors merely focus on their perceptions with regards to their roles in general; very limited research has specifically focused on counselors’ perceptions regarding their roles in working with students with special needs. Milsom’s (2002) study, which was conducted on a sample of 400 school counselors, is an example of one of those limited studies. Based on the School Counselor Preparation Survey-Revised (SCPS-R), it was shown that counselors felt prepared to work with students with special needs, but that they lacked the knowledge and experiences that would allow them to do their job more effectively. In addition, results showed that those counselors felt that they did in fact perform many of the activities required for students with special needs such as
providing individual counseling and advocating for students. Finally, although it was stated by the counselors participating in this study that they did not work with teachers, results showed that those counselors spent the majority of their time with teachers in order to provide them with the best ways to deal with students with special needs. (Milsom, 2002)

Research has also stated that school counselors have not gone through proper preparation programs in order to be well-equipped with using effective methods in working with students with special needs (Arnold, 2010; Milson, 2002). For instance, Arnold (2010) conducted a study on 24 school counselor trainees enrolled in a counselor education program in the United States to explore their perceptions of their future roles in working with students with special needs. The survey composed of open-ended questions that also examined trainees’ attitudes towards working with students with special needs and their knowledge about working with those students. Results revealed that school counselor trainees reported that they needed more practice in special education and related services, more training related to classroom management, more knowledge regarding classroom interventions for students with special needs and more knowledge about the laws related to special education as well as the referral process. Most of the school counselor trainees believed that all these are an essential part of a school counselor’s role and hence they need to strengthen their knowledge and skills in these areas at the graduate level.

**Teacher and School Counselor Collaboration**

Many studies emphasize the importance of teamwork that should take place in schools between school counselors and teachers (Beesley, 2004, Clark & Amatea, 2004;
Erhard & Umanksy, 2005; Milsom, 2002; Reiner et al., 2009). In fact, “counseling by nature is built on the principles of teamwork” (Lenhardt & Young as cited in Beesley, 2004, p.267). Teachers should be part of the implementation of counseling services since they have the same goals as school counselors which is to guide students to succeed academically, vocationally, emotionally, behaviorally, socially and personally (Beesley, 2004; Clark & Amatea, 2004). The study conducted by Clark and Amatea (2004) expressed the need for teachers and school counselors to work together to help students in their character development and academic achievement. Both graduate students and teachers expressed that the most highly needed area of focus in counseling programs is collaboration between school counselors and teachers (Gysbers as cited in Beesly, 2004).

In fact, school counselors are not capable of implementing comprehensive school guidance and counseling programs alone (Beesly, 2004) and since teachers can be important and helpful resources for dealing with special needs students, collaboration between both parties is essential (Beesley, 2004).

According to Greene and Valesky (1998), elementary school counselors are in greater need of collaboration with teachers since they benefit the most from teachers’ skills. At the elementary level, the counselor’s role focuses on early identification of students suspected to have a disability in order to take the necessary measures to reduce the deterioration of the disability. Hence, elementary school counselors need to work more closely with teachers than school counselors at other grade levels because they need teachers’ support to help them detect symptoms of specific disabilities at an early age. (Greene & Valesky, 1998)
Moreover, Greene and Valesky (1998) state that inclusion of students in the general education classroom will increase counselor consultation activity. In fact, school counselors’ and teachers’ consultations are important to ensure student success in schools (Beesley, 2004; Gybers & Henderson; Myrick as cited in Clark & Amatea, 2004). Teachers need to gain knowledge about students with special needs since they are expected to help school counselors in order to meet the needs of those students (Greene & Valesky, 1998).

**Teachers’ and Counselors’ Self-Efficacy**

In order for the education of students with special needs in regular education classrooms to be effective, not only should teachers and counselors collaborate, but they should also have a positive attitude towards their abilities to carry out their expected duties (Edhard & Umanksy, 2005; Greene & Valesky, 1998). This corresponds to Bandura’s (1977, 1982, 1986) concept of self-efficacy which states that individuals engage in tasks that they believe they can perform well in and that they feel comfortable doing. According to Bandura (1986), in order for attitude and behavioral change to take place, one is expected to participate in positive training and other practices (Edhard & Umanksy, 2005; Greene & Valesky, 1998). Thus, for teachers and school counselors to have positive attitudes towards working with students with special needs, they should have a positive perception about their abilities to successfully deal with those students; the higher their self-efficacy towards these duties, the higher the probability for these tasks to be more effective. A study conducted by Erhard and Umanksy (2005) showed that school counselors in Israel conveyed positive attitudes towards including students with special
needs in the general education classroom. More specifically, the counselors were shown to spend more time with the teachers and students at the school although the counselors had reported to believe that they spent more time and produced more tasks for administrative purposes (Erhard & Umansky, 2005). Counselors also reported the importance of special education training in contributing to their work in the school in areas such as allocation of time, collaboration with the role partners, and involvement in areas of inclusion. This implies how important it is for counselors to work with students with special needs and to be knowledgeable with regards to working with them. Results of this study also showed that teachers who showed positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with special needs were more likely to provide effective services to those students (Erhard & Umanksy, 2005). Also, the results of another study conducted by Greene and Valesky (1998) showed that elementary school counselors had the highest self-efficacy when they carried out consultation practices with teachers.

Although recent research and many laws have stated the necessity of school counselors to provide services to students with special needs, school counselors still need training with regards to dealing with those students. In fact, a serious concern is that knowledge regarding students with special needs is not provided to most school counselors in their education programs (Korinek & Prillaman as cited in Milsom, 2002). The study conducted by Milsom (2002) focused on counselors’ level of preparedness and position with regards to students with special needs. The School Counselor Preparation Survey-Revised (SCPS-R) was used to assess the activities that school counselors performed for students with special needs, their level of preparedness, and the education they received
with regards to students with special needs. Results showed that the activity performed the most by school counselors for students with special needs was individual/group counseling. In addition, results indicated that school counselors were somehow prepared to work with those students; however, they felt unprepared in some tasks such as assisting students with transition plans and behavior modification plans. Overall, the results of this study indicated that although school counselors provide many services to students with special needs, they still feel the need to be fully prepared to work with those students.

In addition, the study conducted by Milsom (2002) showed that there was a relation between the education school counselors receive with regards to working with students with special needs and how prepared they felt while dealing with those students. In fact, it was shown that school counselors felt more prepared and were able to deliver more services to students with special needs when they received knowledge, whether through workshops or courses, and/or experiences while working with those children (Milsom, 2002). This is concurrent with the results of the study conducted by Greene and Valesky (1998) where it was shown that the greater the number of special education courses taken by counselors, the better and more positive attitudes they had towards dealing with students with special needs. This implies that both teachers and counselors need to gain information about students with special needs in order to serve them the best way possible.

In conclusion, the aim to meet students’ needs is greater at the elementary level where students are placed in a single classroom with one teacher (Greene & Valesky, 1998). This implies that teachers must also play a role in catering to the needs of each and every student in the classroom. Hence, elementary school counselors and teachers should
feel prepared to work with students with special needs who are placed in the general education classroom (Greene & Valesky, 1998). In order to feel prepared and provide students with the best education, collaboration between teachers and school counselors will help both gain the skills and knowledge needed from each other.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology of the study including a description of the sample selection, an explanation of the instruments used, as well as the procedures that will be followed for data collection and analysis.

Research Design

This study followed a qualitative exploratory design in which the researcher sought to understand the perceptions and expectations of teachers and school counselors with regards to the school counselor’s role in working with special needs students. The aim of the study was exploratory since, as previously mentioned, no research has been done regarding this issue in the Arab world, Lebanon in particular. The researcher based the study on qualitative (interviews) educational research methods since this provides a more in-depth understanding of the perceptions and expectations regarding counselors’ roles with students with special needs and explores the situation further. In addition, most articles this study was based on followed a qualitative approach that focused on details regarding teachers’ and counselors’ perceptions. Moreover, the study of perceptions and expectations needs detailed explanations of the participants’ views and opinions. Also, since this topic is a new one conducted in Lebanon, and since no clear standards were previously set for teachers and counselors’ roles with regards to students with special needs, a qualitative design may set the foundation for other articles that may also be conducted regarding this topic in Lebanon.
Participants

Three private Anglophone schools in Beirut and Greater Beirut meeting the criterion of including students with special needs in their general education classrooms were chosen for the study. The schools were selected using purposive sampling. Two of the schools were located in Beirut area, while one of them was located in Greater Beirut area. Then, through stratified sampling, only elementary teachers and counselors were selected. Ideally, one teacher per grade levels 1 through 6 would be available for the study; hence, one teacher was randomly selected from each of the grade levels 1 through 6 in each of the three schools, resulting in a total of 6 teachers for each school. In addition, one elementary school counselor was selected from each school resulting in a total of three counselors (no random sampling is necessary since schools usually have only one elementary school counselor). Hence, the total number of participants in this study is 18 elementary teachers and three elementary counselors.

Instrument

An interview was conducted with 18 elementary teachers and 3 counselors, as previously mentioned. The interview contained 4 questions (see Appendix) about the perceptions and expectations of teachers and counselors regarding their roles towards students with special needs. Possible probing questions were added in order to meet the purpose of the study which focuses on students with special needs, in particular. The instrument was given to recognized professionals in the field for content validation.

The study relied on qualitative interviews using an open-ended approach. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions about various
roles of the school counselor based on the researcher’s experience as well as the findings of previous studies. As conducting the interviews, the researcher asked the teacher or counselors probing questions (see Appendix) for further clarification or elaboration. Both etic and emic perspectives were the focus of this study since the participants are given the freedom to discuss anything related to the questions; however, the responses were analyzed based on the researchers’ perspectives.

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving approval from the IRB and after the administrators of the three prospective schools signed a consent form which explained the purpose of the study, consent forms were given to the teachers and school counselors participating in the study. Teachers and counselors were given the freedom to choose not to participate in the study. The purpose and procedure used was explained to all participants and the researcher explained to them that the answers they provide during the study will remain confidential and anonymous. Each participant was assigned a confidential code that will represent him/her throughout the collection of data, and participants were informed that all their answers, whether in writing or recorded on tape, will be stored in a safe place and that only the researcher will have access to. Also, the researcher informed them that the information gathered will be destroyed once the study is over.

Before beginning the interviews, the researcher procured the school policies on inclusion, if any, as well as the job descriptions of teachers and counselors in each of the three schools. The semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the teachers and counselors in a private room that the participant or administration specified. Specific
days were set for each school in order for the researcher to visit the school and conduct the interviews with the teachers and counselor of each school. Measures were taken in order for replacements to be done in case the teachers have classes after the break. No time limit was provided for the interviews since the participants were given the freedom to talk. The duration of the interviews ranged between 30-45 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded by consent of the interviewees and the researcher took notes. The interviewer assured the interviewee that everything that is said will remain confidential and that their identities will remain anonymous. The transcribed interviews were sent to the interviewees for review and approval of the content of the material.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from the interviews was analyzed using the interpretational analysis (Merriam, 1998). The audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. A first reading of all the interviews was done in which the researcher came up with codes. The unit of analysis was taken as one sentence. The transcriptions were coded using the open coding method to identify and/or generate the common, salient themes that appeared in the transcripts. After coding all the sentences, a second reading was done to group codes into categories. A third and final reading was then done to place categories under general themes. Inter-rater reliability was done on two teachers’ and one counselor’s transcripts to verify the main themes that were generated. Comparison of both the teachers’ and counselor’s responses was done in order to determine any similarities or differences in the identified themes. Moreover, it was necessary to look at teacher’s role as well while examining the participants’ perceptions and expectations. In addition,
comparisons between the different schools’ participants’ answers were done. The themes were determined based on the researcher’s analysis and the themes found in previous research. The general themes derived from the data collection were the following: knowledge about school policies, perceptions of the counselor’s role, expectations of the counselor’s role, teachers’ concerns, perceptions of the teacher’s role, teachers’ suggested improvements, counselors’ suggested improvements and counselors’ concerns. Several subthemes were derived, and they were: strategies used in the classroom, character education lessons, teachers’ experience, in-class support, more elementary school counselors, more teacher knowledge about students with special needs, workshops and training, collaboration and teamwork, university preparation, referral and pull-out, workshops and training and classroom size.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the interviews. The answers to the three research questions will be presented through common themes that were derived from the interviewees’ answers; the themes are supported with excerpts from the participants’ answers. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section provides the teacher’s perceptions and expectations regarding their roles and the counselor’s role when dealing with students with special needs. The second section provides the counselor’s perceptions and expectations of their roles and the teacher’s roles when dealing with students with special needs. The third and final section uses the themes found in the first two sections as a framework to compare the results found between teachers and counselors.

Teacher’s Perceptions and Expectations

Teachers in this study were unaware of the school policies related to inclusion, and were also unaware of the counselor’s job description. In general, teachers had a slight idea about what counselors do in school, and they mostly stated observation and pull-out as the counselor’s main tasks. Teachers expected more from counselors towards them and towards students with special needs. Teachers believed that time and limited resources were obstacle for dealing with students with special needs. They also stated other concerns related to their work and the counselor’s towards students with special needs. In order to ensure that students with special needs are being offered a proper education, teachers suggested improvements.
Knowledge about School Policies

None of the teachers in this study were aware of school policies relating to inclusion, if any. In fact, they had never heard of any school policies about inclusion. However, when they were asked what they knew about school policies concerning inclusion in general, teacher A5 stated:

I don’t know if we have a policy here in our school but I know that when some students are capable of being placed in the classroom, they place them but with modifications.

Teacher C6 also said:

I never read the school policy, if any, but I think it must state that special needs students must be in class for most of the time and must be treated like other students.

Perceptions of the Counselor’s Role with Regard to Students with Special Needs

None of the teachers who participated in the study were aware of the counselor’s job description. Almost all of them stated that they do not know what the school counselor is actually supposed to do. Only three teachers shared their thoughts about what they thought the counselor’s job is at their school. Teacher B6 mentioned:

What I know is that their job is to help students emotionally and mentally, and to help regular education teachers in dealing with them.

Similarly, teacher C6 said:

…I think the counselor must focus on the emotional and academic aspects of a student’s life, and must do individual and group counseling, and must
be in contact with parents, and focus on the behavioral aspect of students’ lives.

When asked about what the counselor does at their school, the most common tasks mentioned were observations and pull-outs for individual counseling sessions. Other tasks included conducting meetings, and character education planning. Many teachers from schools A and B also stated that the school counselors make behavioral charts for each child after explaining the students’ cases to the teacher. This behavioral chart, according to the teachers, is used to help the counselor follow up on the child’s social life and behavior. As teacher A4 mentioned:

*The counselor deals with the social aspect of the child’s life (social skills) using the behavioral chart. She informs the teachers of the chart and the case. The counselor deals with the students on a one-to-one basis and sometimes informs the teachers concerned about the charts and strategies she is using… The only strategy I know is the behavioral chart.*

In addition, most teachers claimed that they do not even know what their school counselor *does* when dealing with students with special needs. As teacher A2 stated, they only know the product and not the process. For instance, B2 and A4 responded with the following:

*I don’t know what the counselors do with those students. They help them become closer to the environment and people around them, but I don’t know the tasks.* [teacher B2]
I’m not aware of the steps that are being taken on behalf of the counselor.

It’s all from what I see her doing. She observes but I don’t know the specific steps and strategies she uses with them. [teacher A4]

In fact, a majority of the teachers even stated that they had no idea what took place between the counselor and students after they are pulled out from the classroom, i.e. during individual counseling sessions. This is illustrated by the following:

I don’t know details about the sessions that take place between the counselor and the students. I am informed of the reasons and sometimes about how to deal with that kid in class. There’s no ongoing follow up.

[teacher A6]

Almost all teachers in school C mentioned that they are not updated about the strategies used with the students after they are pulled out, and that they are neither informed of the intervention taking place, nor about the strategies used during the individual counseling sessions. C2 stated the following:

We know briefly what happens next. We know nothing about the counselor’s intervention. She probably has different strategies, but we don’t know. We know the outcome only. We are not present during meetings. This is not our job. She only familiarizes us with the case.

Expectations of the Counselor’s Role with Regard to Students with Special Needs

According to the teachers, the counselors should be doing more than what they are doing, whether with teachers or with students with special needs. In addition, they expressed their anger towards the way counselors were working with students with special
needs. Most of the participating teachers mentioned that if a child is referred by them, the counselor walks into the classroom to observe the child. After that, the child is pulled out by the counselor, and they sit for one-on-one counseling sessions in private. Sometimes counselors call for meetings with parents, most of the time in the absence of the teachers.

According to A5:

If students are referred, the counselor comes to class and observes those students, or if I have a problem with one of the students, on the spot I ask the counselor to come to my class. Other than that students have sessions with the counselors.

As for B5, who attended one individual counseling session, she complained about the quality of the session that took place between the counselor and the student with special needs. She said that:

Counselors do pull outs which involve individual counseling (20 minutes per week or 2 times per week), but I don’t think that’s beneficial anyway. I once attended a session. There was no flow in the session. The child did not express. The counselor was just pointing out the wrong things.

B6 further criticized the fact that the school counselor pulls out students with special needs even though sometimes their cases do not require individual counseling sessions:

Counselors do some pull out sessions. I had five students with special needs, but only two needed individual counseling, the rest didn’t need. I don’t think the other three benefited from it... The other 2 students improved a bit.
Ten teachers from schools A and C believe that the number of observation hours done by the counselors is not enough to decide whether to pull the student out or not. Some also stated that the number of pull out sessions, as in individual counseling, were very few per week. C3, for example, stated the following:

*The counselor usually pulls out students that are referred. They do observations but not frequent enough… and once per week (20-25 minutes) is not enough for pull outs.*

The teachers also expressed their annoyance regarding how they are always the ones trying to meet with the counselor either for more information on how to deal with students with special needs in their classroom, or for follow up. A2 said for instance:

*I usually ask the counselor for consultation about certain cases or situations… We meet with special needs teachers and counselors to talk about kids who have special needs, when we ask for that. They rarely ask for meetings.*

*It’s like I run after them to give me strategies but no continuous feedback.*

[teacher B2]

**Perceptions of the Teacher’s Role with Regard to Students with Special Needs**

The teachers could not specify their role towards students with special needs. According to the majority of teachers in this study, there is nothing explicitly mentioned in their job description about their role towards students with special needs. However, teachers B2 and B3 from the same school said that their job description emphasizes the
importance of working with all students, including regular students and those with special needs. Teacher B3 said:

…it states that I should cater for all students’ needs. [teacher B3]

On the other hand, two teachers, A6 and C6 had never read their job descriptions but both mentioned that they do not think there was something mentioned about students with special needs.

Strategies Used in the Classroom

Although the teachers could not explicitly identify their job description regarding students with special needs, they mentioned a number of teaching strategies that they used in their classrooms when dealing with such students. The major strategies mentioned included: differentiated instruction, modification, one-on-one instruction and the use of manipulatives. Less frequently used teaching methods included using repetition, giving reinforcements (based on the student’s personal interest), making accommodations (e.g., seating the child next to them or seating the child in the front), placing students with special needs in groups with regular students, and using visuals.

Ten teachers used differentiated instruction in which they give the lesson to regular students using a certain learning style and then re-explain the same material using a different learning strategy to those with special needs. For instance, teacher A1 said:

I use differentiation. Sometimes I give them different tasks than that of their friends, or I might just change the instructions.

In addition, fourteen of the teachers mentioned using modification as the most common strategy when dealing with students with special needs. The modifications they
make usually involve giving shorter material, making letters and handwriting bigger, highlighting or coloring words, aligning words, providing oral answers rather than written ones, or breaking tasks into chunks.

In some schools, the teachers make their own modifications if they are certain and comfortable in doing so, while others refer to the special needs coordinator after making the modifications in order to verify if their work is correct. This is illustrated in the following:

_I modify material the send it to the special needs coordinator to check if it is okay for that specific child._ [teacher A4]

_I do a lot of modifications. Since it’s an inquiry-based program, it’s open for anything and many modifications can be made._ [teacher B2]

In school C, all modifications are done by the special needs teacher, and the general education teacher simply applies what was given to her. Teacher C1 said:

_I give my exams, lesson plans, and everything to the special needs teachers and she modifies. Then, I give it to the students with special needs in class._

With regard to using the one-on-one strategy, twelve of the teachers attested to using this approach; whenever the teacher has time or when the regular students are working on a task, the teacher will sit with the students with special needs and explain to them the same task, give them an easier task, or read them a story. According to A3, although this is beneficial for them, sometimes they miss out on other regular classroom activities. For instance, teacher A3 stated:
...sometimes students with special needs are taken aside and we work with them more while others are in their playing centers in class. So they're missing the center’s time although it might be beneficial.

A third of the interviewed teachers emphasized the use of manipulatives in their classrooms when dealing with students with special needs. Some of the teachers use manipulatives related to the child’s everyday life or real life examples, while others use concrete objects in which students can use their senses. Teacher A5 said:

*I try to give them manipulatives, concrete objects, things that they use in their daily lives because they are more familiar with those objects.*

**Character education lessons**

In schools A and C, teachers also give character education lessons that are prepared by the school counselor, but modified by the teacher based on the students’ needs. However, when the topic is sensitive, the counselor delivers the lesson since the teachers do not know how they are supposed to tackle the subject. As teacher C6 stated:

*The counselor gives us lesson plans about different topics and the materials for us to give the character education session in class. She doesn’t tell us how to give it. We should modify it the way we see it work in our class.*

Teacher C3 believes that these lessons do not benefit students with special needs much. She said:

*I give guidance and counseling classes (character education) once per week to all the students in the class. They are basically preventive measures*
(hygiene, friendship, career…). This helps students a little bit, but not everyone with special needs benefits. Regular students benefit more.

Teachers’ Experience

Fifteen teachers stated that experience helped in improving the efficiency of the roles they perform towards students with special needs. They believe that with time, they get used to those students and their needs, and they work with them better. Teacher A3 said:

As a regular education teacher, it’s frustrating but since I have many years of experience, I know how to deal with these kids.

Moreover, nine of the interviewed teachers said that they do not need the counselor’s help because with experience, they became able to work on their own. Because of my experience, I must know what to do I don’t need the counselor to teach me anything with or without the counselor. It’s the same for me. Not all teachers can deal with issues but I can. I don’t need the counselor’s intervention. I don’t need her to be in my class. My experience helped me. [Teacher A3]

Teachers’ Concerns

The teachers of this study expressed many common concerns with regard to dealing with students with special needs in their regular classrooms. Some teachers believed that what they were doing with students with special needs was enough and that students were benefitting. However, others believed that they should be doing more and one of the main
reasons that they are not able to do so is the lack of resources available to them. Teacher A2 said:

*Maybe a teacher should have more pictures to use with students with special needs, more activities, more stuff they like and enjoy, not just the traditional way of teaching that we do. They like visual stuff which I don’t have.*

In addition, eleven teachers expressed that their lack of knowledge regarding students with special needs was a major issue for them. Teacher A2 and A3 mentioned, respectively:

*I don’t know a lot about special needs so I don’t know if this is enough for me as a regular education teacher. I’m sure I should do more but I can’t because I have other regular students.* [Teacher A2]

*Teachers must have more practice to know how to deal with students with special needs. Students must use manipulatives and concrete objects in the classroom. They need one-on-one teaching but I can’t do that in my class.* [Teacher A3]

Teacher A4 further mentioned:

*I do what I was told to do by the special needs teacher. If I was a special needs teacher I would give them what they deserve and need. They need a shadow teacher in class. They’re not getting the right amount and type of help they need from me.*
Another major issue mentioned by fourteen teachers was that of time constraints. Teacher B1 referred to time as her “enemy”. In fact, a majority of the interviewed teachers neglect either regular students or students with special needs in the classroom since they do not have time to focus on both together.

...students need more one-on-one, more manipulatives and resources, but there isn’t enough time. [teacher A5]

Moreover, teachers complained about not having time to provide students with special needs with the emotional and academic support they needed. They attribute this to the work load they already have as homeroom teachers. As teacher B3 illustrated:

I am not doing enough. Those students need more emotional support which I can’t really give in class…they need a lot of time. I need to be physically and mentally relaxed to work with them. I have many things to do in and out of class that I can’t provide them with what they need.

In school A, where there is no shadow or in-class support teacher, teacher B1 even went further to express feelings of guilt:

I’m not doing enough with the students with special needs. I’m always worried and guilty because I don’t feel I’m serving them well. You’re neglecting some for others, either special needs or regular students.
Teachers’ Suggested Improvements

In-class support

Nine teachers emphasized their need for an in-class support teacher or a shadow teacher who can help them deal with students with special needs on a one-to-one basis. C2 mentioned:

I need help. I need the special education teacher and the counselor to help me in class. We need in-class support 24/7 for extra assistance because I have to work and focus on my other students.

Although one of the schools has in-class support, the teachers in that school still felt that the amount of time that the shadow teacher spends in class is not enough, and that they need a bigger number of in-class support teachers. One of the teachers said that the in-class support teacher just walks in to help for half an hour per day which is not enough. As for B1, she said:

We have an in-class support teacher but it wasn’t enough. We need more staff. We need more in class support teachers. Less than two times per week is not enough.

On the other hand, only one teacher, who receives in-class support around once per week criticized those in-class supporters:

I don’t think those students will benefit in class even if with an in-class support teacher. Many things distract them and they distract others, especially when the in-class support teachers are in the class. I get tensed and they waste my time.
More elementary school counselors

Twelve of the teachers in this study mentioned the need for more than one elementary school counselor. For instance, teachers C6 and B1 said:

*One counselor isn’t enough for the whole elementary. We must have at least three counselors. One counselor has no time for us all. The counselor must have assistants maybe.* [teacher C6]

*We need them to be available, so we need more staff.* [teacher B1]

In fact, teachers from all three schools, including schools where there are two elementary school counselors, complained about how school counselors should be seen everywhere in school. According to most teachers, especially from school C where there’s only one elementary school counselor, the school counselor’s job should not be limited to the office; counselors should be visible to students with special needs on a daily basis for those students to get used to the counselor. This, in turn, would help build a bond of trust. B6 said:

*Counselors must be visible on a regular basis not just in the office.*

*Counselors should walk around, observe and talk to kids, and engage with them.*

Moreover, when the counselor walks around the school, s/he will be able to observe kids in different settings, which will help her deal with them. As C3 and B2 stated:

*I see the students’ improvements more because I am with the students more than the counselor. I see them in different settings. The counselor must be found everywhere.* [teacher C3]
Around ten teachers furiously expressed their anger towards the fact that counselors, in general, only visit their classrooms when they are asked to, which is in case of a sudden problem or emergency. Hence, counselors mainly present corrective measures rather than preventive. B1 said:

_Counselors come to the classroom if we have behavioral problems, on call problems. They just help with quick interventions. For example, they give us something to read to know what technique to use the next day._

C4 also stated the following:

_The counselor works with me only on call. If there’s a problem, I ask her to interfere. She might talk to the kids or to the parents. She doesn’t really walk to observe the classes. She only observes when asked to and then she pulls the student out._

More teacher knowledge about students with special needs

Around six teachers emphasized the need to know more about the students with special needs in their classroom. In school C, teachers complained about not being allowed to access students’ files to know more about them because, according to their counselor, it is confidential. As the following teacher illustrated:

_We need to have files about students coming to our class. They don’t give it to us. They don’t want us to put something in mind based on files. But, I would prepare ahead of time and read about the disabilities. I need to know his or her case to treat him accordingly. Also, we need to read the files of students with special needs who are already in our classes._
Although some teachers have access to students’ files, those teachers believe this is not enough. A majority of the teachers highlighted the need to be informed by the counselor of different steps and strategies, preferably in written form rather than oral form, which can be used with students with special needs. They also believe that they should discuss each student’s case including the strategies and steps that need to be followed. In doing so, this will also assist the counselor in doing her job. B5 stated the following:

*I don’t need just verbal/oral instructions on what to do. I need to really know what is the case of each kid. How can I deal with him on the spot? We need a plan from the counselor. We need steps… I need to know the strategies that they are using so that I use them with the child.*

One third of the teachers even asked for modeling where the counselor would provide them with real-life examples on how to deal with students with special needs.

*I need real-life examples. I need modeling. Personally I don’t care about whether it’s prevention or intervention as long as it’s hands on. I want to see it in front of me.* [teacher B2]

**Workshops and training**

Eight of the teachers emphasized the need for better quality workshops and training to be done regarding special needs. Teachers complained about the workshops not being enough, being too general, and not tackling the topics that teachers can relate to or use in class. B1 said the following:
We need training. The workshops done by the counselor about special needs are not enough…They should give us readings and workshops about the common issues. I think this would decrease the referrals or at least the first few steps of working with those students.

Moreover, teachers complained about the workshops being theoretical instead of practical. For example, B2 said:

*I need more knowledge about special needs. We need workshops. One workshop is not enough especially when it’s oral, verbal. We can’t act based on knowledge only. We need to be involved.*

Four teachers also asked to have worksheets and readings about the cases during workshops so that they can analyze and discuss the cases. A6 said:

*We need to read the cases and analyze them during workshops. We need worksheets for us.*

Increased collaboration and teamwork

Twelve teachers mentioned the need for more collaboration mainly between the school counselor, the special education department and the general education teachers. Teacher B1 states the following:

*Collaboration and teamwork are very important… It’s very important for the special needs department, the counselors and teachers to collaborate together to serve the students, to cater to their needs. I need to feel the team’s support.*
Around five teachers stressed the necessity for the counselor and special education department to work together where they can both work with the teachers. They believe that this is important for catering to the child’s needs as a whole, whether academically, behaviorally or socially. In fact, A4 mentioned:

*Counselors and special needs department must all work together because the academic affects the behavior and vice versa. I need to work with both. Both should be present.*

Moreover, around seven teachers stated that the collaboration is needed on behalf of the counselor. They are blaming the counselor, mainly, for not collaborating and communicating much with them. As teacher A1 said:

*I expect more collaboration from the counselors, than the special education teacher.*

Five teachers believe that one way of achieving more teamwork and collaboration is by having more meetings with the counselor, special education department and general education department. They claim that this is the best way to follow up on the different cases they have in their classrooms and to discuss strategies to implement with the child. For instance, A3 said:

*It’s always good to communicate and listen to others but this doesn’t happen here since there are no meetings between the counselor and all the teachers.*

However, C1 stated the following concern regarding having more meetings:
We must have meetings between all the teachers, the counselor, and the special education department but it’s not feasible because some teachers don’t like other teachers to tell them what to do.

One of the teachers, B6, underlined the value of quality over quantity. She believes that they can have fewer meetings in their school as long as they are more meaningful and beneficial to them. She further states that most of their current meetings with counselors revolve around character education rather than special needs.

**Number of students in the classroom**

Five of the teachers interviewed complained about having a big number of students in the classroom, while seven others complained about having many students with special needs in the classroom, which prevents them from working either with those kids, or with regular kids.

*I want a small number of students with special needs in my class. Aside that, I don’t mind. They need to be with regular classes.* [Teacher A3]

*In Lebanon there is a challenge which is classroom sizes so I don’t want to take care of those kids. Our classrooms should be made in a way that I can easily move around the class without disturbing others.* [Teacher C2]

**University requirements**

Ten teachers stated their regretful for not taking courses about special needs during their educational years in university.
In university they don’t teacher us about special needs at all, so I had no idea about those kids. The government must do something about this in universities. [Teacher A2]

I wish I did special education. I didn’t know that existed when I was in university. We needed to learn about that. [Teacher A5]

**Counselor’s Perceptions and Expectations**

Counselors in this study were unaware of school policies regarding inclusion, if any, as well as the teacher’s job description. Counselors mentioned teaching strategies that teachers should use in the classroom with students with special needs, and stressed on the significant effect that school counselors have on such students. Counselors believed that they do not have enough time to work with students with special needs. They also stated several concerns related to teacher’s performance towards students with special needs and suggested improvements.

**Knowledge about School Policies**

None of the counselors in this study mentioned that they were aware of school policies relating to inclusion, if any. Counselor B7 stated the following:

*I don’t know about the school policy, but what I know is that only students with mild cases are placed in the classroom. There is no set policy.*

The counselor in school C stated that she does not think they have a written policy about inclusion, but that they will have one soon. She said:

*I’m not sure we have a written policy about inclusion. We will be creating one.*
As for the school counselor at school A, she stated that they have a written policy but that she does not know of its content:

_We have a written policy, but I am not sure if it is about special needs in general and whether they have something about inclusion._

**Perceptions of the Teacher’s Role with Regard to Students with Special Needs**

The participating counselors were unaware of what the teacher’s job description was with regards to students with special needs. For instance, counselors A7 and B7 mentioned that they were unaware of the teachers’ job description, while counselor C7 stated that she read the job description a long time ago and that there was nothing mentioned regarding the role that general education teachers play when dealing with students with special needs.

With regard to the general education teacher’s strategies in the classroom, counselors stressed the importance of using differentiation in the classroom in order to cater to students’ needs. Counselor B7 said:

_Differentiation is used to cater for each student’s needs (such as sitting close to the teacher, using repetition, visual aids, verbal and written modifications…etc). Teachers complain about not having time due to the curriculum and not having a background. It depends on the teacher. Some of them are really supportive._

According to counselors A7 and B7, the teacher should make modifications in the classroom for students with special needs. However, according to counselor C7, it is not
the teacher’s job to make the modifications but rather the special needs teacher’s job. She stated:

The general education teacher shouldn’t modify the exams. It should be like here in our school. The special education teacher modifies and gives to students. For mild cases, there are very few modifications.

Perceptions of the Counselors’ Role with Regard to Students with Special Needs

According to the counselors, a school counselor’s job description stresses the importance of their role in working with all students in general. Counselor C7 said:

I must focus on all students in general… academically sometimes, but mainly socially, emotionally, personally, and behaviorally.

Counselor B7, who had read her job description while signing the contract a year ago, stated that the counselor’s job description must be modified at their school. She believes that the counselor must not have a specific schedule that she should follow in order to be in contact with students. She stated the following:

The counselor’s job description is not correct. My job description needs to be flexible and direct; the school counselor should be someone you can talk to any time of the day. This must be revisited.

As for counselor A7, who has read and modified the counselor’s job description at their school based on the school’s needs, said the following:

We know that there is no one definition for the school counselor’s role in general, let alone for students with special needs. Actually, it is common knowledge that counselors perform different tasks, mostly sometimes,
administrative. This is known to be true all over the world not only in Lebanon. Even the American Association for School Counselors does not have a unique job description. So, it is up to each school to assign tasks or define the role of the school counselor according to its needs, mission and vision. This is also the case in Lebanon, where counseling is still a very young field and each school has a different look regarding what the counselor does.

In schools A and C, the counselor plays a role in preparing character education lesson plans with topics such as bullying, hygiene, friendships…etc. Since character education lessons are delivered by general education teachers, the counselors meet with the teachers to provide them with the lessons. Teachers may modify the lessons the way they see it fit for the students. Counselor C7 stated the following:

*Teachers give the character education in class, 1 hour per week. I prepare the curriculum. We meet once per week. I explain the lesson and material to the teachers.*

Preventive measures in school B are given during advisory sessions for grades 5 through 8 where the counselor walks into the classroom, while corrective measures are used for grades 1 to 4. Counselor B7 elaborated:

*We have advisory sessions for grades 5 to 8. We discuss social issues and common topics such as bullying, drugs… we address them as a whole class. We visit classes, and do a lot of observations. We do sessions with the*
preschool like accepting others but not with grades 1, 2, 3, and 4 where go only upon need. For example there was a death case so we went in and talked about it.

In schools A, B and C, counselors emphasized the importance of implementing interventions using behavioral charts to try and modify the students’ behaviors in the classrooms, if needed. Counselor C7 said:

I mainly do behavioral charts. I give them to special education teachers and general education teachers and parents. I write the behaviors in the chart based on students’ needs. We do it in the way of competition.

Counselors’ Concerns

Counselor B7 argued that teachers need more resources and manipulatives for students with special needs. However, as counselor A7 mentioned, homeroom teachers already have enough to do so they will not be able to work with students with special needs properly in the classroom. She mentioned:

It is not easy especially taking into consideration the load that they usually have in class.

Similarly, counselor C7 claims that it might take teachers time to get used to having students with special needs in their classrooms since it is hard to control them. She said:

Teachers have negative attitudes towards students with special needs and they’re right, they need time to cope with this. Students with special needs are not always controlled.
The counselor in school B said that sometimes she provides the teachers with the steps to be taken with some of the students but teachers do not follow them, and that is why feedback is not provided by the teacher. Counselor B7 said:

*Teachers never give feedback because they don’t follow the steps that we give them.*

However, unlike the other two counselors, counselor B7 believes that teachers exaggerate about not having time to deal with students with special needs and that sometimes dealing with students with special needs in the classroom is sometimes very easy and straightforward. She stated:

*When we observe teachers in the classroom, we’re shocked. Teachers complain about not having enough time due to other students in the classroom, but sometimes it’s just one word that is required to help the students with special needs.*

Counselor B7 also believes that counselors themselves do not have time to provide guidance to teachers every step of the way since their job already requires a lot of planning. Counselor A7 also stated the following:

*The special needs coordinator, the team members and the counselors themselves do not have the time to work with the general teacher enough to help in dealing with the student.*

Along the same lines, counselor A7 stated:

*Most if not all the general teachers have no experience about special needs students or how to work with them. They feel frustrated and lost at the beginning*
(sometimes always), when they have to deal them. Even when they are promised to be helped by the special needs coordinator and team members, they still feel unequipped to do the job. Even when the above factors are provided, there are teachers who simply are not ready, or do not want to work with such students.

Referral and Pull-out

All counselors mentioned the fact that they pull out students from the classroom after teachers fill out referral forms. Counselor B7 complained about the way teachers fill out those forms. Counselor B7 said:

*Once teachers notice that students need pull-out, they refer the child. The priority of referral is mentioned in the referral form (urgent…) as well as the reasons of referral and the strategies that teachers used before referring the child. The strategies are not good sometimes such as we talked to him/her. We ask teachers to write anecdotal records. Sometimes also the issues are silly (referred because talk a lot for example).*

Counselor C7 also argues that sometimes the reasons of referral are very minor and that they can be solved in class with the general education teacher. She stated the following:

*Sometimes I observe in class when the teachers refer the child. I ask the teacher to observe the child and write notes (referral form) because teachers spend more time with the child. The teacher writes her observations, what she did and why she referred the child. Sometimes the*
issues are so minor and the teacher can solve this in class. I ask the students to come to me only when it’s a big problem.

Counselor B7 also complained about teachers not responding to the behavioral chart, and not following up on it properly. She said:

*Sometimes counselors put intervention but teachers don’t provide feedback.*

On the other hand, counselor C7 believes that teachers should not have all the information about students in their classroom because it is confidential and because she does not want them to stereotype a child ahead of time. Counselor C7 said:

*We can’t always tell teachers about all the data about the students. I want them to discover alone. I don’t want them to have an idea in their heads about the child. And we need to respect the fact that there is confidentiality.*

Counselor C7 stated that she informs the teachers about the strategies she used even if she does not want them to be present during the session. Moreover, she wants the teacher to research on the internet first and *then* come to her. Counselor C7 stated the following:

*I use strategies during individual counseling. Sometimes I involve the teachers and parents, but not in meeting, but I give them feedback. I give them strategies sometimes if behavioral. Everything is on the internet. Teachers can research and find but each individual is different. We can give them what to do with cases in general but they need to follow up. I can’t do that on my own. I encourage them to come and visit my office whenever they want.*
**Counselors’ Suggested Improvements**

**Workshops and Training**

Counselor A7 and B7 stated that more workshops should be done about students with special needs because teachers need to gain more knowledge about the disabilities and what to do in the different cases. Counselor B7 said:

*Teachers have no knowledge about special needs, we must focus on special needs, disabilities, cases, what can be done (from the L.S and counselor).*

Counselor C7 agrees with counselor B7, and she believes that teachers need workshops about special needs in order to start accepting those students just like regular students. She said:

*We need workshops for regular education teachers. They need to accept those students fully, but it will take time...They have to accept them as others.*

Despite the importance of workshops, counselor B7 mentioned that time was an issue:

*We don’t do many workshops and training but we should, but we have no time. Maybe must decrease from curriculum and increase the number of meetings with teachers to focus on students with special needs.*

Counselor C7 believes that although they need more workshops in school, it is also the teachers’ job to want to attend voluntarily. In addition, she stated the following:
I want practical workshops for counselors and for teachers. We all need. We don’t need theoretical especially because counseling needs practice more than special needs. We need workshops about counseling, not just special needs. I did one this year (guest speaker) but all was written. The best thing is for the counselor to do (conduct) the workshop to do it practical for teachers, but no time.

Collaboration and teamwork

Counselor B7 said:

Teachers spend most time with the child so there must be collaboration between the special education department, the counselor and teachers to discuss the student’s case. The counselor must be the person I trust, not the teacher. Students must feel safe around the counselor….It’s teamwork that’s missing.

Counselor C7 said:

No time but if we had time I would like to meet with parents more, to involve them more. I want parents to be encouraged and motivated to come and ask and care. We do workshops for parents but they don’t show up….We can’t do anything without parents’ involvement. It will be hard for me and teachers.

Moreover, counselor B7 stated that when she asks teachers to meet together with the counselor, teachers do not attend because they say they have no time for these meetings.
University Preparation

Counselor A7 blames universities for not offering special education courses as a mandatory course for all teachers. She believes that it is necessary that all teachers, even if they are not majoring in special education, to know about students with special needs.

Counselor A7 said:

*The [university] program should include more education courses preparing teachers to deal with such issues, even if they are not studying to be SN teachers. Learning difficulties and special needs are becoming very common in education and should be acknowledged much more in preparing teachers/educators…*

Moreover, counselor A7 believes that universities do not even prepare *counselors* to work with students with special needs. Counselor A7 said:

*I think that in universities, here and abroad, school counselors are not prepared, through courses or training, to deal with students with special needs. I think it is a personal effort on the part of the school counselor, although I also think that it should be mandatory and well prepared for, that a school counselor must work with the special needs students closely…*

Classroom size

Two of the interviewed counselors believe that they mainly focus on pull-outs rather than going into class to help students with special needs because of the large classroom sizes. Hence, there are some tasks like intervention that they are
not performing because of the number of students in the classroom. Counselor B7 stated the following:

Those students have to be treated equally. We really strive to make it a better place for students with special needs but we can’t put them alone.

They need social interaction. Sometimes pull outs are the best. Inclusion is hard to be perfect...In Lebanon we have big classrooms. The general education teacher already has weak students in class. She can’t do a lot more...

A Comparison between Teachers and Counselors

A comparison of the teachers’ and counselors’ responses, as described above, reveals several similarities and differences. First, the teachers and counselors in this study were both either unaware of the existence of school policies on inclusion or the contents of such policies, if they existed. In addition, a majority of the teachers and counselors admitted to never reading the other parties’ job description.

Regarding the perceptions of the roles of the other party, both the teachers and counselors claimed that the other party was not adequately doing their job. Almost all teachers stated that the counselors do not provide them with the necessary steps to deal with students with special needs in their classroom. Furthermore, they stressed the fact that the counselor does not inform them about what he/she is doing with the students, specifically during pull-out sessions. On the other hand, some of the counselors in this study claimed that they do in fact provide teachers sometimes with the steps they should take with those students. However, other counselors believe that teachers should either
look for the steps on their own or put the effort to come and visit the counselor and ask her about the steps.

In terms of the counselor’s duties, both the teachers and counselors mentioned observations and individual counseling as the counselors’ main tasks. They also both have similar viewpoints on the referral process that takes place: if the child’s symptoms persist even with the implementation of certain techniques by the teacher, the counselor observes the child in the classroom after which the child is pulled out for individual counseling sessions, if needed. However, some teachers complained about the counselors’ observation hours as not being enough to decide whether the child must be pulled out or not. In addition, some teachers complained about the individual counseling sessions being few in number per week. On the other hand, the counselors claim that some teachers fill out referral forms for students even when the reason is minor and can be solved in class. Another counselor also criticized the quality of the teachers’ techniques that are tried with the students before referral.

In addition, the counselors and teachers agree that the school counselor provides the teacher with a behavioral chart which is supposed to be filled out for each child in class. While some of the teachers stated that this is the only strategy that the counselor uses in the school, the counselors stated that teachers do no usually fill out the charts, which prevents her as a counselor from being able to follow up on the students. In terms of the character education lessons, both teachers and counselors agree that the counselor prepares the lessons and explains it to the teacher, who then delivers it in class to all students. According to most teachers from schools A and C, character education lessons are the only
preventive measures that the counselor carries out. One participating teacher stated that she
does not even think those lessons are beneficial to students with special needs. However,
according to the counselors, those lessons are very important for all students.

There were some commonalities between the teachers and counselors in relation to
the teacher’s role in the classroom when dealing with students with special needs and the
concerns associated with such a role. Most of the teachers and all the counselors mentioned
that differentiated instruction was being implemented in the classroom and they stressed
the necessity of that implementation. Counselors also stated, like most teachers, that
modification should be done with students with special needs. However, only one
counselor stated that the material being modified must be done by the special needs
department, and not the general education teacher. Furthermore, both teachers and
counselors stated that general education teachers need more resources that are hands-on
like manipulatives while teaching students with special needs in the classroom.

Another major issue stated by some of the teachers and counselors was the number
of students in each classroom. The counselors believe that the big number of students in
each classroom prevents them from working with the students in the classroom. On the
other hand, this big number of students in the classrooms prevents teachers to work closely
with students with special needs. Most teachers also stated that there are many students
with special needs in their classrooms, which stops them from paying special attention to
those students.

As a means to reduce the classroom size problem, almost all teachers suggested
having in-class support teachers that would help them while working with students with
special needs. Even the teachers who already had in-class support believed those supporters should be spending more time in class and that the staff should be bigger. However, none of the counselors mentioned the fact that teachers needed in-class support. Also, most teachers believed that the elementary level should have more counselors. This is in accordance with the counselors who also believe that there should be more than one counselor for the elementary school.

Time was one of the main issues stated by the majority of the teachers. They believed they had no time to work with students with special needs in the classroom because they have the other regular students to teach as well. In fact, the teachers suggested that counselors work more closely with students with special needs since they have more time. However, all counselors stated that they have a lot of planning and work to do and that they barely have time for other things. Also, a counselor mentioned that teachers usually exaggerate about not having time to work with students with special needs, and that sometimes the strategy or solution does not need time. She even went further to say that time will never be an obstacle if the teacher is willing to work with the students, believes in him/herself and can manage time properly.

The counselors in this study believed that they spent most of their time in the office with the students due to issues of confidentiality. On the other hand, most teachers stated that the counselor’s work should not be limited to the office, and that the counselor must be working with students everywhere in the school. Moreover, some of the teachers believed that, although confidentiality is important, teachers should be aware of the important public events in students’ lives because they spend most of their time with them.
Collaboration and teamwork was also another common theme among the teachers’ and counselors’ responses. In fact, a majority of the interviewed teachers as well as all the counselors believed there should be more collaboration and teamwork among the teachers, counselors, and special needs teacher. One way of achieving this is through increased school meetings. However, most teachers complained about how they were the ones who ask the counselors to follow up on the students and to meet with them. On the other hand, a counselor stated that whenever teachers are invited to attend meetings, they complain about not having time.

All counselors and all teachers agreed that general education teachers need to gain more knowledge about special needs because some of them have no information about those students. Both teachers and counselors suggested that workshops and training should be done in the field for teachers to become more at ease while teaching students with special needs in their classrooms. In fact, most teachers and one of the counselors criticized that the workshops that are being done are mostly theoretical. They stated that they need practical workshops where they can learn and see the steps that can be done, instead of listening to them verbally.

Most teachers as well as the counselors complained about not having been informed or asked to take courses about special needs in university. They believe that they should have known about these courses because all teachers, even if they are regular teachers, should learn about students with special needs.
CHAPTER V  
DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, the major findings of this study will be discussed in light of previous research. In addition, the limitations, recommendations for further research and implications for practice are provided.

**Discussion of the Findings**

In this study, teachers stated various concerns regarding the counselor’s role in working with students with special needs, while counselors expressed their concerns towards their role as well. A number of major themes were derived from the findings of the interviews, and these themes were found across all three schools. Some themes were unique to each of the general education teachers and the counselors while several other themes were common among teachers and counselors.

First and foremost, the findings of this study clearly show that none of the teachers and counselors were aware of whether or not there is a policy about inclusion in their schools. None of the participants even brought up the word policy on their own. For instance, one of the counselors stated that they will be creating one soon, while another counselor stated that they have a written policy but she is not sure if it stated anything about inclusion. Nonetheless, it was found that all three participating schools do not have an inclusion policy. According to Reiter et al. (2005) inclusion policies are important for helping students with special needs of mild cases be transferred to regular schools and classrooms. In addition, although Law 220 in Lebanon promotes inclusion, most children with special needs are still placed in specialized institutions (Wehbi, 2006). Hence, each
school should have its own inclusion policy where workers involved with students with special needs at each school should take part of the policy-making process which will diminish conflicts between co-workers (Reiter et al., 2005). Inclusion policy in a school is affected by the counselors’ behaviors and attitudes (Reiter et al., 2005), as well as the amount of knowledge and skills that teachers have (Winter, 2006).

Another major finding of this study was that both teachers and counselors had a very vague idea about what the role of the other party was with regard to dealing with students with special needs. A major factor contributing to this may be the fact that teachers and counselors were unaware of each others’ job descriptions. In fact, several previous studies have also found that teachers do not know what the role of the school counselor is (e.g., Clark & Amatea, 2004; Remley & Albright as cited in Reiner et al., 2009).

The teachers’ knowledge of what a school counselor’s role is mainly based on what they observe the counselor doing. For instance, the teachers of this study admitted that they know the different steps taken by the counselor before pull-out sessions. However, most of them claimed that they were unaware of what really took place between the student and the counselor after pull-out, i.e. during counseling sessions, as well as the different strategies used by the counselor. Counselors do not usually inform teachers what they are doing as part of their job. This is considered part of consultation, and in fact the findings of some studies stated the need for the counselor to work more closely with teachers to help them work with students with special needs in their classrooms (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Hamzeh, 2008). However, the counselors believe that they do in fact inform teachers of
what strategies to use in their classrooms. They further mentioned that teachers should play a bigger role in helping students with special needs which is in line with the results of previous studies (e.g., Beesley, 2004; Greene & Valesky, 1998). For instance, they should work on their own to become familiar with the strategies to use and they should be more proactive in following up with the counselor and asking for help.

The tasks that the school counselor performs, as indicated from counselors’ responses, were more or less similar to those mentioned by the teachers. This was similar to the findings of Hamzeh’s study (2008). It was shown that the counselor’s job is mainly focused on individual counseling. However, the teachers were not satisfied with all the counselor’s counseling services at the school since they believed that the counselor should be spending more time observing students everywhere in the school, particularly in the classroom. This finding is consistent with those of previous studies in which teachers expressed the need for counseling services to improve (Remley & Albright, 1998 as cited in Reiner et al., 2009). Also, teachers claim that counselors should focus more on preventive measure rather than corrective ones, such as behavioral charts and individual counseling, in order to avoid problems and for time efficiency. Furthermore, some teachers criticized counselors about not having enough knowledge about how to deal with students with special needs. Moreover, many teachers complained that the counselor should deliver the character education lessons rather than the teacher. They believe that they can give such lessons as group counseling, and since s/he is more familiar with the strategies, s/he may have a more influential role on students. This will also provide the counselor with more opportunities to interact with the students.
Some of the teachers complained about the fact that the counselor spends most of her time in the office while she should be moving around the school observing students in different settings, as they mentioned. On the other hand, two of the counselors believe that their work should be mostly limited to the office for confidentiality reasons. This theme was also a major one in a study conducted by Amatea and Clark (2004) on teachers’ perceptions and expectations of the counselor’s work. The researchers found that the counselor was expected to be visible in school to students and teachers and that the counselor should not be isolated (Clark & Amatea, 2004; Skutley, 2006).

Most teachers stated that the experiences they had with students with special needs helped them improve the efficiency of the tasks they perform with regards to those students (Milson, 2002). They mentioned that the more time they have spent with students with special needs, the more they know how to work with them, and feel less stressed towards those students.

In terms of suggestions for improvement, the teachers and counselors had similar points of view. Similar to previous studies (e.g., Beesley, 2004; Greene & Valesky 1998), counselors and teachers both agreed that teachers need to gain more knowledge and practice with students with special needs. In the Lebanese society, educators lack the knowledge required to work with students with special needs (Wehbi, 2006). Attending workshops and training was one suggestion that both counselors and teachers in this study provided. This has also been suggested in previous studies (e.g., Foote et al., 2010; Greene & Valesky, 1998; Leatherman, 2007; Wehbi, 2006). These workshops can provide teachers with background knowledge about students with special needs and equip them with the
skills and strategies to deal with them. In fact, teachers believe that they need to be shown how to use different strategies through modeling and practicing rather than the usual theoretical workshops. Counselors also agree that it is necessary for them to attend workshops, but they claim that they do not have the time.

Both teachers and counselors complained about the lack of resources for dealing with students with special needs. One of those resources is physical material in which students with special needs need concrete objects, manipulatives, and other supplies that help them learn the information in a way that suits their needs and cases (Foote et al., 2010; Leatherman, 2007; Wehbi, 2006). Another lacking resource mentioned by both teachers and counselors was time. General education teachers complain about not having time to follow up with the counselor about students with special needs because of the work load they already have. Moreover, teachers feel like they are always the ones putting the effort and working hard to be able to gain information about students with special needs in their classrooms from the counselors. On the other hand, counselors themselves believe that they have no time to meet with the teachers to inform them about students with special needs always, and that the teachers do not put effort to meet with the counselor to hear updates about the students. (Clark & Amatea, 2004)

Moreover, teachers stressed the importance of having more human resources by having more in-class support teachers who are well-equipped and trained to work with students with special needs. This is especially important since most of the teachers and counselors mentioned that the big classroom sizes in Lebanon are a major issue. In fact, the three participating schools have a small number of in-class support teachers which prevents
them from spending enough time with those students. Also, big classroom sizes prevent the
general education teacher from giving his/her full attention to students with special needs
as well as the other regular students in class (Foote et al., 2010). The teachers and
counselors also mentioned the importance of having more than one elementary school
counselor. In fact, the counselors in this study also stated the necessity of having more
school counselors in order to be able to work with all students with special needs and to
cater for students’ needs.

The theme that was stated mostly by teachers and counselors was that of
collaboration and teamwork and that one way of achieving this is through meetings.
According to the teachers and counselors of this study, students are the priority. Therefore,
regular education teachers, counselors and special needs teachers should all work together
to cater to the needs of students with special needs whether physically, emotionally,
academically or socially. In fact, it was obvious that the participants were in need of
working and collaborating together since, as evident from the earlier discussion, each one
has little knowledge of what the other was doing. In Clark and Amatea’s (2004) study the
most recurring theme between counselors and teachers was also that of collaboration.
Collaboration is necessary between counselors and teachers to promote better services for
students with special needs (Beesley, 2004) and to complement teachers’ and counselors’
roles (Amatea & Clark, 2004). Teachers must give input because they deal with students
on a daily basis (Erhard & Unmansky, 2005; Winter, 2010), and counselor involvement is
necessary because they provide a professional contribution to the program (Beesley, 2004;
Clark & Amatea, 2004; Schimmel, 2008).
Another major theme mentioned by most teachers and counselors in the study is university preparation. Teachers and counselors in this study blamed universities for not offering the courses about special education during their college years. All teachers majoring in education should have pre-requisite courses about special education before graduating in order to gain knowledge about students with special needs and how to deal with them (Martin et al., 1996; Winter, 2010). The bigger the number of special education courses taken in university, the more positive the attitude towards dealing with students with special needs (Greene & Valesky, 1998) and the more counselors become involved in the inclusion process (Erhard & Unmansky, 2005).

**Limitations**

This study is limited in numerous features. Since it is a descriptive study, the data gathered provides only teachers’ and counselors’ perspectives and expectations on the role that school counselor has and should have towards students with special needs. Therefore, the use of a self-reported questionnaire is a limitation. Moreover, a major limitation is the fact that the number of counselors is few compared to that of the teachers. This is due to the fact that most schools in Lebanon usually have one school counselor for each level at the school. Also, the participating schools were selected using purposive sampling. In fact, participating schools are all situated in Beirut and the Greater Beirut area which limits the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the number of schools in which the interviews were conducted is small in number which also limits the generalizability. On the other hand, the use of the stratified sampling helped in ensuring that a cross section of teachers across grade levels was interviewed.
Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could examine the roles of the counselors and that of the special education department towards students with special needs because teachers are mixing up between the roles of the counselors and the special education department. Moreover, further research could be expanded from this study to examine in-depth the roles of each of the school counselor, general education teacher, and special education teacher towards students with special needs in a school setting. There are almost no studies that examined teacher’s perceptions of the counselor’s role in Lebanon (Wehbi, 2006), and in general those conducted in other countries are limited (Reiner at al., 2009); hence, more studies should be conducted in order to know the reasons behind general education teachers’ satisfaction or lack of satisfaction with counseling services in schools. Finally, further research should be done on a larger sample in different areas all over Lebanon to have more generalizable results.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study provide many implications for practice. First, it is necessary for schools to have clear policies on inclusion (Reiter et al., 2005) because the placement of students with special needs should follow a plan that is set by teachers, counselors, and special needs department. On a broader level, the Ministry of Education in Lebanon should develop a unified policy regarding inclusion of students with special needs. Moreover, policies regarding the counselor’s role in general, towards students with special needs, in particular, should also be issued by the Ministry (Ayyash-Abdo et al., 2010; Wehbi, 2006). In addition, schools should have clear teacher and counselor job
descriptions in order to facilitate the role of each and so that each one knows what is expected of themselves and of the other party. The school administrators also have a very important role in providing additional resources for dealing with students with special needs. For instance, schools should be equipped with more educational materials catered for students with special needs and should have more in-class support teachers to assist the general education teachers (Foote et al., 2010; Leatherman, 2007; Reiner et al., 2009; Wehbi, 2006).

Counselors and teachers should be more equipped with the knowledge and skills for dealing with students with special needs. A good place to start would be counselors conducting workshops or lectures about the role of the counselor in school since teachers are unaware of the counselor’s role in general. Counselors can give workshops on to how to work with students with special needs and the on social-emotional aspects of such students. Counselors should also attend workshops about students with special needs since university programs do not provide enough courses about students with special needs (Arnold, 2010; Milsom, 2002). On the other hand, teachers should be trained to use different resources and strategies when dealing with students with special needs. Another way of becoming more skilled and qualified is to provide more in-depth special education courses at the level of the university for both teachers and counselors.

Finally, and most importantly, teachers and counselors should collaborate together more (Beesley, 2004; Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Clark & Amatea, 2004). It is very important for special education teachers, general education teachers and school counselors to meet at least once per week to follow-up on the progress of students with special needs.
These meetings also ensure that all the needs of the child are being addressed whether academically, behaviorally, socially, personally or emotionally. Although students’ confidentiality should be respected, teachers should be told about any general information they need to know that would help them in teaching students with special needs. Regular education teachers are part of the team that works for the sake of those students, so public knowledge should not be hidden from them.

**Conclusion**

This is a pilot study about teachers’ and school counselors’ perceptions and expectations regarding the counselor’s role in working with students with special needs in Lebanon. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that both teachers and counselors are unaware of what the counselors’ role is in dealing with students with special needs. This emphasizes the need for clear policies and laws, both at the level of the school and the level of the government, regarding inclusion and the counselors’ role in the latter. In addition, more collaboration should take place between the school counselor and the general education teacher. Regular education teachers and counselors should accept each other and work collaboratively in order to help students with special needs progress in life (Amatea & Clark, 2004).
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the tasks that general education teachers perform towards students with special needs?

2. What are, in your opinion, the tasks that general education teachers should have towards students with special needs?

3. What are the tasks that the counselor performs towards students with special needs?

4. What do you think the counselor’s job is with regards to students with special needs?

Possible Probing questions:

a. How do you think the school counselor should contribute to addressing those problems?

b. What particular types of skills and interventions does your school counselor have for helping you address these challenges?

c. What services does the school counselor(s) perform in your school (e.g., for students, teachers, administrators, parents)? Which should be given greatest priority in your opinion?