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Anne Ferguson Napier, JD

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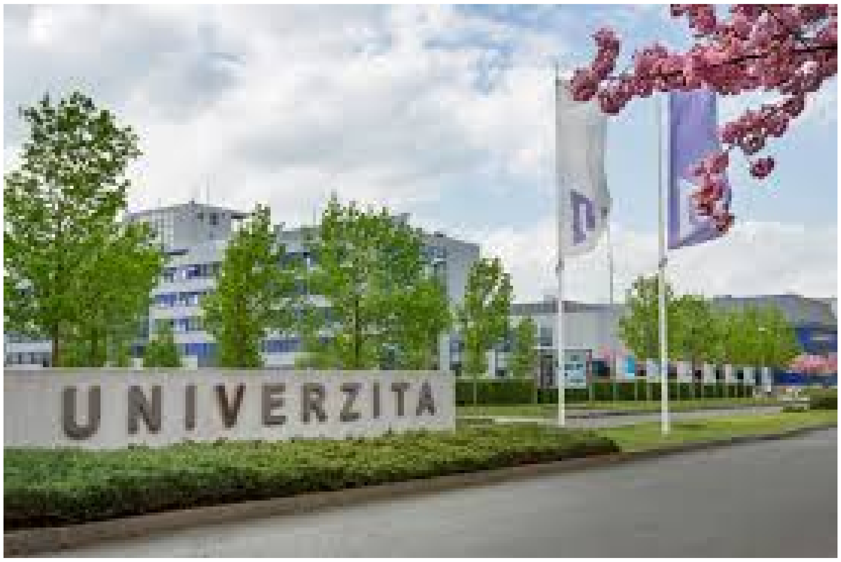

The mission of IASE is to:

- **Promote awareness and understanding of issues and developments related to the education and welfare of individuals with special needs throughout the world;**
- **Promote professional exchange between professionals in special education, family members and individuals in related disciplines internationally;**
- **Encourage and promote research to advance the field of special education and share that information through official publications;**
- **Promote continuing education in special education; and,**
- **Work collaboratively with other special education organizations for worldwide promotion of the interests of individuals with special needs.**

The vision of the International Association of Special Education (IASE) is to improve the quality of life and service delivery for all individuals with special needs.

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Blanka Gruberová

Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia

Blanka Gruberová email:gruberb@kpg.zcu.cz

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Blanka Gruberová

University of West Bohemia

Veleslavínova 42, 301 00 Plzeň

Background

The issue of motivation in speech therapy is currently a highly debated topic. One of the most common challenges that clinical speech therapists encounter in their professional practice is motivating their patients and keeping them motivated during their individual therapy plans. It is the establishment of a quality therapeutic relationship that is crucial.

This paper explores possibilities of motivation within the framework of color personality typology. The main aim is to gain insights into the types of motivation of parents of pediatric patients attending clinical speech therapy. The outcome is insight into the issue under investigation, understanding of its basis, and recommendations for theory and practice.

The Use of Personality Typology in Speech Therapy Intervention

Effective communication has positive impacts on all aspects of our lives. The relationship between the patient and the clinical speech therapist and their communication level enter into the dynamic; it must be remembered that each person is different and needs a different style of conveying information and influencing the patient's motivation.

Motivating the patient to change and maintaining that motivation is one of the most critical areas in speech therapy. Although every patient coming to the speech therapist’s office is initially motivated, motivation decreases throughout therapy. The longer speech therapy is provided, the more critical it is to work with motivation.

A color personality typology can be used to help the speech therapist to understand the patient/parent, their behavior, decision-making, and communication patterns, which can help the speech therapist to strengthen the overall interaction between him/her and the patient and ultimately achieve better results in the therapeutic process.

Personality Typologies

Some of the most significant difficulties from the type differences of people are manifested in working and professional life. The worst thing we can unwittingly do is to attribute a moral dimension and a negative dimension to this otherness. We think that ‘whoever is different is worse.’ However, only a person willing to reflect on himself and understand others has a chance to succeed in the long run. One way to learn about the nature of the personality of the people we interact with is to become familiar with personality typology (Čakrt, 2012).

Hartman's personality profile, sometimes known as “The People Code,” divides personalities into four primary colors: red, blue, white, and yellow. Each personality has its positives and negatives, strengths and weaknesses, and none is better than another (Hartman, 2007).

Motivation in Speech Therapy Intervention

The speech therapist is rightly regarded as an expert in interpersonal communication. His task is not only to explain the nature of the patient's difficulties comprehensibly but also to motivate all involved in the therapy sufficiently.

If a parent comes to a speech therapist with a child, he or she has a motive to do so. It should be remembered that the content of the speech therapist’s work is to help motivate and achieve a specific change in communication. Furthermore, the change is the final process of the work of motivation and not the beginning, which the parents and the child should already have come up with. It should be noted that developing the client’s motivation to cooperate and, therefore, change is often a lengthy and, unfortunately, unsuccessful job. Nevertheless, it forms an integral part of the speech therapist’s work.

Research Hypotheses and Investigations

Based on the theoretical analysis, the following research problems were identified:

1. How can color typology help the speech therapist know the patients' behavior and estimate their future reactions?
2. What motivation is appropriate for patients attending speech therapy?
3. What is the difference in motivation in patients of different colors according to the color personality typology?

For the exploratory investigation, we decided to apply three questionnaires: a short questionnaire observing the characteristics of the respondents, a questionnaire of color personality typology, and a self-administered questionnaire observing the motivation for home practice by the patient's legal representative.

The self-administered questionnaire tracking the motivation to practice by the patient's legal representative contains a total of eight pairs of items designed to describe the different colors in terms of closure (openness and closedness, blue-green and yellow-red) and orientation (people-oriented or task-oriented, blue-red and green-yellow).

Characteristics of the Research Group

The study group consisted of legal representatives of pediatric patients (4 to 7 years old) attending speech therapy at the clinical speech therapy clinic. Data collection took place in Plzeň and Plzeň-North District in June 2022. The sample consists of 62 respondents.

Discussion

Based on the survey results, the motivation for speech therapy corresponds to the color personality typology. Blue color responded to blue typology motivation and disagreed with green typology motivation. Green color similarly agreed with green characteristics and opposed blue typology. Yellow color also responded as anticipated, aligning with yellow typology and opposite to red typology. Only reds responded with the opposite answers to those typical of their color. Openness and task orientation are typical for the reds, but when asked to assess their child's motivation, they acted closed and people-oriented. This may be due to inappropriate wording of the questions in the questionnaire or to anticipation, i.e., reds suspect which sentences characterize them but outwardly know that this is not how they should behave towards other people (and especially their children). Other color types responded according to their color personality typology.

Recommendations to the Public, Parents, and Professionals

Awareness-raising activities aimed at the general public, but especially at therapists in the helping professions through spoken word and printed word methods, are considered necessary.

The active participation of various professionals in addressing motivation in speech therapy is essential. Speech therapy is a multidisciplinary field. We read about color typology in many publications, but the publications we have drawn on still need to be used in clinical speech therapy. By linking two seemingly unrelated fields, many interesting insights can be gained.

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Biographical Information

Blanka Gruberová

Dr. Gruberová works with the attestation exams in Organisation and Health Care Management and Clinical Speech Therapy. She holds a PhD in Special Education at Charles University in Prague and at J. A. Comenius University in Prague, a master’s degree in Speech Therapy at Palacký University in Olomouc, and a bachelor’s degree in Addictionology at Charles University in Prague.

2. AN EVOLUTION OF PREPARING PRESERVICE TEACHERS TO TEACH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ONLINE

Samantha Mrstik[1] and Rebecca Cooper[2]

[1]University of West Georgia

[2]School of Education, Georgia Gwinnett College

Samantha Mrstik email: smrstik@westga.edu

Rebecca Cooper email: rcooper5@ggc.edu

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Samantha Mrstik

University of West Georgia, College of Education

1601 Maple St.

Carrollton GA, 30118, USA

Background

Prior to COVID-19, in 2016 researchers at Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC) in the United States began instructing preservice teachers on how to teach online. Due to COVID-19, the Technology Integration Project has become of major importance to preservice teachers making them, not only novice teachers upon graduation, but technology leaders at their schools.

Because preservice teachers learn to construct an online course and teach online, the special education program at GGC has been able to infuse assistive technology and inclusive, online instruction for students with disabilities thereby preparing special education preservice teachers to provide more services for students with disabilities in an online environment.

Conceptual Framework

Teaching online has become a normalized part of the American education system. No longer is learning online just for inclement weather days or a reward for good behavior in class. In 2016, researchers at Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC) collected data by surveying graduating seniors and found that preservice teachers graduating from the Teacher Education Programs were not able to design and implement an online course in the K-12 environment. Professor Rebecca Cooper designed the Technology Integration Project based on the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), and it was implemented in all Teacher Education Programs over the course of a semester. Professor Cooper tied each piece of the project to either the Educator ISTE standards and/or the Student ISTE standards making sure that all standards were covered over the course of the project. In this project, preservice teachers were given a course shell in a learning management system (LMS). The preservice teachers were to design the course including a quiz, discussion post, and several modules, along with appropriate video and website links, assignments, rubrics, and grade level content. After a few years of full implementation, data on preservice teachers was gathered prior to graduation. The preservice teachers were surveyed on their experience with online teaching over their 2 years in their education program and the results are reported in the study below.

Results

Cooper et al. (2019) surveyed preservice teachers and found that technological pedagogical content nowledge (TPACK) (Mishra & Kohler, 2006) was developed through participation in and completion of the Technology Integration Project. TPACK is a term that describes the integration of technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK), technological content knowledge (TCK), and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) that was coined by Mishra and Koehler (2006). Joo et al. (2018) stated teachers must be experts in infusing technology with content knowledge and technology.

More recently, Cooper et al. (in press) surveyed novice teachers in their first year of teaching, and found, as a result of the Technology Integration Project, they were becoming teacher leaders in the area of technology in their schools. Researchers followed a group of these novice teachers through their first years of teaching. The novice teachers confirmed they were able to help other teachers learn to develop an online course and teach online during the pandemic.

Initially, the Technology Integration Project was embedded into coursework in a few courses spanning the teacher education programs in special, elementary, and secondary education. However, researchers found that many instructors had difficulty teaching the subject matter. Therefore, the Digital Age Seminar was created to instruct preservice teachers in using technology tools to enhance their instruction, creating an online course, and writing a lesson plan for their online course. This course only employs instructors well-versed in online teaching and learning as well as the ISTE standards for students and educators.

The next iteration of the Digital Age Seminar was developed by a GGC researcher whose focus is Special Education. They developed a Technology for Special Education Course, which includes all the Digital Age Seminar objectives and coursework, but focuses on needs of students with mild disabilities in the online classroom. In addition, this course includes learning about assistive technology and high leverage practice (HLP) 19 (Israel, 2019, p. 265).

Preservice teachers in Technology for Special Education are all in clinical, special education placements during the duration of this course. Some special education, preservice teachers are working as paraprofessionals in special education classrooms, and some preservice teachers are placed in a traditional, special education placement provided by the Office of Clinical Education. This clinical placement allows for preservice teachers in the special education program to complete their coursework for the student's population in their classrooms. Preservice teachers must use appropriate research-based practices, such as implementing universal design for learning (UDL) and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), for their students, and they must be able to explain why the research-based practice was selected. In addition, the preservice teachers must include research-based practices for teaching online. Like in the Digital Age, students in Technology for Special Education must write a lesson plan for an online class with a focus on accommodations for students with disabilities. They must create an online class for the student population in their classroom, learn about assistive technology at their school, and select appropriate technology tools for their students.

This is the pilot year for the Technology for Special Education Course. At this time, there is no data that has been collected on students' perceptions of the course.

Conclusion

We will continue to develop the Technology for Special Education and Digital Age Seminar courses as preservice teacher survey data is obtained each year. Both courses will continue to evolve as data is collected. Furthermore, we are exploring opportunities for embedding Artificial Intelligence (AI) into these technology classes. We realize that technology is changing daily, thus, there is a need to be current in technology practice to impart that knowledge to preservice teachers and their future students.

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Biographical Information

Samantha Mrstik

Samantha Mrstik, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Special Education Department in the College of Education at the University of West Georgia. Dr. Mrstik teaches preservice, special education teachers. She has developed and taught online courses for over 7 years. Her research interests are educational technology and international special education.

Rebecca Cooper

Rebecca Cooper, PhD, a Professor in the School of Education at Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville, Georgia, USA, has developed and taught online courses for over 15 years. Her areas of interest include assessment, K-12 students' attitude toward science, and the integration of technology tools in K-12 learning environments.

3. DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION THROUGH MULTIPLE PATHWAYS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Amanda Wood[1], Jody Wood[2], and Nikki Murdick[2]

[1]Wentzville School

[2]Saint Louis University

Amanda Wood email: hollywoodteach@gmail.com

Jody Wood email: jowood23@gmail.com

Nikki Murdick email: nmurdick@gmail.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Jody Wood and Amanda Wood

11200 Raymond Dr.

Wright City, MO, USA 63390

Nikki Murdick

2130 S. Compton Ave.

St. Louis, MO, USA 63104

Background

Today's teachers face classrooms of students that are very diverse—culturally, linguistically, economically, and with vastly different learning abilities. Although students are usually grouped by age, their abilities, especially in inclusive classrooms, are extremely diverse. An evidence-based practice being used more often in this type of classroom is differentiated instruction (DI) (Gartin et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2014, 2017). DI strategies have been cited as a way for teachers to effectively address the needs of all children in a mixed ability classroom (Gartin et al., 2016).

Differentiated Instruction

DI instruction has many different definitions, but the central basis is that it is a model of teaching that requires teachers to be flexible in their instruction. This means adjusting the curriculum to fit the needs of the learners, instead of the students being expected to modify themselves for the curriculum. According to Tomlinson (2017), DI is not a set of teaching methods but a teaching philosophy. It is based on the idea that in order to address student differences, teachers need to adapt their own instruction. In other words, the content and presentation of the material is modified to meet the students' various readiness needs, whether they be physical, intellectual, or emotional.

When teachers use the DI model to prepare their instructional and classroom environment, they address four different areas before teaching can begin. According to Roberts and Inman, (2023), DI is actually a "roadmap" for teachers to differentiate their teaching. The first area is the content (input) or what the students are to learn. At this stage the teacher should ask, "What do I want my students to know, understand, and be able to do?" Thus, the teacher needs to consider the specific information they want the students to learn and the ways in which they will gain access to what they are to learn. So, two questions for the teacher to consider at this time are:

1. Why is it important to teach the students this lesson?
2. What are the basic elements, ideas, or skills that all students should know?

For example, in math, the concept might be estimation (learning how to estimate), that is, finding a value that is close enough to the correct answer. Or in English with the study of a novel, any one concept might be the character, plot, climax, setting, atmosphere, conflict, or theme.

The second area for the teacher to consider is the process (sense making) or how the students are to learn the content. At this time the teacher should ask, "What will I do instructionally to get my students to learn this material?" During the consideration of this area, the teacher must think about how to get students to "own" the material. The teacher should consider the following four questions:

1. How is the concept going to be presented to the students?
2. Is it necessary that all the material be presented, or could the students be given an activity that would lead them to discover the concept?
3. Is the concept or skill to be presented relevant to students' needs, interests, and experiences?
4. How can new learning be related to previous learning?

In addition, teachers should consider variations in other factors such as style of teaching, student profiles (characteristics), questioning techniques, and level of participation. This is also the time when the teacher decides what type and how much practice the student may need to "make sense" of and synthesize the content they are learning. To do this the teacher should ask the following questions:

1. How will the students practice the concept or skill introduced?
2. Will practice be individual or will there be opportunities for paired or small group learning?
3. Will different types of seating need to be arranged, or schedules to accommodate the methods of practice chosen?
4. What related activities will be available for students who have already learned the concept or will learn it quickly?

The third area for consideration by the teacher is the product (output) or how the students are going to show that they have learned the content. As a teacher this would be when the decision is made on the type of summative assessment that would be most appropriate for the content the students are to learn, the method(s) in which the materials have been taught, and therefore, what form of output would be most likely to show the students have learned the information. Assessment of student learning can include the typical paper "test" format, model construction, poster or collage, oral presentation, etc. In addition, assessments can be designed as individual student assessments, paired student assessments or even small group assessments. The assessment decision should focus on the skill levels of the student(s) and the content that was to be learned.

The fourth or overarching area for consideration by the teacher is that of the environment or how can the teacher prepare the classroom so that it is conducive to student learning. Once the teacher has reflected and addressed the first three areas of content, process, and product, then the concept of the environment must be reviewed. In other words, how would the teacher arrange the physical classroom so that it is conducive for learning the material that has been chosen and for preparing the resulting product and summative assessment plan. In addition to the physical classroom environment, the teacher must also think about the grouping of students within the classroom and the emotional issues that any students may have with the content to be learned.

Teachers who implement the philosophy and methodology of differentiating instruction must use teacher reflection while reviewing whether the content, product, process, and learning environment are required to address the learning needs of all students including those with varying levels and types of disability. Teachers who plan to use DI should be prepared to change their teaching methodology and should incorporate what Steele (2009) said into their personal beliefs and philosophy, “Inspired teachers are passionate about their work. They are firmly convinced that they are responsible for student learning and they consistently bend their efforts toward doing a better job every day” (p. 21).

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Biographical Information

Amanda Wood

Amanda Wood's, PhD, educational background includes a bachelor's degree in Education, a master's degree in Counseling, a master's degree in Administration, and a PhD in Administration. She was a teacher prior to moving into a school psychologist position at Liberty High School, Wentzville School District, where she is currently employed.

Jody Wood

Jody Wood's, EdD, educational background includes a bachelor's degree in Education, a master's degree in Reading, a Specialist Degree in Administration, and an educational doctorate. She worked in public education for 31 years in teaching and administration prior to joining higher education at Saint Louis University.

Nikki Murdick

Nikki Murdick, PhD, holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, a master of education degree in Special Education Curriculum Development, and a PhD in Education of Exceptional Children. She was designated a fellow in the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and a Professionally Recognized Special Educator in the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). She is retired from teaching and administration at Saint Louis University.

4. ENHANCING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (DI), COOPERATIVE LEARNING, AND SHELTERED INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION PROTOCOL (SIOP)

Jody Wood[1], Nikki Murdick,[1] and Amanda Wood[2]

[1]Saint Louis University

[2]Wentzville School District

Jody Wood email: jowood23@gmail.com

Nikki Murdick email: nmurdick@gmail.com

Amanda Wood email: hollywoodteach@gmail.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Jody Wood and Amanda Wood

11200 Raymond Dr.,

Wright City, MO, USA 63390

Nikki Murdick

2130 S. Compton Ave.

St. Louis, MO, USA 63104

Background

Teachers who use differentiated instruction (DI), cooperative learning (Coop), and sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) provide both support and inclusion of persons with disabilities as well as prepare students to be able to collaborate, cooperate, and find success across their lifespan. DI, Coop, and SIOP are educational approaches designed to meet the diverse needs of students. Each strategy will be defined and a brief overview provided of how they can contribute to student success and classroom activities associated with each approach.

Differentiated Instruction (DI)

DI is an instructional approach that recognizes and accommodates the diverse learning needs of students within the same classroom. It involves tailoring teaching methods, content, and assessment to match the individual abilities, interests, and readiness of students (Pearl, 2006). A DI approach acknowledges the variability in student's learning styles, preferences, and abilities and seeks to address these differences by providing a variety of instructional strategies and materials. It can help students be more successful because:

1. DI ensures that students with different learning preferences, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, are engaged through various instructional methods.
2. DI addresses varied readiness levels because it allows teachers to provide advanced content for students who are ready for more challenges and additional support for those who may need extra assistance.
3. DI fosters a positive learning environment by acknowledging and valuing each student's unique strengths; DI contributes to a positive and inclusive classroom culture (Corley, 2005).

A DI activity within the classroom may include learning stations which are set up with activities that cater to various learning styles. Another example is the use of tiered assignments which provides different levels of assignments based on students' readiness. Another example is the use of flexible grouping where students rotate through various groups based on their needs and abilities.

Cooperative Learning (Coop)

Coop is an instructional strategy where students work together in small groups to achieve common goals. It promotes collaboration, communication, and mutual support among students (Felder & Brent, 2007). This approach is used to achieve shared goals, and foster positive interdependence, individual accountability, and group processing. It can help students be more successful as follows:

1. Coop enhances social skills. As students learn to work collaboratively, they communicate more effectively, and they develop essential social skills.
2. Coop promotes critical thinking because Coop often requires students to discuss and analyze information, leading to deeper understanding.
3. Coop builds a sense of community because collaborative tasks create a sense of belonging and community within the classroom (Gillies, 2016).

Cooperative learning activities within the classroom may include activities such as jigsaw where different portions of content are assigned to each group member thus promoting information sharing. Think-pair-share is a common strategy where students think individually, pair with a partner to discuss, and then share their thoughts with the class. A third strategy could be group projects where different tasks are assigned to each group member, and it requires collaboration to complete the project, thus building the will and skill to work together as well as interdependence.

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

SIOP is an instructional framework designed to support English language learners (ELLs) by incorporating language and content objectives, as well as scaffolding techniques. It is an instructional model aimed at making academic content comprehensible for ELLs but works very well with students with disabilities to extend understanding through integrating language development and content instruction (Daniel & Conlin, 2015). It helps students be more successful because:

1. SIOP ensures that language development is embedded in content instruction, facilitating language acquisition,
2. SIOP provides support through scaffolding techniques to help students comprehend complex concepts.
3. SIOP emphasizes the importance of understanding and incorporating students' cultural background in instruction.

An example of SIOP in the classroom includes the use of visual aids such as charts and graphic organizers to support understanding. Another example is explanations of how explicit vocabulary instruction is related to content in lessons. A third example is peer support that encourages collaboration and peer assistance among students (de Jager, 2019).

DI, Coop, and SIOP are powerful tools that contribute to student success by addressing diverse learning needs, promoting collaboration, and supporting students with language deficits. By integrating these strategies into the classroom through specific activities, a teacher can create an inclusive and engaging learning environment. Teachers play a crucial role in adapting and implementing these approaches to maximize their impact on student success in the classroom.

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Biographical Information

Jody Wood

Jody Wood’s, EdD, educational background includes a bachelor's degree in Education, a master's degree in Reading, a Specialist Degree in Administration, and an educational doctorate. She worked in public education for 31 years in teaching and administration prior to joining higher education at Saint Louis University.

Nikki Murdick

Nikki Murdick, PhD, holds a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education, a Master of Education degree in Special Education Curriculum Development, and a PhD in Education of Exceptional Children. She was designated a fellow in the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and a Professionally Recognized Special Educator in the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). She is retired from teaching and administration at Saint Louis University.

Amanda Wood

Amanda Wood’s, PhD, educational background includes a bachelor's degree in Education, a master's degree in Counseling, a master's degree in Administration, and a PhD in Administration. She was a teacher prior to moving into a school psychologist position at Liberty High School, Wentzville School District, where she is currently employed.

5. TRANSITION PLANNING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Amanda Wood[1], Jody Wood[2], and Nikki Murdick[2]

[1]Wentzville School District

[2]Saint Louis University

Amanda Wood email: hollywoodteach@gmail.com

Jody Wood email: jowood23@gmail.com

Nikki Murdick email: nmurdick@gmail.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Jody Wood and Amanda Wood

11200 Raymond Dr.,

Wright City, MO, USA 63390

Nikki Murdick

2130 S. Compton Ave.

St. Louis, MO, USA 63104

Background

Transition from school to postsecondary, employment, and community living is challenging for many students, but is particularly true for students who experience disability. All students, regardless of disability, need access to a high-quality education, exposure to the world of work including the chance to participate in work experiences, opportunities to develop leadership and advocacy skills, connections to caring adults, safe places where they can interact with their peers, and access to support services and accommodations that can allow them to transition from youth to adulthood (Office of Disability Employment Policy, n.d.a). Transition planning is a critical aspect of empowering individuals with disabilities to navigate the challenges of adulthood successfully. Transition planning is vital to equip students with disabilities with the skills, knowledge, and support systems necessary for a smooth shift from the structured school environment to the demands of adult life (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015).

Ways Parents Can Support Transition

Parents can support transition into a successful adulthood by having open communication which is critical, regularly discussing their student's goals including interests, potential career paths, and concerns. Secondly, parents need to assist in skill development at home by encouraging the development of daily living skills,involving their students in grocery shopping, cooking, and managing personal hygiene routines. Third, networking opportunities are essential. Parents should connect with local support groups or organizations by attending community events that focus on inclusivity, where both parents and students can network with professionals.

How Teachers Can Support Transitions

Teachers with parents can support the transition of their students into adult living. One major way is for teachers to prepare individualized education plans (IEPs) that focus on the skills needed for a successful adult life**.** Teachers can, and must, tailor IEPs to focus on transition goals. One way is to set a goal to gain practical work experience through internships or volunteering while still in school. Secondly, teachers should collaborate with vocational service professionals**.** By collaborating with vocational professionals, teachers can identify and integrate internships into the curriculum and coordinate with local businesses to offer students real-world work experiences related to their career interests. Finally, teachers can teach a life skills curriculum and incorporate practical skills into the general secondary curriculum they teach. For example, they can create lessons on budgeting, time management, and effective communication.

How Professionals Can Support Students with Disabilities

Professionals within the educational and vocational fields can cooperate with professionals and leaders in the community to provide a seamless transition plan for students with disabilities. They can develop mentorship programs with professionals throughout their community such as connecting students with disabilities to mentors in their chosen field. Teachers can identify needed workplace accommodations that will be required for their students to have a successful transition and leaders and other professionals can advocate for workplace accommodations and ensure the workplace is accessible and supportive, with accommodations like assistive technology or flexible work hours. And finally, all professionals and family can collaborate to provide continued support services. Leaders and professionals should collaborate with post-secondary institutions and employers and work with colleges and employers to provide ongoing support services such as counseling or accessibility accommodations.

Skills Students Need for Successful Transition

For students to be successful in their transition from school to adult life, there are 10 skills that they need to be taught and must acquire.

The teacher should teach:

1. Self-advocacy by encouraging students to actively participate in IEP meetings, expressing their preferences and needs for accommodations.
2. Problem-solving by assigning students real-life scenarios to solve, such as planning a trip with a set budget or addressing a personal challenge.
3. Time management by providing exercises where students schedule study time, extracurricular activities, and personal responsibilities in a weekly planner.
4. Communication skills by having students engage in role-playing activities that simulate workplace or social interactions, emphasizing effective communication.
5. Financial literacy by having students create a project where they manage imaginary finances for a month, e.g. expenses, savings, and unexpected costs.
6. Adaptability by engaging students in discussion of case-studies and/or scenarios requiring adaptation to changes, reflecting real-world unpredictability.
7. Networking by facilitating networking events within the school or community.
8. Critical thinking by presenting students with real-world problems, encouraging them to analyze, evaluate, and propose solutions.
9. Independence by assigning tasks that promote independent decision-making: planning a personal schedule or navigating public transportation.
10. Job-specific skills by providing students with hands-on experiences or simulations related to their chosen career path: virtual labs, guest speakers from the industry, or workshops (School Based Preparatory Experiences, n.d.).

In summary, youth with disabilities need to use their individual transition plans to guide their personal instruction and learn the required strategies to continue that process post-school.

They also need to learn how to access specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school so they can use them successfully post schooling. This requires that they develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations, and they need to be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff (Office of Disability Employment Policy, n.d.b).

If parents, teachers, professionals, and community leaders work together, the student's transition becomes much easier. Successful transition planning for individuals with disabilities necessitates collaboration and emphasizes specific skills. With transition planning, we can empower students with disabilities to thrive in adulthood and contribute meaningfully to society.

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Biographical Information

Amanda Wood

Amanda Wood’s, PhD, educational background includes a bachelor’s degree in Education, a master's degree in Counseling, a master's degree in Administration, and a PhD in Administration. She was a teacher prior to moving into a school psychologist position at Liberty High School, Wentzville School District, where she is currently employed.

Jody Wood

Jody Wood’s, EdD, educational background includes a bachelor’s degree in Education, a master's degree in Reading, a Specialist Degree in Administration, and an educational doctorate. She worked in public education for 31 years in teaching and administration prior to joining higher education at Saint Louis University.

Nikki Murdick

Nikki Murdick, PhD, holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, a master of education degree in Special Education Curriculum Development, and a PhD in Education of Exceptional Children. She was designated a fellow in the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and a Professionally Recognized Special Educator in the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). She is retired from teaching and administration at Saint Louis University.

6. MTSS AND PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAM: ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISPROPORTIONALITY

Jody Wood[1], Amanda Wood[2], and Nikki Murdick[1]

[1]Saint Louis University

[2]Wentzville School District

Jody Wood email: jowood23@gmail.com

Amanda Wood email: hollywoodteach@gmail.com

Nikki Murdick email: nmurdick@gmail.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Jody Wood and Amanda Wood

11200 Raymond Dr.

Wright City, MO, USA 63390

Nikki Murdick

2130 S. Compton Ave.

St. Louis, MO, USA 63104

Background

One long standing issue in the field of disability is the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. However, by utilizing problem-solving teams disproportionality can be minimized. “Among the most longstanding and intransigent issues in the field [of special education], the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs has its roots in a long history of educational segregation and discrimination” (Skiba et al., 2008, p. 264).

To assist with elimination of disproportionality, schools should move to multi-systems of support (MTSS) to engage a problem-solving team prior to referral to special education. “Whole-school application of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) [and problem-solving team] offers a reframing of the problem with potential for social and academic gains for all students, including those with extensive needs for extraordinary supports and services” (Sailor et al., 2018, p. 3). Initially MTSS was conceived as a school-wide framework for all students. It emerged from the response to intervention (RtI) problem-solving model designed to provide interventions to students at risk for failure and to provide pre-referral information for students who might later need special education support. It has evolved into a framework to assist with decision making in terms of identifying students with disabilities. MTSS usually has three tiers of support in a triangular pattern with the largest being Tier 1, containing the normal instruction or core curriculum provided to all children including a comprehensive evidence-based curriculum supported by effective teaching and learning practices including differentiated instruction and mastery learning.

Thus, decision making in terms of eligibility for special education services should move beyond MTSS Tier 1 to problem-solving teams to utilize a more equal and accurate means to determine eligibility. This method allows for a longer period of decision making with a more thorough understanding of each student's abilities.

> MTSS is a prime opportunity for schools to intentionally create a system that eliminates barriers and produces positive outcomes. MTSS has the potential to address these long-standing issues and build a new path forward given the flexibility inherent in the framework. MTSS [along with the use of a problem-solving team] incorporates foundational practices for addressing equity in education through data-based decision making and evidence-based tiered supports to address and prevent academic and behavioral challenges (Jackson, 2021, p. 1).

Many researchers have recommended MTSS to address the issue of disproportionality and inequity (Cartledge et al., 2016; Castro-Villareal et al., 2016; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Losen & Orfeid, 2002).

Once MTSS Tier 1 interventions have been exhausted, the teacher and/or grade level team makes the decision to move the student forward to the problem-solving team for a more in-depth consideration of next steps to support his/her learning process. A problem-solving team is a student services structure using resources and staff to increase student achievement by linking educational interventions with needed support services. These supports are coordinated and monitored by the team as it operates through the lens of equity and cultural competency. Problem-solving teams can prevent the need for special education assessment and strengthen district plans to address disproportionality.

The problem-solving team is multidisciplinary. It is essential in the process of referral for special education services. A problem-solving team utilizes a "strengths-based" perspective based on the resiliency model (See: http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets) and is an organized means for identifying students needing support, delivering services, and monitoring progress. The problem-solving team uses a “triage” method to prioritize student needs and focuses on early intervention using a “case management” approach.

When the team finds student concerns, the team leader contacts the counselor to start the process as the beginning step. The counselor shares a survey to collect initial information and then sets up meetings during teacher planning time to allow the support team to discuss their concerns in detail and to complete basic information. As the second step the counselor sets up an initial problem-solving team meeting with an interventionist or special education teacher in the area of concern. The third step is to create a plan and devise interventions to be written on the intervention planning form and develop a data collection plan. This plan is implemented for 6 weeks. If the plan is not working at the end of 3 weeks, the team must contact the counselor to meet again to develop a different plan. The fourth step is data analysis. Some of the information to be discussed include the 6 weeks of data collected including the baseline score, intervention form and results, and the score when the student was tested in the final week. If there is no consistent data collected, then the intervention is resumed, and a meeting is set for 6 weeks. The team will continue to move the student forward to Tier 3 if the plan is not providing the student with success. If data indicates a lack of response to the interventions, then the counselor will set up an individualized education plan meeting per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (IDEA, 2004), a U.S. law protecting individuals with disabilities or per Section 504 (a U.S. law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability and provides equitable access to education) (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973) or discuss parent counseling recommendations. The problem-solving team must follow state and federal guidelines. Following these steps through MTSS with the problem-solving team allows for a more specific and analytical way to determine a recommendation for special education evaluation. It further ensures more equitable outcomes and should limit disproportionality due to cultural differences.

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Biographical Information

Jody Wood

Jody Wood's, EdD, educational background includes a bachelor's degree in Education, a master's degree in Reading, a Specialist Degree in Administration, and an educational doctorate. She worked in public education for 31 years in teaching and administration prior to joining higher education at Saint Louis University.

Amanda Wood

Amanda Wood's, PhD, educational background includes a bachelor's degree in Education, a master's degree in Counseling, a master's degree in Administration, and a PhD in Administration. She was a teacher prior to moving into a school psychologist position at Liberty High School, Wentzville School District, where she is currently employed.

Nikki Murdick

Nikki Murdick, PhD, holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, a Master of Education degree in Special Education Curriculum Development, and a PhD in Education of Exceptional Children. She was designated a fellow in the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and a Professionally Recognized Special Educator in the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). She is retired from teaching and administration at Saint Louis University.

7. ACTIVATION OF ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

Hana Ryšlavá, Kateřina Brzáková Beksová, Lenka Nádvorníková, Alena Bjørke, Zdeňka Braumová, and Zuzana Palounková

Department of Social Work and Special Education, Technical University of Liberec (TUL)

Hana Ryšlavá email: hana.ryslava@tul.cz

Kateřina Brzáková Beksová email: katerina.brzakova.beksova@tul.cz

Lenka Nádvorníková email: lenka.nadvornikova@tul.cz

Alena Bjørke email: alena.bjorke@tul.cz

Zdeňka Braumová email: zdenka.braumova@tul.cz

Zuzana Palounková email: zuzana.palounkova@tul.cz

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Department of Social Work and Special Education, Faculty of Science, Humanities and Education, Technical University of Liberec

Studentská 1402/2

461 17 Liberec 1, Czechia

Background

The contribution represents an activation program organized in the form of regular meetings for adult people with intellectual impairment. Its purpose is to offer them the possibility of diverse social interaction and sustainable lifelong learning and education, which are aimed at increasing their quality of life. The program is implemented by workers and students of the Department of Social Work and Special Education, Faculty of Education, Technical University of Liberec (TUL). The uniqueness of the experimental project "Come to us for college" is based on a partnership of academic workers and their students, who work together to find suitable theories and to try to apply them practically in the learning process of adults with intellectual disability. This process takes place in the environment of the university.

Characteristics of the Target Group of the Activation Program

The target group of our educational project are people with significantly below-average levels of intellectual function and adaptive behavior, i.e., individuals with intellectual impairment or mental illness, in whom the intellectual disability manifests itself secondarily. Most individuals with intellectual impairment are able to handle basic self-service and domestic and practical activities. They are capable of a relatively independent life and some individuals have a job. However, they do require support due to difficulties in planning, acquiring and understanding complex language concepts, and a limited capacity for acquiring theoretical skills. According to Valenta et al. (2018), their limited prerequisites lead to an inability to meet developmental and socio-cultural standards leading to independence and responsibility (in communication, adaptation, housekeeping, working ability). The university program involves 23 people aged 17–65 years with mild, moderate to severe intellectual impairment, schizophrenia, and Asperger's syndrome. In addition, most people with these conditions have an intellectual impairment in combination with motor problems, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Down syndrome, impaired communication skills (e.g. balbuties), hearing and visual impairments, etc. The initial screening of potential trainees came from an evaluation of the level of autonomy in daily life and their functional experience (Lebčych, 2008, p. 22; Vágnerová & Klěgrová, 2008, p. 65), designated either by legal representatives or by key social workers, which is more in line with the American Association for Mental Retardation (AAMM) concept than involvement in a project based on an intelligence quotient (IQ) assessment.

Concept of the Educational Program

The concept of the educational program is primarily focused on the development of crystalline and emotional intelligence in people with intellectual impairment, so that they can better orient themselves, gain mental resilience, greater adaptability, internal motivation, perceive their surroundings, and function in relationships. We perceive an increase in the level of subjective quality of life also through the presence of higher needs and values. We believe that in education, the mechanism of imitation (personal role models) and satisfying the need for meaningfulness of one's own life are also important.

In the program we find out the focus and interests of our trainees, using different approaches and variable learning styles. Together we set goals, discuss meaningfulness and strive for non-violent communication.

Organization and Involvement of Students of Special Education

In spring 2024, the third cycle of the educational program took place, consisting of six to eight 2-hour meetings once every 14 days. For the first cycle, topics were proposed by lecturers from the ranks of academic staff. For the remaining time, two topics were determined by students of the program themselves. These topics included: emotions, nature, finance, security in the media world, addiction, self-care, first aid, mental well-being and communication skills, healthy lifestyle, partnerships and challenging life situations, reading and creative workshops, transportation, etc. Important emphasis is placed on practice and repetition, safe communication, active listening, and an equal tandem of student and lecturer. Among other things, we support the participants' autonomy with regard to fulfilling home preparation and excusing absence. Our program also offers the students of the course a possible escort from the ranks of students of special education during transportation to the program venue and back home.

Benefits

The satisfaction of education is fundamentally determined by the experience in school adaptation. Along with other socialization experiences from childhood and adolescence, school success has an undeniable influence on the quality of life of most people. The self-worth of many of our students is influenced by negative school experience. In childhood, they often experienced humiliation, mockery, and underestimation due to their disability, which some still interpret as their own incompetence, but also anxiety during learning. Enhanced competencies, their maintenance and the layering of new with interest acquired skills in our trainees awaken or renew a positive relationship with education. They further awaken or renew changes in connection with memory functions, with the development of motivation, including the setting of potential goals. Based on the partnership approach, appropriateness of topics and meaningfulness of educational content, there is a successful adaptation to a completely new environment, also the emergence of new (desirable) practices (e.g., in transport, relationships, preparation for teaching) and secondarily, an increase in mental and physical resilience. We consider the development of literacy, well-being, and the acquisition of new relationships as the main contribution on the part of the training.

Students of special education gain the possibility of contact with persons with intellectual impairment and deepen their experience in support of individuals with special needs. They have the opportunity to realize activities that they choose within a given topic, plan, and modify their content and intensity while taking into account the specifics of trainees. They receive immediate feedback from trainees in the form of their interest, retention of attention, and motivation for learning.

For lecturers, the benefit is not only the mutual triad of enrichment (lecturer, student, trainee), but above all the possibility of monitoring the authentic reactions and expressions of students and trainees of the course. For all participants, the individual lessons provide feedback, which is reflected in the following lessons and course cycles. However, the challenge for the future remains the sustainability of the project due to its format based on volunteering.

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Biographical Information

Hana Ryšlavá

Hana Ryšlavá, PhD, works as an assistant professor at the Department of Social Work and Special Education of the Technical University of Liberec (TUL). The main areas of interest are people with visual impairment and inclusive education. She also works in school counseling, focusing on children with visual impairments and their families.

Kateřina Brzáková Beksová

Kateřina Brzáková Beksová, has a PhD in Theology and Psychosocial Sciences, graduated from Husitská teologická fakulta, Univerzita Karlova (HTF UK) in Prague, Special Pedagogy studied at TUL, and psychotherapeutic training at Pražská vysoká škola psychosociálních studií (PVŠPS) in Prague. Since 2014 she is an assistant professor in the Fakulta přírodovědně-humanitní a pedagogická, TUL (FP TUL), works in counseling, and educates workers in social services. She publishes in geriatric care.

Lenka Nádvorníková

Lenka Nádvorníková, PhD, graduated from the rehabilitation study program at Zdravotně sociální fakulta, Jihočeské Univerzity (ZSF JU) in České Budějovice, and did her doctoral studies in social work at Pedagogická fakulta, Katolické Univerzity (PF KU) in Ružomberk. Since 2006 she has been working as an assistant professor at FP TUL. She publishes in the field of social policy with a focus on the disadvantaged position of persons with disabilities and seniors in society.

8. THE PROCESS OF LEGAL VIOLATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER

Li-Ju Chen[1] and Hsiang-Lin Chan[2]

[1]Chang Gung University, Taiwan

[2]Chang Gung Medical Foundation, Taiwan

Li-Ju Chen Email: lizzy@gap.cgu.edu.tw

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Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Li-Ju Chen

Graduate Institute of Early Intervention, Chang Gung University

Chang Gung University

259 Wenhua 1st Road, Kwei-shan

Tao-Yuan 33302, Taiwan

Background

Over the past decade, the researcher has served as a member of the appeal panel for special education students, handling a minimum of 30 cases involving gender equality complaints or school regulation violations. The available data indicates that more than 70% of these cases were linked to students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The research on the “Coping Program for Autism’s Cognitive Stereotype Behavior,” conducted by us over the past 4 years, revealed significant cognitive stereotypic behaviors in students with ASD. Furthermore, the implementation of the Recognize-Coping-Reconstructing (R-C-Re) program has proven effective in addressing their challenges in behavioral adaptation (Chen, 2022).

Jackson (2019) indicated that 10-30% of the population undergoing treatment for alcohol and drug issues exhibited characteristics associated with autism. Yen (2016) conducted a study involving 126 adolescents with ASD and found that various callous-unemotional (CU) traits were linked to different types of bullying experiences. Sutton et al. (2012) organized various studies, revealing that inappropriate behaviors among individuals with ASD included kissing strangers, intruding into the private space of infatuation targets, and engaging in masturbation in inappropriate situations or public places. Individuals with ASD often struggle with regulating emotions, managing sexual desires appropriately, facing challenges in social interactions, and dealing with other limitations. This can lead to inappropriate sexual behaviors and difficulties in maintaining sexual relationships (Capriola et al., 2017). We hypothesized a correlation among legal violation processes, the stereotypic cognition and characteristics of students with ASD.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to gain insights into the processes underlying the legal-violating behaviors of those with ASD. Understanding these processes can contribute to more effective educational interventions aimed at reducing inappropriate behaviors.

Methods

This research comprises two main components: a quantitative analysis and a qualitative analysis. A questionnaire, titled "Questionnaire of Young Students' Adaptation Behavior Process" was developed for this study. Following review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a survey was conducted with 113 participants, including school staff responsible for relevant cases of punishments or complaints, professionals in psychological counseling, and students with ASD or their families. The gathered data were analyzed using the statistical analysis software, SPSS, to examine patterns and processes of legal-violating acts. Additionally, the descriptions of 18 participants who were involved in illegal events were reviewed to gain insights into the process of violent behaviors, as identified through coding in the open-ended responses.

Results

The research found that:

1. Seventy-four percent of individuals with ASD were reported to have experienced mild or severe violence, while 17% had experienced severe violence.
2. Most violent behaviors occurred during an individual's junior high school years.
3. The subjects were involved in various forms of violence, with the top five most frequent being: violating school regulations, lying, verbal attacks, yelling and abusing, and physical attacks.
4. Significant causes of violence included: ineffective problem solving skills, poor emotional regulation, self-identity crisis, and interpersonal stress.
5. The reported reasons for engaging in violent behaviors were feeling uncontrollable,

excitement, influence from friends, self-protection, and excessive anger.

Suggestions

1. Individuals with ASDs struggle to discern right from wrong due to their stereotypical cognition. Addressing their thought processes and motivations is essential, and the design of intervention programs should focus on providing individualized guidance.
2. Emotional education and legal education are deemed essential programs for individuals with ASDs. These programs can contribute to enhancing emotional understanding and legal awareness among this population.
3. Inappropriate behavior often stems from experiences of frustration in social interactions and pressure. To address this, present resources that can help individuals with ASDs overcome frustration, thereby mitigating the likelihood of inappropriate behaviors.

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Biographical Information

Li-Ju Chen

Li-Ju Chen grew up in Taiwan and has been a teacher for more than 30 years. She is currently a Professor at Chang Gung University in Taiwan. She earned her master's degree in Psychology and her PhD in Special Education, both from universities in Taiwan.

Hsiang-Lin Chan

Hsiang-Lin Chan grew up in Taiwan and has been a corporate psychiatrist for many years. She is currently employed at Chang Gung Medical Foundation in Taiwan.

9. TEACHER MEDIATION AND INTERNET USE BY CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

Esther Chiner[1], Marcos Gómez-Puerta[1], Cristina Miralles-Cardona[1], and María Cristina Cardona-Moltó[2]

[1]University of Alicante, Spain

[2]Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota

Esther Chiner email: esther.chiner@ua.es

Marcos Gómez-Puerta email: marcos.gomez@ua.es

Cristina Miralles-Cardona email: cristina.miralles@ua.es

María Cristina Cardona-Moltó email: cristina.cardona@ua.es

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Universidad de Alicante

Edificio de Ciencias Sociales

Ctra. San Vicente del Raspeig s/n

03690 San Vicente del Raspeig, Spain

Background

Evidence shows teachers' perceptions and beliefs affect the educational attention offered to students with disabilities and there is a link between their perception of self-efficacy and the willingness to include students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. This is relevant since what is indicated in the social model of disability is that the barriers, prejudices, and difficulties in participation present in the environment establish the limiting nature of the disability. So, it is important to identify what beliefs exist in schools to be able to eradicate those that may hinder the development of the learning potential of students with disabilities (Morin et al., 2013).

Digital literacy and inclusion have been claimed as a right of people with disabilities and become another element in the fight against discrimination derived from the disability digital divide. Understanding this concept helps us understand it as a barrier to access or participation in digital devices and/or the internet. Internet access helps people with disabilities obtain certain benefits, e.g., socialization, self-determination, social participation, improvement of digital skills, or leisure (Chiner et al., 2017). However, internet use carries certain risks, especially for children and youngsters, classified into five categories linked to: inappropriate *content;* inappropriate *contacts* with strangers; behaviors (*conduct*) that the individual can carry out online; *contract* risks, due to advertising, commercial abuse, or personal information theft; and *consequences* of internet use, such as health issues (Smahel et al., 2020). The perception of risks can modulate the training and internet access promoted by teachers, since they may tend to overprotect students with special education needs (SEN), if they believe that they will not be able to manage the risks, by exercising high control over the content they access online. Teachers tend to consider the internet as an unsafe environment for students with intellectual disabilities (ID) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Chiner et al., 2021). Consistently, they tend to consider that the less secure the internet is, the more risks there are, and therefore they are less likely to favor their digital inclusion since they think that the risks prevail over the benefits (Chiner et al., 2021). Despite the existence of strategies of internet risks mediation (Livingstone et al., 2011), teachers have barely received training in this regard, and do not feel prepared to prevent or manage online risks for students with disabilities (Gómez-Puerta & Chiner, 2019). Regardless of the importance of these issues, the studies carried out in this field are still scarce, a deficiency for which this work tried to help compensate. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore and compare preservice teachers', or student teachers', perceptions of mediation strategies for the safe use of the internet by students with SEN in Chile and Spain.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey study was conducted to collect data from two cohorts of kindergarten student teachers from Spain and Chile. The convenience sample comprised 263 participants, of which 145 (55.1%) were enrolled in a Spanish university and 118 (44.9%) in two Chilean institutions. The majority were female (*n* = 244, 92.8%), and their average age was 20.31 years (*SD* = 3.86). Students were asked to range their digital competence from 0 to 10, as well as their confidence to manage online risks for students with ID and students with ASD, on a 5-point Likert scale. Likewise, participants were asked the extent to which they would use different mediation strategies to prevent and manage online risks with their students with and without SEN. The majority had not received specific training on internet safety for students with ID (99.6%) and students with ASD (99.2%). Their main source of information about this topic came from the media and family or friends. Participants' responses were analyzed using descriptive, correlational, and comparative techniques with the latest version of statistical analysis software IBM SPSS.

Results

Digital Competence and Online Risks Prevention and Management

Overall, students perceive that they have a medium-high level of digital competence ($M = 7.75$, $SD = 1.568$) with no statistically significant differences between Spanish and Chilean student teachers' perceptions. However, the perceived competence to prevent and manage online risks is very low for the five categories (content, contact, conduct, contract, and consequences), for both students with ID and with ASD, with scores below 3 on a 5-point Likert scale. Spanish participants feel more prepared to manage online risks related to inappropriate behavior carried out by students with ID and ASD (conduct) than Chilean student teachers ($p < .01$). A statistically significant relationship was found between the perceived digital competence and the perceived self-efficacy to manage online risks for students with ID ($r = .325$, $p < .001$) and with ASD ($r = .349$, $p < .001$). The more confident student teachers feel about their digital competence, the more prepared they think they are to prevent and manage online risks.

Teacher Mediation Strategies

Student teachers would frequently use all the mediation strategies proposed to prevent and manage online risks with all students (with and without SEN), especially those strategies related to teaching how to use the internet safely, and helping when students have difficulties finding information on the internet or experience problems online. On the other hand, the strategy of staying close to students when they use the internet would be used less. Statistically significant differences were found between Spanish and Chilean preservice teachers ($p < .01$). The latter used strategies such as talking to the students about what they do online and about safe and unsafe websites more often than the Spaniards.

Discussion and Conclusions

Results in this research are convergent with those already identified in previous studies (Chiner et al., 2021; Gómez-Puerta & Chiner, 2019). The results highlight the importance of identifying beliefs and attitudes specifically in each context, as well as the relevance of design training actions aimed at training student teachers about online risk mediation.

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Biographical Information

Esther Chiner

Esther Chiner is an Associate Professor of Educational Research and Assessment in the School of Education at the University of Alicante, Spain. She holds degrees in Psychology and Education and a PhD in Education. Her research interests are related to educational and digital inclusion of diverse students.

Marcos Gómez-Puerta

Marcos Gómez-Puerta is an Associate Professor of Instruction and School Organisation at the University of Alicante, Spain. He has a degree in Psychopedagogy and a PhD in Educational Research. His research interests are mainly related to the educational, digital, labour and social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Cristina Miralles-Cardona

Cristina Miralles-Cardona is a Juan-de-la-Cierva research fellow at the University of Alicante, Spain. She holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary-Gender Studies and a master's degree in Educational Psychology (University of Minnesota). Her previous professional activity was developed as a psychotherapist and teacher-on-special-assignment. Her research focuses on education for gender equity, mental health, and inclusion.

María-Cristina Cardona-Moltó

María-Cristina Cardona-Moltó is a former Professor at the University of Alicante, an international affiliate at the University of Helsinki (AGORA Center for the Study of Social Justice and Equality), and a visiting scholar at the Institute on Community Integration (University of Minnesota). She holds a master’s degree in Psychology and a PhD in Education.

10. THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN USING "OPPORTUNITIES TO RESPOND" AND "POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK" IN TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: A SINGLE CASE STUDY

Hoa T. Nguyen, Hoang Oanh T. Huynh, Thuy An T. Hoang, and Nga T. Hoang
Department of Special Education, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education
Hoa T. Nguyen email: hoanth@hcmue.edu.vn
Hoang Oanh T. Huynh email: oanhhth@hcmue.edu.vn
Thuy An T. Hoang email: anhtt@hcmue.edu.vn
Nga T. Hoang email: ngahth@hcmue.edu.vn

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Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:
Dr. Hoang Thi Nga
Ho Chi Minh City University of Education
C.106, 280 An Dương Vương Street, Ward 4, District 5,
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Conceptual Framework and Background

High-leverage practices (HLPs) are teaching methods that effective teachers could use in teaching a variety of students with different educational needs in a variety of subject areas and educational settings. Using HLPs have been shown to have a positive impact on students with disabilities' (SWD) learning, promoting the inclusion of SWDs, and enhancing their engagement and successful academic outcomes (Brownell et al., 2021). To intensify teaching instructions, opportunities to respond (OTR) and positive and constructive feedback (PCF) are used together with HLP 16, Explicit Instruction. The main goal of OTR is to encourage all students to respond more often for greater active participation than when called on one at a time. Increasing OTR creates a dynamic classroom environment that encourages students to participate and feel empowered to contribute, leading to improved learning outcomes and reduction of disruptive behavior (Haydon et al., 2012; Brownell et al., 2021). The impact of OTR depends on the degree teachers provide PCF to students. Teachers should provide clear, specific feedback about the student's attempt, not general praise, or provide constructive comments focused on what the student achieved to encourage perseverance and improvement (Brownell et al., 2021).

In Vietnam, challenges and difficulties are encountered involving the training and professional development of special education teachers. A report by the General Statistics Office (GSO) shows that nearly three-quarters (72.3%) of schools lack teachers with sufficient qualifications to teach students with disabilities, and only about one in seven teachers in primary and secondary schools (14.1%) have been trained to work with students with disabilities (GSO, 2018). It can be affirmed that the professional development (PD) of the special education teacher team is a crucial factor in providing special educators with the knowledge and skills to effectively support learners with diverse expectations. This article provides basic information on using OTR and PCF techniques in the context of specialized classrooms for children with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Vietnam. The findings, while preliminary due to the size of the study, provide primary evidence that affirms the effectiveness of HLPs in teaching students with ID. It also encourages the continuation of training and application of HLPs as a valuable tool in enhancing the professional capacity for special educators in Vietnam.

Method

The research was conducted at T. B. Center for Inclusive Education Support and Development in Ho Chi Minh City, as part of a larger study on improving literacy outcomes for students with disabilities. The two teachers who focused on OTR and PCF are female, had worked in the field of special education for 7 and 9 years respectively, and had degrees in special education. They taught five male students, ranging from 12 to 18 years old. Their main disability was ID which is commonly comorbid with cerebral palsy or autism spectrum disorder.

Before the research took place, we (university personnel) established a research partnership with the principal at the center, then all teachers were invited to attend an introduction session about the purpose and process of conducting the research. Two teachers showed interest in this study and signed a consent form to participate. Next, the two teachers were asked to conduct three teaching sessions to gather baseline data about their teaching. Thereafter, one research facilitator organized professional development training for the teachers about HLPs in general, HLP 16, application OTR in class, positive and constructive feedback, and criteria for evaluating implementation fidelity. After PD training, two teachers conducted six teaching sessions in different subjects to collect data in the experiment. All sessions were recorded for data collecting purposes. Data on the application of OTR and PCF in class were compared pre- and post-intervention to discern the impact of the PD.

Lesson video recordings were then analyzed by five undergraduate research assistants who were trained in the main constructs of interest. The data were scored as following a) frequency of OTR in total, b) frequency of unison and individual OTR, c) student response forms (verbal or others), d) the accuracy of student answers, and e) feedback forms of teachers to students' answers. The researchers modified checklists developed by the IRIS Center and to collect fidelity and social validity.

Results

Before PD, teachers' average OTR was about 2.8 opportunities per minute. After the training, the OTR rate was almost doubled, with an average of 5.5 OTR per minute. This was even higher than the target ratio recommended by the IRIS center (3-5 OTR per minute).

As suggested by Brownell et al. (2021) and Haydon et al. (2010), the target OTR rate should be 70% directed to groups and 30% aimed at individuals. Before the training, the OTR rates for individuals and groups were nearly the same, 50.5% and 49.5%, mainly by verbal responses. After training, these rates were 22.5% and 77.5%, respectively, meaning the rate of unison OTR increased by more than 20%. The teachers also provided diverse forms of responses for students, such as unison verbal answering, letter cards, happy/unhappy face cards, thumbs up or down, etc. Unison verbal responding still accounted for the highest proportion (76.5%). Regarding the accuracy of student responses, the ratio increased from 50.9% to 77.4%. Even though the rate of students answering correctly was higher, this rate has not reached the recommended level (80-90%) (Brownell et al., 2021).

Finally, the study examined the quality of feedback that teachers used in class. The feedback was divided into general feedback (e.g., "that is correct," "great job," or "clap your hands") and positive and constructive feedback (e.g., "you pointed to the yellow cat, that is correct," "yes, this is letter d," or "you have a great answer, this is the worker wearing a red hat"). Both before and after PD, teachers focused on positive and constructive feedback at a rate of nearly 70%. This rate was consistent with one suggested by Kelsey (2020).

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on the positive impact of PD, using OTR and PCF with teachers in special education schools for students with ID in Vietnam. Generally, the teachers increased the rate from 3 OTR per minute to 5.5 OTR per minute, with about 77% accuracy of student response. The teachers also increased the proportion of unison responses, from about 50% to 77% with varied answer forms. Finally, they slightly increased PCF from 70% to 77%. This was a skill that teachers did well even before PD. It should also be noted that there are several limitations that occurred in this research paper, including a short coaching period, lack of a maintenance phase in research design, and the limit of baseline data.

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Biographical Information

Hoa T. Nguyen, Hoang Oanh T. Huynh, Thuy An T. Hoang

Hoa T. Nguyen, Hoang Oanh T. Huynh, and Thuy An T. Hoang are lecturers at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. They hold masters' degrees in Special Education and Psychology. They have the same shared interest and experiences in the field of special education, especially working with children with special needs in early intervention programs and inclusive settings.

Nga Thi Hoang

Nga Thi Hoang is the lecturer of Special Education Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. She also has served as the dean since 2014. Her research interest focuses on improving the early intervention services for children with developmental disabilities, evidence-based practice and promoting the inclusive education for children with disabilities in Vietnam.

11. COOPERATION BETWEEN A SPEECH THERAPIST AND THE FAMILY IN SUPPORTING A PRESCHOOL CHILD WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DYSPHASIA

Nicole Kubartová and Blanka Gruberová

Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia

Nicole Kubartová email: kubartov@students.zcu.cz

Blanka Gruberová email: gruberb@kpg.zcu.cz

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Krále Jiřího 20

Karlovy Vary, 36001, Czech Republic

Background

In line with Vygotsky's (1977) theory, which emphasizes the importance of interaction with loved ones for children's language learning, our research focuses on how parents can effectively contribute to the speech therapy process, with the speech therapist's partnership approach being a key element. This article further explores the role of parents as co-therapists, which for them involves understanding the child's problem, learning effective communication strategies, and applying the speech therapist's instructions in the home environment (Lechta, 2003). Based on a study by Klatte et al. (2019), four pillars are identified as key to effective parental participation in speech therapy intervention. These are parental involvement, parental reflection, mutual understanding between the parent and the clinical speech therapist, and the professional skills of the speech therapist.

Our 2024 study details the collaboration between parents and speech therapists in the context of home training and communication skills development in preschool children with developmental dysphasia. The main objective was to identify and analyze factors that hinder, or, on the contrary, contribute to optimal cooperation between parent and speech therapist. We conclude by comparing the perspectives of a clinical speech therapist and parents on the process of collaboration and speech therapy care for a preschool child with developmental dysphasia. Parents' requests for speech therapy services coincide with the services offered by the speech therapist. The only thing parents would appreciate is an increase in the frequency of speech therapy visits.

Home Preparation for Speech Therapy

It is evident from the interviews that the course of home preparation for speech therapy is very individual. From the perspective of the clinical speech therapist, regularity and consistency are the most important aspects of home preparation. The clinical speech and language therapist recommends that home training should be done daily, in the same place, with the same person each time. The time of day is also an important factor. The child should do home preparation for speech therapy in the morning when he or she is not yet tired.

Developing Communication Skills in Preschool Children with Developmental Dysphasia

The communication skills of a preschool child with developmental dysphasia can be developed primarily through two-way, parent-child communication. According to the clinical speech therapist, positive feedback from the parent is important to awaken the child’s interest in communication. Through communication, the child learns to express his or her own opinions, while expanding his or her active and passive vocabulary. The development of the child’s communication skills is also linked to the singing of songs, the purpose of which in this respect is to strengthen auditory perception.

Methods

The research is based on a questionnaire survey of 60 parents of people with communication disorders. The second part of the research investigation is semi-structured. The core research sample consisted of one clinical speech therapist and two parents of preschool children with developmental dysphasia. Data was collected in the city of Pilsen in autumn, 2023.

Factors Influencing Cooperation Between Parent and Clinical Speech Therapist

Our research shows that adherence to the speech therapist’s instructions and parental consistency in home preparation are important for effective collaboration. First, it is necessary to arouse the parent’s interest and motivate and praise them. The parent’s interest and willingness to participate in the speech therapy process are also factors that influence the understanding of the home preparation instructions. Education, socio-cultural background, or the level of social status of the family, can be considered secondary in this respect. Another factor is that the same person should attend speech therapy with the child each time, for the sake of information mediation. The parent’s familiarity with the specific diagnosis is not necessary to ensure functional cooperation. We consider language barriers or different perspectives of the parent and the clinical speech therapist on the child’s behavior to be factors preventing optimal cooperation.

Comparison of the Clinical Speech Therapist’s and Parent’s Perspectives on the Course of Cooperation and Speech Therapy

It can be said that the parents’ expectations correspond to what the clinical speech therapist offers. Parents attend speech therapy with their children approximately once every 6 weeks. However, if they had the opportunity, they would welcome more frequent visits. Since the speech progress of these children is not that significant, the clinical speech therapist feels that increasing the frequency of visits for children with developmental dysphasia would only make sense to ensure that home training is being done correctly. Another reason for not increasing the frequency of visits is the high demand for speech therapy, as there is a shortage of clinical speech therapists in the Czech Republic.

Parents communicate with the clinical speech therapist about their child’s speech difficulties most often in the presence of their child. Many also contact the speech therapist by email or telephone, mainly because they are concerned about their child’s future. The clinical speech and language therapist is willing to meet with parents without the child being present.

The approach of the clinical speech therapist also influences the course of cooperation. The interviews show that humanity and friendliness are key for the respondents to build trust. The clinical speech and language therapist strives to achieve this mainly by being empathetic, understanding, and supportive of the parent in difficult situations for them.

The survey results suggest that parent satisfaction with speech therapy care is closely linked to how the parent feels about the clinical speech therapist with their child. According to the respondents, the environment of the speech therapy clinic contributes to the comfort of the parent, which should feel cheerful. A number of other factors may also influence the course of the collaboration. The way information is conveyed is one of them. Adherence to the speech therapists instructions is crucial to ensure functional cooperation. To follow them, parents must first understand them. A method of conveying information that has worked well for parents is for the speech therapist to demonstrate and try out the task practically.

Discussion

We expected to obtain information specific to preschool children with developmental dysphasia through interviews. Although the clinical speech therapist's responses are adequate, from our perspective they are more general in nature. Despite the fact that each child is an individual, we would try to ask the clinical speech therapist a little more in the future and to specify our questions only to our chosen target group.

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Biographical Information

Nicole Kubartová

Nicole Kubartová holds a bachelor's degree in Czech language with a concentration in education and is a student of the third year of a bachelor's degree in Special Education at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen.

Blanka Gruberová

Blanka Gruberová covers attestation exams on Organisation and Health Care Management and Clinical Speech Therapy. She has a PhD in Special Education from Charles University in Prague, a J. A. from Comenius University in Prague, a master's degree in Speech Therapy from Palacký University in Olomouc, and a bachelor's degree in Addictionology from Charles University in Prague.

12. AN INTERNATIONAL LOOK AT CO-TEACHING IMPLEMENTATION

Wendy W. Murawski[1], Cristina Gulløv[2], and Bea Zumwald[3]

[1]California State University, Northridge

[2]Frederiksoddeskolen, Fredericia, Denmark

[3]Pedagögische Hochschule, St. Gallen, Switzerland

Wendy Murawski email: Wendy.Murawski@csun.edu

Cristina Gulløv email: cgul79@gmail.com

Bea Zumwald email: bea.zumwald@phsd.ch

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Dr. Wendy Murawski

Center for Teaching and Learning

Eisner College of Education, California State University Northridge

18111 Nordhoff Street

Northridge, CA 91330-8265 USA

Background on Co-Teaching Practices

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), an international organization focused on students with disabilities and those who work with them, identifies high-leverage practices as those actions that any educator can take, and should learn, to make the most impact on student achievement and success. The first high-leverage practice (HLP) identified by CEC emphasizes collaborating with professionals to increase student success (Jenkins & Murawski, 2024). One of the ways in which schools around the world are implementing collaboration to successfully include students with differing abilities is with *co-teaching*. Co-teaching is an increasingly used service delivery option designed to address the diverse needs of students in an inclusive setting by having general and special educators co-plan, co-instruct, co-assess, and co-reflect (Jenkins & Murawski, 2024). Unfortunately, though co-teaching may be touted as a best practice and is increasingly used internationally, major barriers still challenge educators.

Studies investigating co-teaching have revealed that a significant proportion of educators who claim to engage in co-teaching, either voluntarily or as instructed by administrators, employ a “one teach, one support” approach during their collaborative instructional time (Karten & Murawski, 2020). Despite the intention of co-teaching to facilitate differentiated and specially designed instruction within an inclusive classroom, research indicates a substantial deficiency in this aspect (Lochner, et al., 2019). The mere presence of two teachers in the classroom should not entail merely duplicating tasks with different student groups, nor should it result in one teacher predominating while the other functions merely as an assistant. Instead, their roles should intertwine, merge, and build off one another, offering value-added to the classroom. At the heart of co-teaching lies the essential question articulated by Murawski and Spencer (2011): “How is what the two educators are doing together *substantively different and better for students* [emphasis added] than what one of them would do alone?" (Jenkins & Murawski, 2024, p.96).

International Implementation of Co-Teaching Models

When co-teaching between general and special education teachers was first publicized by Lynne Cook and Marilyn Friend, their application of two adults in the same room was specifically to increase inclusive practices and differentiation for students with disabilities. Over the years, co-teaching has been applied to a variety of populations, to include students who are second language learners, gifted/twice-exceptional students, and struggling students for a variety of other needs, to include those that are behavioral or social-emotional in nature. Co-teaching has been hypothesized as a service delivery option poised to include more historically marginalized groups, using the strengths of both educators to identify and address a variety of needs. However, because not all educators have experienced successful co-teaching, there is a tendency of teachers either to resort to what is most familiar (one leading and one supporting) or to default to typical instruction that lacks any semblance of differentiation or specially designed instruction.

As co-teaching expands globally, its adaptation varies according to the diverse needs of different countries and cultures. Gulløv (2022) observes how Denmark's utilization of pedagogues has facilitated a proactive approach to addressing students' social-emotional needs.

> Teachers and pedagogues are two of the main professionals who collaborate on children's learning, wellbeing, and inclusion in Danish schools, especially in primary education… Historically, pedagogues focused primarily on students' social relationships and communities, such as learning through play, leisure time activities, children's development, and overall wellbeing…. (Gulløv & Murawski, 2024, p.37).

Pedagogues have 3.5 years of education, compared to Danish teachers who have 4, and are thus individuals with their own areas of expertise. Following a 2014 mandate for more inclusion in Denmark, numerous schools underwent a transformation by integrating pedagogues into the academic sphere. This initiative aimed to bolster students' social-emotional learning and enhance their engagement in academics throughout the day and led to increased co-teaching between pedagogues and teachers. Key elements such as parity, scheduling, and training have emerged as crucial factors for ensuring the sustainability of co-teaching models with teachers and pedagogues; teams equipped with these show positive outcomes (Gulløv & Murawski, 2024).

Similarly, Zumwald (2022) investigates collaborative interactions between teachers and paraprofessionals in Switzerland to foster inclusive success. Like counterparts in Denmark and the United States, issues of hierarchy, training, goal setting, communication, and personalities play significant roles. Despite efforts to co-plan, Karten and Murawski (2020) suggest that the relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals often falls short of true co-teaching criteria. However, many schools worldwide grapple with barriers such as scheduling, staffing, coordination, and training, prompting exploration of methods to ensure genuine co-teaching. Also in Switzerland, Vogt et al. (2010) highlight the use of mixed-age classes at early elementary levels, where two teachers share responsibilities, albeit not for the entire day. This approach yields positive outcomes for students, increased differentiation of tasks, and enhanced inclusion of students with varying abilities.

Co-teaching can also be a method by which other best practices can be implemented. For example, Murawski and Gulløv (2024) discuss specific strategies and examples in Denmark where co-teaching, coupled with a universal design for learning (UDL) approach, supports all students, not just those with disabilities. By embedding natural options and choices for diverse learners, UDL reduces the need for extensive individualized planning, facilitating support in co-taught, solo-taught, or paraeducator-supported classes.

Internationally, there persists a need for researchers to scrutinize and compare various co-teaching approaches to determine the most effective methods for inclusive education. It is recommended that educators look at applications both domestic and international to learn what appears to work best, be most impactful for student success, and result in increased collaboration and inclusion. Co-teaching has its barriers, but its impact can be worth the work.

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Biographical Information

Wendy W. Murawski

Wendy W. Murawski, PhD, is the Executive Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at California State University, Northridge, a Professor of Special Education, Director of SIMPACT (Simulated Immersive Learning Program), and chief executive officer of 2Teach Global Educational Consulting (www.2TeachGlobal.com). She is an international keynote speaker and has authored/edited 18 books focused on inclusive education.

Cristina Gulløv

Cristina Gulløv has a Master of Arts in Educational Psychology and is a school principal at a school for children with autism in Denmark. She is also a lecturer and has contributed to various research and development projects aimed at advancing educational collaborative practices, playful learning, and co-teaching.

Bea Zumwald

Bea Zumwald, PhD, is a Professor and Researcher at the University of Teacher Education in St. Gallen, Switzerland. She co-leads special education teacher training in cooperation with the University of Teacher Education in Special Needs, Zurich. She is an expert on inclusion and co-teaching.

13. THE USE OF DESIGN THINKING IN TRANSITION PLANNING

William Butler

Avondale Elementary School District, Avondale, Arizona

William Butler email: wbutler1973@gmail.com

I have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

William Butler

11901 S Freedom Park Dr, #469

Herriman, UT 84096 USA

Background on Transition Planning

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004), every student should have a transition plan in place by the time of their 16th birthday. However, there is no stipulation within the law that says that the individual education plan (IEP) team has to wait that long before approaching the idea. While there are some individual success stories, as a whole, students with disabilities continue not to do well on measures of postsecondary success. As an educational system we have to look at current practices and ask ourselves whether continuing to approach the transition plan in the traditional way is effective and even fair to student success.

Looking at transition through the lens of Schlossberg's (Schlossberg & Leibowitz, 1980) transition theory, the student should be at the heart of the conversation. Schlossberg posited that a successful transition was one where there was a mindful approach before, during, and even after completing that transition. Schlossberg came up with four "Ss" to summarize her work—the situation (or why the transition is needed), self (knowing oneself), support (what support systems are in place), and strategy (what skills does the individual have to help through various situations) (Belle et al., 2022).

Implementing a Design Thinking Component to Transitions

Design thinking (DT) is a process that puts the individual at the heart of the conversation and all decisions are made after getting to know that individual. DT is a cyclical process that involves taking an empathetic approach to a situation or interaction. Once there is a level of empathy gained, the individuals involved undergo an ideation phase of possible solutions and then choose one to prototype. The prototype is then tested and feedback gathered, then the process cycles back to the empathy phase to see if the prototype is effective. Consistent communication is key during the empathy phase to ensure that the prototype—or intervention—is continually addressing the needs of the individual.

In this case, the intervention is the development of transition related goals for post-secondary success. During the empathy phase of DT, data is gathered in terms of the students' academic progress as well as occupational and vocational needs.

Van Gronigen (2022) notes that there is an expanding body of research that suggests that educational organizations adopt a design thinking mindset in order to change how they operate. To give credence to this, the researchers introduced design thinking to an educational organization and found that over the course of a yearlong workshop, the participants gained a more introspective approach but yet maintained some of the traditional ways of doing things, mainly out of habit. Hubbard and Datnow (2020) saw this change when DT was used to turn a low-performing middle school into a thriving magnet school.

Transition goals are typically broad in nature and do not contain the student’s voice or input (Harrison et al., 2017) and typically do not address the student’s interests and preferences. Clearly, an empathetic approach is not being taken.

Hubbard and Datnow (2020) note that while design thinking is relatively new, it can be effective at helping schools and individual students grow. This could be because of—or despite—the fact that design thinking defies the traditional approach in education. This new approach to thinking of transition could also help in the long-term success of students. Trainor et al. (2016) found that students with high-incidence disabilities still are experiencing poor postsecondary outcomes. The authors go on to note that the more successful transition plans include stakeholders’ involvement as well as the involvement of the student themselves. One aspect of design thinking is getting various perspectives in order to gain an understanding of the individual (i.e. student) and their specific needs.

Fullarton and Duquette (2015) also found that the more participants in the transition planning, the more successful the students were. While the study is limited due to there being only five students' experiences studied, it is apparent from the results that students that have a formal transition plan where there is involvement from the parents and other stakeholders, the students have a better chance at success.

The use of DT specifically to develop a transition plan has not been something that has been researched to any extent. However, Kraemer et al. (2022) did find in their study that the scores on transition plans were higher for students on a standard graduation path compared to students that were on a modified path. This suggests that the level of ability to gain true insight from the student creates a higher scoring, or a more effective, transition plan.

Conclusions

The use of design thinking specifically to transition planning is minimal to nonexistent in research. One of the limiting components is the iterative process that makes design thinking effective. However, given that the actual time that transition plans are due is typically when students are already in high school, there is very little time to reflect and revise the plans as currently structured. Entering in with an empathetic mind and at an earlier time can mean that these plans are truly individualized and iterated upon at regular intervals.

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Biographical Information

William Butler

William (Will) Butler is currently the director of Exceptional Student Services for Avondale Elementary School District in Avondale, Arizona. Prior to his current role, he was a classroom teacher, instructional coach, and a university professor. His interests include transition planning, inclusive education, as well as universal educational technology.

14. THE NEW EFFECTIVENESS OF PANEL THEATER IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen[1], Makiko Matsuka[2], Yoshiko Fujita[2], Masako Koga[3], and Thi-Hai Do[4]

[1]Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi, Vietnam

[2]Shukutoku University, Saitama, Japan

[3]Pipi Children's Culture Laboratory, Hanoi, Vietnam

[4]Western Hanoi School, Hanoi, Vietnam

Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen email: nch19381@hnue.edu.vn

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen

Faculty of Special Education, Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE)

136 Xuan Thuy Street, Cau Giay Dist.

Hanoi, Vietnam

Background and Aims

Panel theater was created in Japan in 1973 by Ryojun Kouda (Kouda et al., 2009). It is a method of expressing stories, games, songs, etc., by placing and removing pictures, or moving parts of pictures, which are made from non-woven fabric (P paper), onto a board covered by Japanese non-woven fabric number 3150. Panel theater is an audio-visual channel capable of promoting vocabulary for young children (Saiki, 2018). Children can actively learn and develop communication while watching Panel theater (Tanaka, 2018). Children not only watch performances but also enjoy playing with picture-dolls from panel theater (Ishii & Sawamura, 2019). After watching panel theater performances, children with typical development, even 1-year-old children can move picture-dolls, play with them, recreate stories and create new words (Matsuka, 2023). Therefore, this study, by organizing activities in which children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) play with panel theater, discovered how children with ASD recreate stories by using language and action during their play and discussed the possibility of panel theater activities to support the language development of children with ASD.

Method

A boy N, 8 years old, living in Hanoi and studying at a primary school, participated in this study. He was diagnosed with ASD at the age of 3 at a hospital. The Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (2nd edition) test results for N had a total score of 69 points in all areas (low level), showing that N had a delay in adaptive behavior, low levels in the Communication Domain (62 points), low average level of receptive language (equivalent to a child aged four years and eight months) and low level of expressive language (equivalent to a child aged two years and ten months). In daily activities, N only speaks single words when answering questions, and can speak sentences of two to three words when he wants to make requests to others. N sometimes exhibits echolalia when playing alone.

The individual lessons with panel theater were held two sessions/week for 4 consecutive weeks at extra time after main activities in the afternoon by one homeroom teacher, lasting for 20-25 minutes. After watching the teacher tell a panel theater story, N could play freely with materials from the told story (at least 10 minutes or more). The teacher set up automatic cameras during the lesson.

To know how the child recreated the told story, there are two types of behaviors to be observed: language behavior (includes two criterias: number of words – L1; and content – L2) and action behavior (movement – A1; and arrangement of picture-dolls – A2). N's behaviors when he freely played with materials after watching the story were analyzed by two teachers via video, analyzing in 30 seconds intervals and scoring according to four levels, from 1 point to 4 points, to quantify the level of behavioral expression. The final result was calculated from a total of 48 times that behaviors were observed in the four lessons with a story called "The Similar Ones."

Results

The frequency of each recreated behavior of N and the correlation of those behaviors were analyzed, yielding the following results.

During playing freely with panel theater, the number of words said by N (L1) reached an average of 2.83 points (SD = 1.07) (can speak words in a sentence). The content of the speech (L2) got an average of 2.77 points (SD = 0.97), which means N copied the original sentence of the told story. A1 reached 3.02 points (SD = 0.79) meaning N could "replay the movements of picture-dolls," and A2 got 2.41 points (SD = 0.86) meaning N could "make the original arrangement but did not adjust the surrounding pictures.” The highest value was achieved by A1 (with the highest expression rate of 85.42%), followed by A2 (77.08%); L1 and L2 reached 72.92% of expression rate. L1 and L2 were strongly positively correlated with each other (r = 0.94). Both L1 and L2 have weak positive correlations with A1 (r = 0.35), with A2 (r = 0.34). There is almost no correlation between A1 and A2 (r = -0.02).

Discussion

While playing with panel theater and story “The Similar Ones,” child N with ASD demonstrated a high level of expression, both in language behavior and performance action, for almost three-quarters of the playing time, in which the performance action tended to be greater than the language behavior.

Child N could recreate the story he had heard. He could recreate sentences with suitable meaning with the told story; he could manipulate many movements of picture-dolls at a complex level and begin to place pictures according to the original structure of the told story.

N could sometimes create new words in sentences. The number of words in speech increased with the increase in content. The correlation is weak but it is positive. This shows that the content of the sentences matched the movements of the picture-dolls. While he moves the picture-dolls he could recreate language. This also indicates that when interacting with meaningful objects which have a concrete contextual situation, as with an episode in panel theater, the child with ASD used his language in a meaningful and contextual way, not an echolalia symptom.

Based on the findings of this study, it is possible to say that children with ASD have a chance to acquire and recreate language and action when self-playing with panel theater. Panel theater activities can be used to develop children’s language in future both at the formal, semantic, and pragmatic levels. Future studies can focus on finding evidence to prove these points.

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Biographical Information

Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen

Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen, who holds a PhD in Education, is working in the Faculty of Special Education at Hanoi National University of Education. Her professional area and publications focus on education of children with learning disabilities and developmental disorders. Her recent concern is also on applying Japanese education in Vietnam.

Makiko Matsuka

Makiko Matsuka, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the College of Education at Shukutoku University. She specializes in early childhood education, creative arts education, and child cultural education. She is also a panel theater writer and practitioner. She is currently conducting research on story-making using panel theater.

Yoshiko Fujita

Yoshiko Fujita is now a Visiting Professor in the College of Education at Shukutoku University. She specializes in early childhood education, language development, and child cultural education. She is also a panel theater writer and practitioner. She has promoted panel theater in Japan and 13 additional countries, mainly in Asia.

Masako Koga

Masako Koga is an educational practitioner who has focused her work for the last 30 years on education for infants, elementary-aged children, and children with disabilities. She created many Japanese cultural activities that support mental and physical development. She is also the founder of Pipi Children's Culture Laboratory.

Thi-Hai Do

Thi-Hai Do holds her bachelor’s degree in Special Education and now teaches children with autism spectrum disorders and developmental disorders. She researches and applies panel theater from Japan to educational activities for children with disabilities in Vietnam.

15. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION AND PRACTICE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RURAL KENYA

Josephine Oranga

Kisii University

Josephine Oranga email: josephineoranga@kisiiuniversity.ac.ke

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Kisii University

Sakagwa Building, Kisii University, Main Campus

Department of Special Needs Education

Kenya

Background

Most persons with disability (PwDs) in Africa are school-excluded due to cultural perceptions, financial constraints, non-responsive curriculums, limited teacher training and lack of disability awareness. These factors hamper equity, access and retention of learners with disabilities (LwDs) in schools across Sub-Saharan Africa. Studies reveal that Kenyan LwDs who are fortunate enough to access school largely remain in special educational classrooms/institutions. Disabilities and their causes in Kenya are shrouded in mystery and superstition, subjecting LwDs to stigmas at school and other settings (Kiru, 2019). This is worse in rural areas that still cling onto myths and superstition regarding disabilities.

Hence, it was imperative to identify the challenges that impede the implementation and practice of inclusive education in Kenyan public rural schools with the aim of developing positive intervention strategies to address the challenges. Notably, inclusive education helps foster inclusive communities by taking into account students' diverse strengths, abilities and backgrounds. Respect and empathy grow when students of different backgrounds and strengths play and learn together in responsive school environments. A segregated education system advances inequity and enhances discrimination against learners who already feel left out due to disability. Hence, quality inclusive education should be the overarching guide for educational/curriculum developers worldwide in pursuit of quality education.

Other benefits of inclusive education include: (a) the development of a positive self-image amongst learners, (b) enhancement of friendship skills, (c) respect for others, and (d) improved problem solving skills. Consequently, learners become more accepting of differences (Florian, et al., 2017). Inclusive education, thus, produces positive outcomes for all learners as it provides the opportunity for all learners to develop values and skills necessary to live alongside others in the community. Hence, there's a need to address the challenges that hamper the implementation and practice of inclusion in rural public primary schools in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

The National Special Needs Education Policy Framework (SNE) (Ministry of Education, 2009) is the guide for the provision of special educational services in Kenya. Accordingly, the objectives of the national Kenya SNE policy framework include the provisions of: (a) resources to make learning institutions accessible for learners with special educational needs (b) adequate and disability-friendly buildings, equipment and furniture, (c) provision of a safe environment for learners and (d) modification of facilities, including tuition and sanitation infrastructure.

The Kenyan government recognizes the significant role of teachers in achieving inclusion through the adoption and design of structural re-adjustment interventions that enhance inclusive education (Republic of Kenya, 2012).

However, even with this policy in place, the majority of LwDs in Kenya still learn in segregated special education settings or at best in separate special units/classrooms in regular schools. Inclusion of learners with disabilities in the same classroom as those without disabilities is still a tall order in Kenya (Mwoma, 2017). Literature also indicates a lack of understanding and preparedness amongst teachers in Kenya on what inclusion entails (Kiru, 2019), yet the sheer separation of students with special educational needs (from those without) in order to provide them with special education services makes inclusive education unattainable.

Objectives

Determine the following regarding regular public primary schools in Kisii County, Kenya: (a) barriers to the inclusion of learners with special educational needs; (b) teachers' perceptions and views on inclusive learning.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted and the phenomenological design followed to explore and document barriers and teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion of LwDs in regular classrooms in rural public primary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. The sample consisted of eight primary school teachers from two public primary schools with separate special educational units for learners with intellectual disabilities attached to them. In-person interviews were held and responses recorded using a digital recorder and later transcribed, analyzed, and presented thematically in light of the study objectives.

Results and Recommendations

Results showed that barriers to inclusion of LwDs in public primary schools were: (a) lack/inadequate initial teacher training on inclusion/shortage of trained special needs education teachers); (b) lack of support staff; (c) socio-cultural barriers/superstitious beliefs on causes of disabilities; (d) curriculum challenges; (e) large class sizes; (f) opposition from parents of both learners with and without disabilities; (g) structural/physical barriers; (h) inaccessible neighborhood schools; (i) economic/financial constraints (inadequate subsistence from parents, insufficient teaching and learning resources); and (j) lack/ inadequate parental involvement.

Teacher perceptions included that they had not been trained to handle learners with special educational needs and that teaching learners with special educational needs is burdensome and time-consuming. Furthermore, they may not cover the syllabus in time if learners with and without special educational needs are taught in the same class, and beliefs that learners with disabilities learn best on their own.

Recommendations are: (a) provision of training on the development and modification of curriculum/syllabi that are responsive to the needs of learners with special educational needs; (b) adapt and modify existing infrastructures to make them more disability-sensitive; (c) provide subsidies or cash payouts to poor parents of learners with disabilities to enable them to provide subsistence to their children; and (d) provide parental education.

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Biological Information

Josephine Oranga

Josephine Oranga holds a doctorate in Special Needs Education from Southwest University, China (PR) and a master’s degree in Special Education from Kenyatta University, Kenya. She undertook her Bachelor of Education degree studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

16. THE ISSUE OF EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH LOW VISION AND BLINDNESS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Kateřina Kavalírová and Pavlína Šumníková

Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia, Pilsen

Kateřina Kavalírová email: kavali@kpg.zcu.cz

Pavlína Šumníková email: psumnik@kpg.zcu.cz

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia, Pilsen

Chodské nám. 1015/1

306 14, PLZEŇ 3

Czech Republic

Background

In the European dimension, the right to education is not only one of the basic human rights, but also an important indicator of the maturity of contemporary society. The education of visually impaired children is defined by section 16 of the 2016 amendment to the Education Act of 2015 (Czech Republic, 2016). In our current situation, inclusion is a dominant philosophy and inclusive practices are prioritized. Inclusion is preferred by society, however, the current system of special education intended for children—pupils and students with visual impairments, a full-fledged alternative to the integrated form of education—continues to maintain its position of non-inclusivity (Hájková & Strnadová, 2010). It is necessary to emphasize that inclusion is not the ideal variant of education for every child with a disability. The positives do not always have to outweigh the negatives so that the specific needs of the child and the possibilities of developing his or her individual potential are respected (Květoňová et al., 2009). In the Czech Republic, children with visual impairment can therefore be educated in three ways: in regular schools, in special schools, or in home education, since home education is recognized as a full-fledged alternative to primary school education (Amendments to the Education Act, 2015).

The presence of a pupil with severe visual impairment in a regular classroom, usually together with other pupils with special educational needs, places increased demands not only on teachers, but also on counseling workplaces (Corn & Erin, 2010).

For the education of children with special educational needs to be effective, it is necessary for teachers to be sufficiently familiar with special methods and procedures that are suitable for educating a specific child with to his or her educational needs (Janková, 2015).

Defining the Problem

Children who have a milder degree of visual impairment usually attend regular schools, while children with combined disabilities or more severe visual impairments attend special schools. However, the conditions at regular schools are often not satisfactory. Although schools cooperate with special educational centers, whose workers visit schools to meet children and teachers, students with visual impairments often do not learn specific skills that are necessary for their further education as well as for practical life and social inclusion. Although teachers of regular schools try to involve children with visual impairments in the educational process, they often do not have time or capacity to attend to these students as much as they should. Pupils with severe visual impairments are usually assigned an assistant. However, the problem is in teaching assistants, where not enough space is devoted to methodologies for working with students with different types of disabilities. Here, it would be more appropriate to involve a tandem teacher in school teaching – a special pedagogue who knows special approaches suitable for pupils with special educational needs (Němec, 2022).

However, the social inclusion of children from special schools can be somewhat problematic, as the pupils here are only in a community with children with the same type of disability. The collectives in the classes are small, so there is a lack of sufficient diversity to establish social relationships. A big advantage, though, is that the pupils learn all the specific skills they need during regular lessons. Mobility training is included in the teaching, children continuously learn to work with compensatory aids and can use them effectively in teaching. In addition, children are led to independence. In the case of blind children, emphasis is placed on the development of substitute senses, while, vision reeducation is carried out in the case of visually impaired children (Šumníková, 2018). The special school environment is also adapted to the needs of blind and low vision children.

However, the disadvantage of special schools is that they are specialized workplaces, so children must commute and spend a large amount of time on the road, or be placed in a boarding school, in order to attend them. This disrupts social ties in the local community (Němec, 2022).

Possible Solution

In order to make the integration of people with visual impairments more effective, we decided to prepare a course that is intended especially for teachers, teaching assistants, educators, and other ancillaries who regularly meet low vision and blind people in practice, and especially children with visual impairments. The course will be implemented as part of lifelong education in the scope of one semester. It will be divided into five blocks. For clarity, we present the indicative contents of the parts of the course, processed according to Wiener et al., 2010:

1. Practical information of special needs education for visually impaired: (a) visual defects and their functional impact on the daily life, (b) methods of working with the visually impaired and blind, (c) care for visually impaired persons in the Czech Republic, and (d) specific skills needed for the integration of visually impaired people;
2. Disclosure of information: (a) there are compensatory aids for the low-vision and blind, (b) computers, (c) tablets, (d) other electronic devices, and (e) the practical part, that is the presentation (modeling) of specific aids;
3. Mobility training and independent movement;
4. Reading and writing Braille: (a) how to teach and (b) materials;
5. Practical teaching of individual subjects (methodologies for visually impaired).

Conclusion

Shalon Zell Sacks (in Corn & Erin, 2010) states three basic limitations that visual impairment or blindness causes: information deficit, the ability to move, and reduced control of the environment and one's own person in the environment. Our course is designed in such a way that participants who find themselves in an unfamiliar situation of educating a visually impaired pupil will be familiar with the basic principles of support. They can then fully provide these supports in their practice with the help of special pedagogical centers.

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Biographical Information

Kateřina Kavalírová

Kateřina Kavalírová works as an academic worker in the Faculty of Education of the University of West Bohemia, Pilsen. She mainly deals with the issue of visually impaired people and inclusive pedagogy. She herself has a visual impairment and in her professional practice is also involved in educational activities focused on the lives of people with visual impairments.

Pavlína Šumníková

Pavlína Šumníková is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Czech Republic. She specializes in the education of people with visual and multiple disabilities and has participated in a number of research projects focusing on special education and the situation of people with disabilities, with a particular focus on accessibility, mobility and spatial orientation.

17. DIGITAL LITERACY AMONG TEACHERS OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES IN KENYA AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Martin M. Kavua

University of West Bohemia

Martin M. Kavua email: mkavua@kpg.zcu.cz

I have no known conflict to disclose.

Background

Digital literacy is core competence in the 21st century for teaching and learning (Falloon, 2020; Tohara, et. al. 2021), hence curriculum reforms in both developed and developing countries (such as Czech Republic and Kenya). Despite these curriculum-focused initiatives, there is limited evidence as to the status of digital literacy among teachers of students with disabilities. Additionally, there is limited comparative research on how teachers use digital literacy to facilitate learning in inclusive settings between developed and developing countries.

Methodology and Ethical Considerations

The study adopted the descriptive survey design to allow extensive and in-depth data collection on a large population within a short period of time, determining and reporting the existing scenario (Migiro & Magangi, 2011; Klassen et al., 2012). Study participants ($n = 456$) were drawn from all administrative strata in the Czech Republic ($n = 127$) and Kenya ($n = 329$), to represent each country's diversity to the maximum possible limits. Statutory requirements and ethical considerations were observed in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI)—voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy, data protection, etc. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study with the aim of testing the reliability of the questionnaire (Cronbach Alpha, $\alpha > 0.7$).

Data collection was done by use of a semi-structured, virtual, self-administered questionnaire and an observation checklist. Quantitative datasets were analyzed using bivariate descriptive statistical methods. Principal component analysis (PCA) was used in construction of composite variables. Qualitative datasets were analyzed using a 6-stage thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Text-based data was grouped by country and organized into themes.

Results and Discussion

Results from class observations showed that overall, the information and communication technology (ICT) skills among teachers in the Czech Republic were higher compared to those in Kenya. Regarding ICT infrastructure, schools in the Czech Republic had significantly greater access to hardware, software, and other supportive resources, for instance electricity and internet.

Teachers agreed that they select suitable digital resources for teaching and learning, considering the specific learner's needs with ($M=3.87$, $SD = 0.159$) and ($M = 4.16$, $SD =0.167$) for Kenya and the Czech Republic, respectively. A comparative analysis with ($p = 0.012$) on this response (responses were on a Linkert scale) showed that teachers in the Czech Republic strongly agreed with the statement compared to their Kenyan counterparts who agreed with the statement, hence more competence. Accounting for all measures of how teachers use digital literacy to facilitate learning, teachers from the Czech Republic were on average 27% above the average teacher in the study sample while teachers in Kenya were 15% below the average teacher. This showed a 42% gap in how teachers use digital literacy to facilitate learning between the two countries.

Concerning the selection and use of digital resources, the average score of teachers in the Czech Republic was 19% ($M = 0.19$) above the mean while the average score for teachers in Kenya was 7% ($M = - 0.7$) below the mean. This resulted in a 26% gap in how teachers selected and used digital resources. Regarding the integration of digital technologies in teaching and assessment, the study results showed that the average score for teachers in the Czech Republic was 66% ($M = 0.66$) above the average score while that of teachers in Kenya was 26% ($M = -0.26$) below the average score.

The study showed that the most used hardware in special schools included smartphones at 83.6%, laptops at 69.5%, and projectors at 48.7% ,while the least used hardware were televisions, radio, and smart boards at 31.1%, 25.4%, and 15.4% respectively.

Conclusion

There was a statistically significant difference in the use of specialized hardware and software by teachers to facilitate learning in the Czech Republic and Kenya ($p<0.05$). There were no statistically significant differences in the use of search engines and social media.

Overall teachers of learners with disabilities in the Czech Republic scored higher (27% above average) in their use of digital literacy to facilitate learning compared to their Kenyan counterparts (15% below average).

Similarly, teachers in the Czech Republic demonstrated higher (38% above the mean) self-efficacy in digital literacy compared to their counterparts in Kenya (16% below the mean). The greatest disparity in teachers' self-efficacy between the two countries relate to digital safety and innovation, where teachers in the Czech Republic had significantly higher (64% above the mean) scores on average compared to their counterparts in Kenya (25% below the mean).

The least disparity in teachers' self-efficacy between the two countries related to information retrieval and utilization, where teachers in Kenya had slightly better scores (3% above the mean) on average compared to their counterparts in the Czech Republic (9% below the mean).

Teachers in the two countries faced challenges at personal and institutional levels, however, the challenges related to awareness and access of digital technologies were more severe in Kenya (41% above the mean) and less severe in the Czech Republic (60% below the mean).

The main difference between how teachers deal with challenges in Kenya and the Czech Republic is that, in Kenya non-government organizations (NGOs) and development partners are actively involved in helping teachers while in the Czech Republic, the government is more actively involved.

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Biographical Information

Martin Mwongela Kavua

Dr. Kavua, a Lecturer at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, is passionate about special and inclusive education, digital literacy, and universal design. He has experience in education for learners with hearing loss, teacher training, and policy development as an assistant director of education at the Ministry of Education in Kenya. He has authored several publications and presented academic papers locally and internationally.

18. WEBSITE TO SUPPORT THIRD-GRADE STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN LEARNING MATHEMATICS

Nga T. Hoàng and Ngọc L. B. Hoàng

Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Vietnam

Nga T. Hoàng ngahth@hcmue.edu.vn

Ngọc L. B. Hoàng hoanglebaongoc60@gmail.com

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Conceptual Framework and Background

Digital technology increasingly influences contemporary teaching methods, particularly in educating individuals with special needs (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2021), facilitating their access to quality education, and contributing to promoting equality in education for individuals with special educational needs. However, the application of information technology in teaching mathematics to visually impaired students still faces many challenges. The percentage of visually impaired children attending school is very low and tends to decrease with grade levels. Visually impaired students often demonstrate lower academic performance in mathematics compared to other subjects (Beal & Shaw, 2008; Freeland, et al., 2010). Reasons are attributed to learning resources, especially textbooks, tending to present information not suitable for the predominant learning modalities of visually impaired students, which are primarily through tactile and auditory senses (Emerson & Anderson, 2018).

Against the backdrop of the Ministry of Education and Training's General Education Curriculum reform in Vietnam (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2018), studies on educational aids for the visually impaired remain unexplored in Vietnam, making teaching mathematics to visually impaired children a significant challenge. Designing a website to support third grade visually impaired students in learning mathematics enables the creation of learning tools tailored to the predominant learning modalities of visually impaired individuals. This contributes to addressing the shortage of educational resources for visually impaired children and promotes new research applying information technology in teaching students with special needs in Vietnam.

Research Methods

Survey methods were employed to gather opinions from 10 administrators and teachers regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the currently used educational software, the need for designing a website to support third grade visually impaired students in learning mathematics, and proposals concerning the website's interface and content.

Group interviews were conducted to:

1. Supplement and clarify the current status of information technology application in teaching mathematics to visually impaired students.
2. Ascertain the necessity of designing a website to support third grade visually impaired students in learning mathematics.
3. Clarify the necessity and effectiveness of the website after design.
4. Evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of a designed website through experimentation.

Qualitative and quantitative data processing methods were used for data analysis. The qualitative data were processed using Excel software. Video interviews were transcribed, data normalized, and key terms used for data sorting and classification. Important citations or opinions from each interviewee were highlighted and listed. Subsequently, the quotes and opinions from the video interviews were compared with the interview notes and original video recordings.

Results

The website was designed based on four principles (Fecke, et al., 2015) and through an 11-step process. The four principles include:

1. Accessibility ensures all users, including visually impaired individuals, can access the website’s content and functions. This involves appropriate colors, assistive technologies, and flexible designs for zooming in and out according to users’ visual acuity.
2. Information transmission to ensure users can easily and effectively receive information needs to be in place. This can be achieved by using techniques such as structural markup, clear headings, and rational internal and external links.

3. User interaction and experience opportunities need to be in place to ensure users can interact easily and have a good experience. This includes using non-visual media, enhancing user interaction and experience through multimedia.
4. Compliance with web development standards such as HyperText Markup Language (HTML), Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), and JavaScript ensure compatibility and access across different devices.

Website design processes included 11 steps, a) choose a website building tool, b) identify third-grade mathematics content on the website, c) determine website's interface, d) set up and configure the website on WordPress, e) create and customize necessary functional pages, f) customize the interface and integrating features to support visually impaired students, g) optimize the website for search engine optimization (SEO) search engines, h) back up and restore website data, i) install Secure Socket Layer (SSL) certificates to enhance website security, j) test and debug, and k) deploy and maintain the website.

The website's feasibility and effectiveness were demonstrated through the testing process. The test results showed that the website could help visually impaired students develop their mathematical abilities while increasing their learning motivation and interest in mathematics.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the initial steps have demonstrated the website's success, due to the short research period and limited survey sample, the research results have not been fully explored, and the findings are not entirely verified. In the future, the research team will continue to maintain and develop the website to support long-term learning for visually impaired students. These activities will include a) enhancing promotion and introduction of the website, b) ensuring accessibility and integrating special support features, c) creating a favorable environment and support for teachers and students to access and use the website, d) providing training and guidance for support personnel, e) continuing to research and develop the website, and f) engaging in exchange and cooperation activities with the visually impaired community. This will help improve the education system for visually impaired students and disabled students.

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Biographical Information

Nga T. Hoàng

Dr. Hoàng is the lecturer of Special Education Department, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. She also has served as the dean since 2014. Her research interest focuses on improving the early intervention services for children with developmental disabilities, evidence-based practice and promoting the inclusive education for children with disabilities in Vietnam.

Ngọc L. B. Hoàng

Ngọc L. B. Hoàng is a senior student of Special Education, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, who actively participates in volunteer work with organizations both in Vietnam and internationally. Committed to advancing inclusive education, she explores innovative uses of information technology for students with disabilities.

19. LIVED EXPERIENCE AND VALUED RELATIONSHIPS AT THE HEART OF EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSESSMENT

Martha Howard and Amy Callender

Department of Curriculum & Instruction, College of Education, Tennessee Tech University

Martha Howard email: mhoward@tntech.edu

Amy Callender email: amycallender@tntech.edu

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Tennessee Tech University

200 West 10th Street

Cookeville, TN 38505 USA

Background on Early Intervention Resources in the United States

Early intervention for children from birth to age 3 in the United States is grant funded and authorized as Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (IDEA, 2004). IDEA makes provisions for such families through regulated and supported early intervention services. Part C was established due to an urgent and substantial need to enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities to maximize their potential for success and overcome risk associated with developmental delay. Lawmakers recognized research that shared the impact of early intervention on the child's developing brain, acknowledging that the early years are the prime time for neuronal growth and creation of new learning pathways. The purposes of Part C of IDEA are to enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities, reduce educational cost by minimizing the need for special education through early intervention, maximize potential for independent living, and empower families to meet their child's needs.

Federal regulations detail how each state should implement Part C of IDEA; however, IDEA allows individual states and territories the flexibility to customize the moving parts of the system to suit the needs of their residents. In addition, Part C is discretionary, yet all states have chosen to provide early intervention services. As soon as a state accepts the federal dollars to enact Part C, the state also accepts the responsibility to provide services (physical, occupational, speech, behavioral, developmental therapy, etc.) and financially support the child and family along their early intervention journey. Part C services are at no cost to families who qualify. When children qualify, an Individualized Family Service Plan is written to encapsulate the goals of the child and family, create a timeline for services, and understand their rights as a family.

Milestones Eligibility Evaluation Agency and a Family-Centered Approach

This paper focuses on the impact of the Milestones Eligibility Evaluation Agency (MEEA), established in 2018 as part of a competitive application process by the Tennessee Department of Education. Presently funded by the Department of Intellectual and Development Disabilities (DIDD), MEEA serves families who have children ranging from birth to age 3. As part of the DIDD contract, MEEA receives referrals from the single point of entry, Tennessee's Early Intervention System. These referrals originate from any Tennessee citizen, but most often come from pediatricians, hospitals, health departments, newborn hearing screenings, and family members. After receiving the referral, MEEA evaluators follow contract timelines to reach families, obtain necessary consents and releases, and schedule the evaluation.

MEEA uses a family-centered approach rather than a business model throughout the entire evaluation process. This approach includes using people-first language, family names, respecting family schedules, family diversity, home circumstances, and informing them of the early intervention eligibility process in a way that is easily understood. A family-centered approach to conducting the evaluation process aids in the family’s comfort with the process and adds a level of confidence in the early intervention services to come. Kilgo (2022) shared the family configuration growth in the United States over the last several decades, such as adolescent parents, single parents, adoptive families, foster children, grandparents caring for grandchildren, two parents of the same gender, blended families, and more. Increased cultural diversity in the United States also directly and indirectly shaped the interactions of professionals when serving young children and families. These diverse needs increase our desire, and reinforce the need, to support early intervention professionals in our endeavor to use a family-centered approach that values relationships as key to building trust and establishing rapport.

As evaluators engage with families, from their first contact, the family is viewed as central to processes and outcomes. Each family is treated as an individual unit with the concentric circles of supportive systems influencing their life interactions. While the evaluation is standardized and norm-referenced, evaluators practice their craft with the belief that no family is "standard," and each should be respected and valued. As an agency, MEEA representatives travel to the family's preferred natural environment such as their home, childcare, or local library (IDEA, 2004), engaging with the caregiver and child to gather information to complete hearing and vision screenings, family routines review, and the Battelle Developmental Inventory, third edition (BDI-3) (Newborg, J., 2020). The BDI-3 is a play-based, norm-referenced assessment, resulting in developmental quotient (DQ) scores for each domain (motor, communication, social-emotional, cognitive, adaptive) that help to determine eligibility for services through the statewide early intervention system.

Regarding the origination of the referral, families often feel a reasonable amount of uncertainty and trepidation surrounding the evaluation. Not only is the family welcoming an unfamiliar face into their home or community space, but families are often understandably anxious regarding the unknowns of their child's development. It is the role of eligibility evaluators to provide a safe space for sharing concerns.

Conclusion

From those initial interactions on the phone to schedule the evaluation, entering their natural environment from a place of kindness in lieu of judgment is paramount to a continued journey of partnership through early intervention services. Evaluators serve as the first face of early intervention services. A warm smile, kind heart, empathy, and professionalism set the tone for the family and their continued interactions with early intervention. It is through these relationships, built with families beginning in early intervention, that foster the support for families needed to allow children and families to grow. These lived experiences are pivotal in navigating the journey of support and advocacy needed throughout the lifespan of children with disabilities.

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Biographical Information

Martha Howard

Martha Howard, PhD, is a Professor of Early Childhood Special Education at Tennessee Technological University. In addition to her teaching role, she serves as Faculty Liaison for the campus Child Development Lab and Executive Director of two grant funded programs, BRIDGES Early Intervention Resource and Milestones Evaluation Agencies.

Amy Callender

Amy Callender, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at Tennessee Technological University. As a previous P–12 special education teacher and school psychologist, Dr. Callender now teaches preservice teachers. She is also an executive director for Milestones Evaluation Agency serving children from birth to 3 years of age and their families.

20. INCREASING ACCESS TO SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Katherine Dockweiler and Roberta Kaufman

School of Education, Nevada State University

Katherine Dockweiler email: Katherine.Dockweiler@nevadastate.edu

Roberta Kaufman email: Roberta.Kaufman@nevadastate.edu

We have no conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Katherine Dockweiler

Nevada State University

1300 Nevada State Drive

Christensen Education Building Office 136

Henderson, Nevada 89002 USA

Research Background

School psychologists across the United States have seen the ratio of students to school psychologists increase over the years as has the mental health needs of students (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2021). Students, families, and educators are experiencing real crises and compound traumas (Maercker, 2021), and they benefit from the expertise school psychologists offer. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a 1:500 practitioner to student ratio, however, there are not enough school psychologists to meet this workforce demand (NASP, 2021). Acknowledging these expanding ratios and the needs of students has done little to formulate concrete, actionable solutions to address the sparsity of school psychologists.

Despite the need for more school psychologists to work with the PK–12 student population, recruitment, training, and retention efforts have not kept up with the demand. Communities across the United States are realizing belatedly that school psychologists play a critical role in comprehensive school-based mental health (SBMH) services in addition to their role as evaluators for special education programming. With the growing call for expanded SBMH services and supporting inclusion of persons with disabilities across the lifespan, facilitating those services came an increased understanding of the critical shortage of school psychologists (Santich, 2018).

The school psychologist shortage is complex, albeit not new. Insufficiency in the number of school psychologists has been reported for decades (Thomas, 2000). As early as the 1980s, concerns were voiced as to the need for more school psychologists (Fagan, 1988). The relationship of shortages to the expansion of services, professional regulations, gender and minority representation, and impending retirements has been known for years (Fagan, 2004).

Some of the issues associated with the lack of school psychologists are training and accreditation requirements, changing expectations associated with work responsibilities, increasingly high numbers of students who need academic or social emotional support, public understanding of SBMH professionals, socio-economic factors, and practitioner retirements (NASP, 2021). In addition to concrete explanations for why the shortage exists, there is evidence of role confusion associated with the profession. School psychologists' role is often confused with the roles of the other SBMH professionals, such as school counselors and social workers (Zabek et al., 2023).

Methods

Three research questions were examined by the authors in a two-part exploratory mixed methods study. First, how many states have adopted a 1:500 ratio for school psychologists in state policy? Second, what, if any, background knowledge do undergraduates and post baccalaureate students have as it relates to a career in school psychology at one Nevada institution? Third, at that same institution, are undergraduate or post baccalaureate students able to distinguish roles and responsibilities of school psychologists from other SBMH professionals?

Results

Three key findings emerged from this study. First, few states have adopted a 1:500 ratio for school psychologists. Establishing this goal at the state level will establish a consistent target for districts and create opportunities for pathways toward goal attainment. Second, the profession of school psychology should have a larger presence in educator preparation programs on higher education campuses. The educator audience is critically positioned within the school psychology pathway and could be better utilized to raise awareness of the profession. Third, role confusion exists surrounding the SBMH professions. Educators are not accessing these professionals to support students, and there is a lack of interest in the school psychology profession.

Discussion

The NASP (2021) recognizes the complexity of the shortages phenomenon and offers an extensive list of suggested strategies to support recruitment and retention. However, there is currently no guiding framework or approach to comprehensively address shortages in school psychology. In response to this need, the Active Recruitment, Training, and Educator Retention to serve our Youth (ARTERY) Pipeline framework was created (Dockweiler, 2019, 2023). The ARTERY serves as the framework for a new school psychology program at Nevada State University, which will train professionals who can help support students with disabilities. The ARTERY is a career ladder designed to offer stacked degree programs with a variety of entry and exit points to best serve the diverse needs of persons interested in becoming school psychologists. High school students, 2- or 4-year college students, working graduates, and graduate students all have an entry point within the ARTERY pipeline. This innovative framework focuses on a proactive and coordinated community, regional, and state approach to attract, train, and retain school psychologists, to address workforce needs and increase service delivery with students in PK–12 schools. This framework can be applied outside the United States as students from other countries would also benefit from having multiple entry and exit points into the school psychology profession where they can support students with disabilities.

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Biographical Information

Katherine Dockweiler

Dr. Dockweiler is an Assistant Professor of School Psychology at Nevada State University. She has authored three books, several articles, and is regularly invited to speak at state and national events on her policy research and the workforce development career framework that she created, the Active Recruitment, Training, and Educator Retention to serve our Youth (ARTERY) Pipeline framework for school psychologists.

Roberta Kaufman

Dr. Kaufman was a Special Education faculty member at Nevada State University for 11 years. Prior to that she taught and served as dean in universities in Minnesota and South Dakota. She has authored several books, articles and presented numerous papers. Along with Dr. Dockweiler, she helped initiate a school psychology graduate program.

21. REINTEGRATION OF WAR VICTIMS INTO SOCIETY IN UKRAINE: ROLE OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS

Olha A. Telna

Kharkiv Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy

Olha A. Telna email: Olga.tilna@gmail.com

I have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Kharkiv Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy

7 Rustavelli Lane

Kharkiv, Ukraine

Background

The role of education is hard to overestimate in any society but in the zones of active military conflicts it becomes crucial. Ukraine now is facing so many challenges that the most vulnerable war victims (veterans and civilians with disabilities) often remain unseen with their human rights and basic needs continuously neglected. This paper is intended to briefly analyze the role of special educators in effective reintegration of children and adults with serious health deterioration or disabilities obtained due to the war.

According to independent estimates, at least 1,156 children have been seriously injured as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine between the end of February 2022 and August 2023 (UNICEF, 2023), and now this figure is, obviously, even higher. The same media fact sheet reports that 6.5 million of Ukrainian children have been displaced from their homes either to other regions of the country or further abroad, and nearly all of them feel the need in mental health consultancy or psychological support (UNICEF, 2023). Children with a limb loss, contusion, sight/hearing loss, mental health deterioration, or heavy brain injuries face a number of challenges (a change of their lifestyle, prolonged medical treatment, social isolation, stigma and prejudice) and require professional intervention.

Special educators can help newly disabled children to get used to another reality in which they now have to live, to overcome physical, sensory and/or mental difficulties caused by current limitations, to assist the family in acquiring the right perception of disability and establish a “healthy relationship” with their children.

The second large category of the most vulnerable war victims in Ukraine is constituted by adult civilians with disabilities. The United Nation Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine reports that in mid-November 2023 there were over 18,500 seriously injured civilians who lost their health due to the Russian full-scale armed attack against Ukraine (HRMMU, 2023). This figure, though, is much higher now as hostilities go on and people get injured and disabled nearly every day. Most of those civilians are victims of shelling, bombardments, air strikes, and all kinds of explosives left in the ground. However, the newly disabled adult civilians are the hardest group of war victims to work with as many of them live on or very close to the frontline and are often reluctant to get evacuated (Balachuk, 2023).

Special educators could help these people effectively overcome a number of psychological barriers, teaching them to cope with less stress and more understanding, giving a variety of skills and strategies for independent living. However, my own experience suggests that not all adult civilians with newly obtained disabilities agree to work with a special educator or psychologist fearing social stigma and prejudice.

On the other hand, disabled veterans seem to be rather active in their will to reintegrate into society. Although there are no official statistics for the exact number of war veterans with disabilities in Ukraine, some public sector activists talk about the estimated figure of approximately 500.000, meaning that about a third of war veterans are likely to have injuries causing disability (Romandash, 2024). The national survey of social reintegration of veterans in Ukraine with a special focus on social inclusion has also indicated a high prevalence of disability and illnesses among war veterans. About 73% of its 500 respondents have reported sustaining an injury or illness directly related to their military duty, while 31% had been given a legal status of a disabled person (Kinsella et al., 2023).

According to another survey, conducted in September 2023, the top war veterans' concerns in civilian life include mental and emotional instability, health problems, inaccessibility of medical/social services, public spaces, and working places. The respondents also reported the following issues as "quite likely": family conflicts, unemployment, social prejudice, lack of understanding in the community, and substantial risk of alcoholism or drug addiction (Sociological Rating Group, 2023).

Recognizing these problems, special educators start working with the war veterans while they are still in hospital. Among the proposed services are: psycho emotional support, individual/group discussions of disability related issues, and individual training (PCs and mobile phone accessibility, special equipment for independent living, sign language, Braille, speech therapy, etc.). But such support is now given just in big cities, the centers of special education.

In conclusion, special educators in Ukraine provide a wide range of voluntary services intended to help reintegrate the most vulnerable war victims (children and adults with disabilities) into society. This work, however, is largely limited by lack of awareness in local communities and military actions that prevent further service distribution.

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Biographical Information

Olha Anatoliyivna Telna

Olha Anatoliyivna Telna, PhD, is an Associate Professor at Kharkiv Humanitarian-Pedagogical Academy in Ukraine. She is a university teacher and academic researcher with a particular interest in special and inclusive education, professional writer, translator, and disability movement activist.

22. INSIGHTS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPERTS TO SUPPORT THE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN

Iris M. Binyamini

(Visiting) Faculty of Medicine, Israel Institute of Technology (Technion) and

Department of Medical Social Work, Tel-Hay College, Israel

Iris M. Binyamini email: iris.manorbnyamini@gmail.com

Background

There is a growing recognition of the importance of, and contribution made by, special education services to preparing students with special needs (SWSN) for their transition into the community when they graduate (Beadle-Brown et al., 2023). The main goals of special education schools include preparing graduates for this transition and supporting them to use their full potential in it. However, little recent progress has been made toward reaching these goals for graduates with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs). This lack of improvement is worrying, especially given that those growing up with IDDs face challenges in their lives in areas, such as learning, decision-making, self-care, and independence (Boyle et al., 2011).

It is particularly challenging for the parents of students who graduate from special education schools and transition into the community due to uncertainty about their children's options, transition tasks, and the fact that the parents are older. Transition to community support services and entry of new professionals into parents and graduates' lives add further complexity (Rozalski et al., 2010). Parents report less professional support when their child leaves school, feelings of loss/abandonment (Patton et al., 2018), chronic pressures, significant therapeutic load, uncertainty, and a lack of preparation for their child's transition (Schultz et al., 2011).

Experts, particularly those working with IDDs in special education schools before transition to the community, have important knowledge about identifying the needs of adults, graduating with IDDs, knowing basic functions they can and cannot perform, and identifying their abilities to utilize their full potential. Therefore, they are significant partners in preparing graduates for the transition to the community (Zhou et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was twofold: to examine the effects of intervention programs on the integration of young people with

IDD after finishing special schools and to examine parents' perceptions of how schools contributed to preparing students to transition to the community.

Method

This long-term study was carried out between 2019 and 2023 at a special education school in central Israel for a population of children and adults with IDDs. In the study, the school's graduates were followed up on the subjects of living at their parents' houses or away from home, work and the workplace, leisure activities, and mobility and independence over a period of five years from the time they finished school. In addition, the parents of the graduates were interviewed from when their children finished school for a period of 5 years. In total, about 45 interviews were conducted. Thereafter, thematic content analysis was performed by the research team, who created a codebook and defined and identified examples for each code, category, and subcategory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Results and Discussion

A summary of the evidence-based insights gained during the research for professionals working in special education is given below. Insights into working with the students were*:*

1. The intervention programs offered at special schools have long-term effects on the post-graduation integration of individuals with IDDs in a variety of areas, namely, living in their parents' homes or outside the home, work and the workplace, leisure activities, and mobility and independence, during the 5 years after graduation.

2. Parents of students who have graduated from special schools are concerned about the independence, social lives, and leisure time of their adult children. The community lacks solutions for these concerns. During the research, information on these topics was collected from interviews with parents, and lists of employment/volunteering places, leisure-time occupations,

and frameworks that care for graduates with special needs transitioning to the community were prepared. These lists enable staff to make recommendations to parents on these issues.

3. Throughout the study period, the parents praised the efforts of the school and staff to prepare the students for the transition to the community on graduation. At the same time, in retrospect, they noted it was important to teach the students certain things before graduation, so they are ready to function independently and be employed in the community, including being introduced to public transportation and organizations such as healthcare providers. The parents also emphasized that learning at school should be practical and experiential.

4. Parents indicated several subjects as significant for learning at school, namely, useful mathematics (e.g., handling money, budget management, secret code, pay slips); learning how to use cell phones, computers, and applications; learning how to behave in the community, with an emphasis on independence at home (e.g., preparing light meals and doing laundry); and some social education, such as teaching initiatives and the importance of marital relationships. In conclusion, parents of graduates have valuable knowledge for experts and school staff.

Insights into working with parents were:

1. It is important that the school initiates meetings between parents of graduated students and parents of students in their last 2 years of school.

2. It is important the school informs parents of students in the last 2 years of school about a variety of continued employment frameworks and outside-the-home housing options.

3. A preparation procedure for separation from school should begin in the last 2 school years and include meetings to give parents info and support from parents of graduated students.

4. It is important to prepare a tailored individual education plan (IEP) for the student of each parent that is a transition plan to the community.

5. A marker goal is one the parent implements at home while the student is at school. The goal is annual, determined with the parent, and implemented during the student's schooling.

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Biographical Information

Iris Manor Binyamini

Iris Manor Binyamini's research sits at the intersection between culture, disability, and illness, studying both Western and non-Western cultural contexts. Her main academic interests are: coping of parents and siblings of children with disabilities and illness in different culture groups, patient (children and family) experiences, and collaboration between interprofessional teams and family and parents in support services.

23. SUPPORTING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS AND LEARNING STRATEGIES USING THE ROPRATEM PROGRAM

Zuzana Bílková and Zuzana Štefánková

Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice

Zuzana Bílková email: bilkova@pf.jcu.cz

Zuzana Štefánková email: stef@pf.jcu.cz

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Zuzana Bílková

University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice

Pedagogická fakulta

Jeronýmova 10

37115 České Budějovice, CZ

The Intervention Program ROPRATEM

The intervention program ROPRATEM is designed for children who need to improve their work organization and work pace (work tempo) skills. ROPRATEM is the abbreviation for *ROzvoj PRacovního TEmpa* ("work pace development" in English), indicating that the program specifically targets these two aspects of performance. However, reduced work pace can be caused by different types of deficits and impairments. Various studies have shown that reduced or fluctuating work pace may not be due to reduced psychomotor pace. More often, it results from a combination of sub-deficits, such as executive functioning deficit in working memory or attention-switching ability, or deficit of visuomotor coordination (Kofler et al., 2019; Miyake et al., 2000). This program is, therefore, based on a wide range of tasks that focus on: (a) ability to process data faster and without errors, (b) reading comprehension, (c) ability to organize work, (d) concentration and attention, (e) visual discrimination, (f) visual memory, (g) auditory memory, (h) intermodality, (i) seriality, (j) visuospatial orientation, (k) graphomotor and visuomotor coordination, (l) self-control, and (m) managing errors.

ROPRATEM is designed as a 3-month program based on pencil-paper worksheets. The child is expected to work every day and produce one worksheet. The time taken to complete each exercise and the time taken to check the exercises is measured. By asking guiding questions, the parent encourages the child to be aware of the strategies they are using to check their work and consider which strategies are effective. It is designed for children from 9 years old up.

Our study focused on three main questions:

1. What is this program's efficiency level in school and work pace?
2. Which specific processes and functions have changed?

3. What is the effect of this program on executive functioning, (a question of particular interest).

Method

The study was designed as quasi-experimental research. We investigated differences in the experimental group's performance in three areas of cognitive functioning related to work pace: attention, working memory, and memory learning before and after completing the ROPRATEM program. We focused on comparing the differences in performance over time (after 3 months) between the experimental group (which completed the ROPRATEM program) and the control group (which did not complete the ROPRATEM program). A smaller proportion of the experimental group also completed a second posttest about 4 to 6 months after finishing the program. Both groups completed the same set of tests consisting of:

1. Trail-Making Test for Children (TMT)—Czech edition (Preiss & Preiss, 2006)—standardized method measures, psychomotor tempo, and working memory.
2. Numeric Square (Jirásek, 1992)—measures the concentration of attention over time, level of information reception and processing, alertness, spatial orientation and visual perception, executive attention, and working memory.
3. Auditory Verbal Learning Test (AVLT)—Czech edition (Preiss, 1999)—standardized method measures short-term verbal memory and learning process (ability to remember and recall verbal material).
4. Two check worksheets (four exercises) from the ROPRATEM program were used as input and output check tasks.

In the pretest, participants completed the four tasks mentioned above. We also collected qualitative data on their anamnesis and diagnosed deficits and difficulties in school performance.

In the first posttest after 3 months (just after finishing the program), the same set of tests was completed, along with a qualitative assessment of the child's progress from the perspective of the parent, child, special educator, and teacher (e.g., improvement of school performance and self-regulation in learning).

Participants

The experimental group was composed of 39 probands (23 boys and 16 girls). The pupils were aged 10.8 years on average. In the control group, complete data were obtained for 26 pupils (18 boys and 8 girls) with an average age of 12.5 years. The sample is slightly dominated by boys (experimental group 59%, control group 69%). The probands in the control group were, on average, 1.7 years older. We offered the possibility of completing the program after the posttest to the participants from a control group.

Results

Due to the small sample size, statistical analyses were performed with Welch's t-tests for two independent samples. We observed a significant difference in performance improvement between the experimental and control groups in the Numeric Square test. Response times were convincingly and significantly longer in the experimental group before the intervention. We consider the improvement in the experimental group to be slightly greater. Also, in checklist exercises, the experimental group improved more.

In the TMT, both the experimental and control groups' response times improved. The rate of improvement was almost identical in both groups.

In AVLT, the experimental group achieved better results in both measurements. However, the trend of improving performance was the same in both groups, so there was no significant effect of the program.

Conclusions

When considering the qualitative data, it is concluded that the program has an effect on the quality of attention and performance in longer tasks, mainly because children have adopted more effective work strategies, i.e., improved executive functioning. It is likely that this achievement is important for better quality of school work. In short-term tasks, the work pace did not change significantly, probably because there was no improvement in working memory capacity. Results are limited by the small sample size and slight imbalance in sample characteristics.

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Biographical Information

Zuzana Bílková

Bílková, PhD, is a psychologist and special educator currently at the Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia. Her current research interests include executive functions, neurodevelopmental disorders, and parental stress.

Zuzana Štefánková

Štefánková, PhD, is a psychologist currently at the Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia. Her current research interests include executive functions and school psychology.

24. ART AS INCLUSIVE PRACTICE: ENGAGING CANADIAN REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES

Susan Barber and Robert Williamson

Simon Fraser University

Susan Barber, email: Susan_Barber@sfu.ca

Robert Williamson, email: Robert_Williamson@sfu.ca

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Simon Fraser University

8888 University Drive

Burnaby, BC, Canada V5A 1S6

Background

Although Canada has much lower numbers of unaccompanied minor refugees (UMR) compared to migrant children in the European Union, the main challenges begin in Canada after children enter schools. Lacking a sense of belonging may be the greatest barrier facing refugee children with disabilities (RCDs) and may prevent them from adjusting to school, finding safety and envisioning a positive, hybrid identity in the school community. Here, teachers play a pivotal role when they are intentional about facilitating social encounters and learning activities that are recognized as good practices in inclusive education.

A major flaw in this plan, however, is that most newcomer children have not yet acquired adequate English to communicate with peers, and may require 3–10 years to become fluent at an academic level. The danger is that many RCDs idle in a year-long "silent phase," which may block them from making friends and finding meaning in school.

Our study begins here, at the moment of arrival, and explores using art in multiple ways that could eliminate lost educational time for new RCDs, as well as for other immigrants. We begin with an overview of the research conducted in a highly multicultural area in Western Canada. The first author will focus on a series of art workshops that were employed with students aged 7–9 in two classrooms with their two teachers, where half the students were refugees and only two children of the total 49 were fluent in English. The second author will provide an analysis of the outcomes of the art workshops through the lens of inclusion and the strengths they offer. The goal was to explore how art might encourage more inclusion because it allows students to begin communicating through visual symbols instead of verbal language.

Just as human rights have evolved over time, the public has embraced moral philosophies that bring greater equity to disadvantaged students. The 1951 United Nations Refugee

Convention highlighted refugees' right to protection, followed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) that established equal rights for people with disabilities. Further, the concept of "inclusion" arises in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), and is later developed in the Salamanca Statement, which spurred international support for inclusion. From here, it is an easy step to a feminist ethic of care in its philosophical form, but can also be applied to politics writ large (Noddings, 2012).

When children are engaged with the arts, there are a range of benefits, such as developing thinking skills, self-confidence, self-awareness, positive emotions and literacy and language acquisition (Jindal-Snape et al., 2018). However, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) interferes with the concentration required to learn and retain knowledge. Being "scared speechless" blocks the brain's ability to form a narrative that would move the memory from the emotion-driven amygdala to the more reflective central cortex. Yet, making art in their regular classroom with peers avoids calling attention to the stigma of needing treatment. Teachers are not therapists and should not be trying to "read" their students' artwork. Rather, the "therapy" occurs just by letting RCDs spend time creatively engaged (Malchiodi, 2015), where under their control, they can slowly release bad memories.

Research

Research questions, therefore, are the following:

1. What are the experiences of RCDs, in terms of inclusion and engagement with education through the arts?
2. How do inclusive art practices impact RCDs' English language skills and mental health?

The first author's choice of methods aimed to blend the goals of arts education, art therapy and art pedagogies to achieve greater effect. Five arts education and art therapy methods with 49 children were implemented and evaluated, using self-portraits, story-read-alouds, paperbag puppets, digital stories, and photovoice. Parents' consent for their children was received through the school's translation into their first languages. No names or identifying materials are given.

The main goal of the study was to uncover the hidden "knowledge of self and others" within children (Barone & Eisner, 2012) by raising emotional awareness through making art. Activities began with literacy, social emotional learning, or a game that led up to art-making. The most essential data, however, were the photographs of the students' art work and how they expressed themselves, especially in the set of second self-portraits.

Findings

Findings reveal that over time, students undergo noticeable changes in their cognitive and affective understandings with exposure to art, and improve their language ability, self-esteem and wellbeing. No child here wanted to be left out, possibly because they found making art fun, yet they were clearly, and inclusively, learning a great deal together about a range of subjects.

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Biographical Information

Susan Barber

Dr. Barber is a Senior Lecturer, Simon Fraser University and has a PhD and master's degree in Arts Education/Curriculum Theory & Implementation and a Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology. She focuses research on art and literacy. Using transdisciplinary methods, she investigates how educators can assist refugees to Canada through art, a universal language that facilitates communication.

Robert Williamson

Dr. Williamson is an Associate Professor, Simon Fraser University and has a PhD in Instruction and Curriculum Leadership: Special Education. His research focuses on including all peoples in all aspects of life. Currently, he is examining the educational experiences of children with disabilities (and their families) within forced migration/refugee contexts.

25. DISTANCE EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PERIOD FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

Marie Kocurová

University of West Bohemia

Marie Kocurová email: kocurova@kpg.zcu.cz

I have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

University of West Bohemia

Univerzitní 2732/8

301 00 Pilsen

Czech Republic

Background and Framework

This paper provides information from an empirical study about distance education of pupils with specific learning disabilities during the COVID-19 closure of schools. Pupils with specific learning and behavioral disorders are numerically the largest group among pupils with special educational needs in the Czech Republic.

During the COVID period, after a logical initial period of improvisation, the school system was partially stabilized in September 2020 with the publication of the Methodology For Distance Education, which set the legal, organizational, and pedagogical principles of distance education and was supposed to help schools in setting rules for the transition to distance education. The characteristics of distance education in the monitored period attracted the attention of research. Among the more extensive ones was an investigation by the Czech School Inspectorate (2021). This study concluded that the closure of schools due to COVID had no significant effect on the mastery of the curriculum. Smaller ones such as research by Starek and Koubkova Pavlu (2021) looked at the issue of effectiveness of distance education from a digital perspective of literacy of participating teachers. Therefore, the goal of this research project was the description and analysis of the educational situation associated with the solution to the pandemic crisis when a distance and hybrid form of compulsory education was implemented.

Methods

The researchers used a questionnaire consisting of 20 questions, mostly based on Likert scales. The research collected data from more than 200 primary schools from 3,259 pupils, of whom 24% had a specific disorder and 76% were without a disorder. The main research goal was to identify the progress, advantages, and risks of distance education of pupils with specific disorders, and to find differences in the attitudes of the two monitored groups. It further explored how pupils with specific learning disabilities and behavioral disabilities coped with specific educational situations. The research problem was addressed by six research questions.

Results

Research Question #1

The first research question asked how students evaluate distance education in general. We found a contradictory overall evaluation of the distance education period. Participating respondents were happy to join online classes and appreciated lower stress in teaching. But overall distance learning did not suit them, and they considered it less advantageous. The anonymity of distance education was also evaluated inconclusively, with diverse results.

Research Question #2

The second research question asked how do students evaluate their results during distance education? The results showed that the respondents reported better school results, even though they realized that they learned less during online teaching.

Research Question #3

The third research question asked how students evaluate the conditions of distance education? The answers to several questions showed a favorable assessment of study materials' accessibility and respect for pupils' individual needs. However, the offer of individual teacher consultations and assistant support to pupils was assessed as insufficient. The answers regarding whether students learn better at home than in the classroom were ambiguous and varied.

Research Question #4

The fourth research question asked how students evaluate their implementation of distance education. Respondents reported positively on their ability to independently organize their studies and on the support from their parents. Diverse and therefore ambiguous, were opinions about students' cooperation and ability to take notes from lessons. According to the respondents, the implementation of distance education was complicated by problems with technology and network connection.

Research Question #5

The fifth research question asked how students evaluate teachers' approaches in the era of distance education? Statements show a preponderance of positive evaluations of teachers' approaches to distance education. Given that the questionnaire, despite being anonymous, was carried out by pedagogues, one must look at the clarity of the statement with a little skepticism. The overall positive evaluation of the pedagogical approach must be confronted with the responses that the majority of respondents did not have individual consultations with teachers.

Research Question #6

The final research question asked how do the statements of students with a specific learning disability differ from those without a disability in the above-mentioned five areas? Answers to this question represent a key area of results. Differences were observed in all items, but an important finding is that the differences between the monitored groups only related to a few items such as the ability to self-organize, the perception of distracting factors in the classroom, consultations with teachers, and the help of parents and teaching assistants**.**

Very favorable news is the perception of a lower level of stress during distance learning in both observed groups, with predominance in the students with a specific disorder. However, we see an unfavorable report in the significant absence of the help of a teaching assistant.

Conclusion

The inclusion of pupils with a specific learning disability has several characteristics and these pupils represent an atypical group of individuals with special needs. They are close to the general population in terms of relatively mild disabilities, and have relatively late manifestation of the disorder (until school age). They are mostly spontaneously integrated, and teachers tend to be quite well prepared for their education.

The successful integration of pupils with specific learning disabilities can also be deduced from small differences in the observed attitudes of both groups during distance education. The results of the research showed that both groups of students had a similar and mostly negative evaluation of distance learning, although they reported better school results and less stress than with the face-to-face form. Pupils with a specific disorder appreciated the lower noise and greater anonymity of distance learning, but they lacked the necessary assistant support and individual consultation with teachers.

The period of distance education, which was very demanding for all participating pupils, teachers and parents, brought a number of special requirements for competence and technical provision of teaching and showed the importance of the often neglected social aspects of the school. It can be assumed that repairing this damage will be more difficult than supplementing deficiencies in the curriculum. This could be a subject for further research investigations.

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Biographical Information

Marie Kocurová

Marie Kocurová, PhD, has been teaching at universities in the Czech Republic for 30 years. Her work deals with specific learning disabilities, education of pupils with special educational needs and teacher education. She participated in designing the counseling system at universities in the Czech Republic.

26. LESSONS LEARNED: SUPPORTING CULTURALLY COMPLEX STUDENTS WITHIN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

Niayesh PazokiMoakhar, Susan Barber, and Robert L. Williamson

Simon Fraser University

Niayesh PazokiMoakhar email: niayesh_pazoki_moakhar@sfu.ca

Susan Barber email: susan_barber@sfu.ca

Robert L. Williamson email: robert_williamson@sfu.ca

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Simon Fraser University

8888 University Drive

Burnaby, BC, Canada V5A 1S6

Background

In a complex world, increasing conflict contributes to global instability leading to a time of unprecedented dislocation and migration. Currently, approximately 110 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide (UNHCR, 2024). As nations receive diverse populations, integrating them into education systems poses challenges, especially for displaced children with disabilities (Culbertson & Constant, 2015).

In 2020, an international research team, supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (890-2020-0136), began studying the educational experiences of refugee children with disabilities. Within this research, art was chosen as a language neutral form of data that offered a way to capture participant experiences in a trauma-informed, organic, and individualized manner. The arts offered a practical means of expression for individuals with communication differences that allowed child participants to convey thoughts independently, particularly when verbal communication may be challenging due to disability (Mulongo et al., 2021). Last, using the arts allowed individuals control over what could be an expression of traumatic events. This proved to be a trauma-informed approach to obtaining data within this highly diverse, complex, and vulnerable population (Gil Schwartzberg et al., 2021).

While implementing the arts-based data collection procedures, the researchers observed an unexpected impact on inclusive teaching. The arts facilitated increased student engagement with each other and the project. This prompted the researchers to ask: What is it about the creation of art that may contribute to teaching methods that transcend the challenges of teaching significantly diverse students from complex backgrounds? One case, presented here as an example, highlights the insights observed by the researchers.

The “puppet project” involved elementary age students in a Canadian classroom creating “puppet” representations of themselves. The classroom was highly diverse, including students with various linguistic backgrounds, abilities, disabilities (physical and cognitive), and educational backgrounds (including refugee experiences from multiple countries). Teachers faced challenges in overcoming language, culture, and trauma barriers while teaching in this setting. However, during the research-oriented art-based data collection, researchers and teachers noted that the project increased natural engagement between students in ways other modalities had not.

Researchers also noted that the art projects resonated with the core tenets of universal design for learning (UDL), a framework for enhancing universal accessibility in lesson design. UDL proposes providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression in educational experiences (Ralabate, 2016) and this is aligned with the puppet project. For representation, the project offered a variety of materials for puppet creation, allowing each student to select materials aligned with their preferences and abilities. This approach transcended linguistic, physical, and cognitive barriers, enabling students to access materials through varied modalities tailored to their needs. The project also fostered collaborative interactions among students, promoting inclusive participation and nuanced understanding of project objectives. Students engaged with the task while navigating linguistic and intercultural complexities, echoing the UDL principle of multiple means of engagement.

The puppet project served as a conduit for student expression, enabling students to articulate their self-expression despite cultural differences and communication barriers. Through puppet creation, students transcended traditional modes of expression, collaborating to understand and communicate their thoughts, feelings, and understandings in a manner that resonated with their capabilities. The project allowed for personalized learning journeys, with students navigating the creative process according to their unique strengths and challenges. In doing so, the project aligned with the ethos of UDL, advocating for flexibility, inclusivity, and equity in educational practices.

The puppet project exemplifies how arts-based approaches can foster inclusive practices in education. By embracing diversity, promoting engagement, facilitating expression, and offering flexible learning pathways, the project showcased the transformative potential of UDL in creating enriching educational experiences for all learners. This exemplar is one of many similar findings in Canada and other locations (Jordan and Kazakhstan), highlighting the need for educators to rethink lesson designs to accommodate increasingly diverse classrooms worldwide. Findings of this project point to UDL representing one existing framework that can support the alignment of inclusive teaching practices with the needs of this growing, complex, and diverse student population.

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Biographical Information

Niayesh PazokiMoakhar

Niayesh PazokiMoakhar is a doctoral candidate at Simon Fraser University, Canada, focusing on educational support for displaced refugee children. She explores arts-based futures planning for complex refugee children.

Susan Barber

Dr. Susan Barber, Senior Lecturer at Simon Fraser University, Canada, researches teaching and learning through narrative, creative writing, and literacy, particularly focusing on assisting new refugees in Canada using qualitative and arts-based research.

Robert Williamson

Dr. Robert Williamson, Associate Professor of Inclusive Education at Simon Fraser University, Canada, focuses on equitable education in complex contexts. His community-driven projects emphasize practical applications and social validity, using mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches.

27. TEACHING AND LEARNING: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN WAR TIME

Nadiia Datso

Vyhoda Special School of Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Council

Nadiia Datso email: nadia.datso@gmail.com

I have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Vyhoda Special School of Ivano-Frankivsk regional council

7 D.Galytskogo street, Vyhoda Town

Kalush district, Ivano-Frankivsk region, Ukraine 77552

Challenges the War in Ukraine has Created for Children with Special Educational Needs

The war in Ukraine has created many challenges for the education system. All students suffer from the hostilities. They have lost their chance for a quality education, and students with special educational needs have lost many times more. Students suffer from destroyed educational institutions, forced relocation, distance learning and classes in shelters. Students with special educational needs often do not have access to a shelter. The quality of correctional and rehabilitation services has deteriorated as services are often absent or limited due to the lack of correctional teachers, who have gone abroad, and loss of already acquired skills. Deterioration of the psychological state of children with special educational needs and lack of quality and timely psychological assistance, including psychologists working with post-traumatic stress disorders, are also major problems. The number of Ukrainian children who lose their arms, legs, eyesight, and hearing as a result of shelling and explosions is growing. So, it should be taken into account that the number of Ukrainian students with special educational needs will increase significantly. These students need a completely new approach as their life experience is usually more terrible than that of adults. Even teachers who work in inclusive schools do not yet know how to teach and educate such children. Given the territories under occupation and the ongoing hostilities, the exact number of children affected is still unknown (Markovska (Buleiko), M., 2023)

Problems educating students with special educational needs differ throughout Ukraine. In areas where active hostilities are taking place, in recently liberated territories, or territories that are still occupied, the biggest problems at the basic level are domestic – lost or damaged homes; no internet access; missing or damaged hearing aids, wheelchairs, correctional aids, computer equipment; no medical care; and no education at all.

In addition to these basic problems, there is also a lack of access to assistive technologies.

Children with special educational needs often fled the fighting with their parents, packing their belongings in a hurry, and lost basic and necessary personal things, e.g., wheelchairs, devices, Braille books, and other individual learning aids. During distance learning, children with special educational needs who study in inclusive classes are mostly excluded from the educational process. They have no connection with the teacher's assistant; they cannot join the lessons, and they often need much more time and support. In this case, the individual development program and individual curriculum are not fully implemented. Provision of correctional and developmental services is complicated; often they are not available, causing a regression in students' development. Most of these services cannot be provided remotely. For example, a rehabilitation therapist or Braille teacher cannot work online. Daily work with children with special educational needs yields results; when there is no systematic work, developmental regression and a setback in skills and abilities quickly occur (Markovska (Buleiko), M., 2023).

Children with various disabilities in Ukraine experience different difficulties. For example, every child with an autism spectrum disorder suffers from changes in routines, schedules, and rearrangements of furniture at home or school. It is hard to even imagine what they feel when they become displaced—danger all around, a road that is not clear to them, a new place, new people and rooms. A basic sense of security is lost. This can shock a child with autism, leading to emotional breakdowns or bouts of aggression (Miroshnikova, A. 2022).

Another major problem is psychological assistance. Frankly, all children who have lived in war have suffered psychological trauma. There are a limited number of psychologists who can work with childhood trauma, and there are no psychologists who can work with children with special educational needs who have suffered war trauma. Parents are left alone with these challenges and often need psychological support themselves (SavED, 2024).

Among those children who have not suffered physically are manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder that require more than psychological support. One example is so-called mutism—a child who used to talk but is no longer able to after psychological trauma, though there are no physical obstacles to this. This condition can last for months and years, so teachers will have to work with students with this condition. And previous experience can be misleading. For example children with mutism should not be approached with direct questions, provoked to speak, or asked to complete sentences, as is usually done with children with speech impairments. Such attention often increases anxiety and makes the children close up even more. There is also constant expectation of bad things, irritability, bouts of aggression, excessive fright from sudden stimuli (knocking, slamming), emotional detachment, decreased interest in life (and more so in learning), psychosomatic manifestations (headaches, stomachaches), apathy, chronic fatigue, and risk of suicide attempts and self-destructive behavior. Students' memory and concentration may deteriorate sharply, and their self-confidence may drop such that they do not even undertake familiar tasks (Ministry of Education of Ukraine, 2023).

Tips to Overcome Students' Challenges

To overcome all these challenges, we have looked to a number of tips from colleagues from other countries. In particular, Waklin (2016) suggests that:

1. Children with special needs caused by war require more sensitivity. Compared to those who have had certain physical features from childhood, they may not self-identify, for example, as a person in a wheelchair. Careless words from classmates can cause trauma; this should be prevented by explanatory work with peers and parents.
2. Children who have been wounded and experienced the horrors of war are much more sympathetic than other children with special educational needs, but perceiving

themselves as victims is not what these students want. The fact that they are survivors who emerged victorious from the situation should be emphasized.

3. If children with special educational needs cannot work in class due to psychological trauma, they should have the opportunity to talk individually and at will about their feelings and thoughts that interfere with their studies.
4. A sense of security is crucial. It is created and given a sense of control through daily routines led by teachers (morning circle, joint lunch, classroom decoration, etc.).
5. There is a phenomenon of post-traumatic growth: such children are psychologically older than peers and have freed up resources that allow them to develop actively. With support, they hopefully can prove themselves and return to a more or less safe life.

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Biographical Information

Nadiia Orestivna Datso

Nadiia Orestivna Datso is a Special Educator and Deputy Director at Vyhoda Special School of Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Council (secondary boarding school for visually impaired students), a member of the Ukrainian Association of Correctional Educators, and Director of the charitable fund “Step into Life.”

28. CAREER GUIDANCE AND LIFE SKILLS TRAINING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Elia B. Dyitege

Mountain Of Joy Foundation (MJF)

Elia Balagilije Dyitege email: eliadyitege95@gmail.com; info@mountainofjoyfoundation.org

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Mountain of Joy Foundation

Arusha-Tanzania

Background

Youth with disabilities often encounter unique challenges in accessing career guidance and developing essential life skills necessary for their personal and professional growth. The Mountain of Joy Foundation (MJF) recognized this gap and implemented a specialized program to address these needs. This paper presents the proceedings of the career guidance and life skills training program conducted at MJF.

Program Overview

Objectives

The primary objectives of the program were to:

1. Provide tailored career guidance to youth with disabilities.
2. Equip participants with essential life skills necessary for personal and professional development.
3. Empower participants to overcome barriers and pursue their career aspirations with confidence.

Methodology

The program employed a multi-faceted approach to achieve its objectives:

1. Needs assessment: A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted to identify the specific career aspirations and challenges faced by participants.
2. Curriculum development: Based on the needs assessment, a customized curriculum was developed, incorporating modules on career exploration, resume writing, interview skills, communication, and self-advocacy.
3. Training delivery: The program consisted of interactive workshops, one-on-one coaching sessions, guest lectures, and experiential learning activities. Qualified trainers and guest

speakers with expertise in disability inclusion and career development facilitated the sessions.

4. Participant engagement: Participants were actively engaged through group discussions, role-plays, case studies, and hands-on activities to enhance learning and skill acquisition.
5. Monitoring and evaluation: Continuous monitoring and evaluation were conducted throughout the program to assess participant progress and gather feedback for improvement.

Outcomes

The program yielded several positive outcomes:

1. Increased career awareness: Participants gained a deeper understanding of various career options and pathways available to them, enabling them to make informed decisions about their future.
2. Enhanced life skills: Participants developed essential life skills such as communication, problem-solving, time management, and decision-making, improving their overall employability and independence.
3. Improved self-confidence: Participants reported increased self-confidence and self-esteem, empowering them to advocate for themselves and pursue their career goals with determination.
4. Community engagement: The program fostered a sense of community among participants, providing them with a supportive network of peers and mentors for ongoing guidance and encouragement.

5. Transition to employment: Several participants successfully transitioned to employment or further education opportunities following the completion of the program, demonstrating tangible outcomes in terms of career advancement.

Conclusions

The career guidance and life skills training program at Mountain of Joy Foundation has proven to be a valuable intervention for youth with disabilities, addressing their unique needs and empowering them to navigate the challenges of career development. The positive outcomes achieved underscore the importance of tailored interventions in promoting the inclusion and empowerment of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

Biographical Information

Elia Balagilije Dyitege

Elia Balagilije Dyitege, MSEd, is the founder and Director of Mountain of Joy Foundation (MJF) in Arusha, Tanzania. With a master’s degree in Special Education (autism spectrum disorders) from the University of Dodoma (Udom) (2019), Dyitege previously served with Compassion International. Dedicated to empowering youth with disabilities, Dyitege established MJF to provide tailored support and opportunities for their development.

29. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION REQUIRES A PROFOUND SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

Jozef Miškolci

Institute for Research in Inclusive Education, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University

Jozef Miškolci email: jmiskolci@ped.muni.cz

I have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:
Institute for Research in Inclusive Education, Faculty of Education
Masaryk University
Poříčí 623/7, 603 00 Brno
Czech Republic

Defining Inclusive Education

This study highlights the transdisciplinary overlap of the field of inclusive education (IE) with other fields of humanities and social sciences through a critical literature review. The study scrutinises a selection of articles published in the *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, as the most cited journal in IE (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2022). Out of the 1,293 articles published in the journal between 2013 and 2023, we identified 29 articles specifically focusing on political, sociological, or theoretical themes. This selection was supplemented by additional sources most frequently referenced in the originally selected articles. The study provides insights about the social and political changes required for schools to implement IE in a lasting manner.

Despite the global expansion of IE as a scholarly field within educational sciences, and as an international human rights project, there is no consensus on the definition of IE. In this study, we define IE as the successful meeting of the social and educational needs of all children in mainstream schools, i.e., not only children with diagnosed special educational needs or disabilities (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). The research in the field of IE can be categorised into individual and class (micro-level), school and school district/community (meso-level), and state, society, and theory (macro-level). The micro-level focuses on individuals in the classroom, including students, teachers, and support staff, examining their attitudes, teaching methods supporting IE, teachers' self-efficacy, and educational outcomes. The meso-level considers the entire school, with an emphasis on creating inclusive environments. The macro-level analysis focuses on the state and society's role in IE, connecting societal values, national and international educational policies, and their impact on schools, classrooms, and students. This study aims to delve deeper into the macro-level analysis to explore the barriers faced by education stakeholders in implementing IE despite explicit support from state policies or legal frameworks.

Ongoing Deficit Based Perception of Students

Dominant societal discourses, such as the medical model of disability, shape and are shaped by educational policies, influencing how teachers perceive and interact with various students (Qu, 2022). This model sees the “problem” in the child and assumes that only medical, psychological or special education expertise can address these “deficits.” In contrast, the social model of disability separates physical impairment from socially constructed disability. It argues that disability is not a product of physical impairment but a social act of discrimination (Florian, 2017). The special education approach is based on a logic of exclusion, where differentiated support is provided for some children, reproducing their social exclusion.

The selected articles in IE advocate for a radical shift in the education system, moving away from viewing IE as a technical problem solvable by partial measures. They call for a comprehensive political and social transformation. This change involves a critical reflection of power relations and injustices in education (Slee, 2013). It requires rejecting the oversimplified explanation of children's failure in education through deficit labels of special education (Andrews et al., 2021). The goal of IE is not to provide specialised intervention for an individual’s difficulties in a segregated environment, but to extend the availability of support to every child in the learning community of a regular class. The radical social change is thus the acceptance of diversity as a practice imperative for all school staff (Florian, 2017).

Ongoing Conflict: Striving for Competitive Excellence and Inclusion

IE values clash with neoliberal values of competitiveness and excellence. Countries have reformed their education systems for efficiency and cost reduction, leading to the rise of non-state schools and standardised student testing (Hedegaard-Soerensen & Grumloese, 2020). This puts pressure on schools to act like profit-oriented companies, reducing students to test results. The neoliberal emphasis on competition and efficiency can create an educational environment that inadvertently excludes students who do not fit into the defined “norm.” This conflict of agendas has a significant impact on everyday practice in classrooms and schools and becomes a major obstacle in the successful implementation of IE, which is very detrimental for students with special educational needs (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023).

Changing How We Think

The selected articles advocate a profound change in how we think about the world, society, and our place in it (Ballard, 2013). This shift also involves challenging societal values that perpetuate inequality and exclusion, such as the neoliberal values of competition and individualism, or a deficit lens on students. Instead, we should promote values of equality, respect for diversity, compassion, community, and sustainability. This requires a collective effort and commitment to social change that extends beyond the field of education and permeates all aspects of political and social life. It is about rethinking our values, and practices to create a society that truly respects and values diversity (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023).

In summary, achieving IE is not just about policy changes. It necessitates a fundamental collective shift in values, prioritising equity, diversity, and respect over competition, to dismantle barriers to inclusion and foster a truly inclusive society.

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Biographical Information

Jozef Miškolci

Jozef Miškolci earned his PhD from the University of Sydney, Australia in 2014. His research interests include inclusive education, comparative education systems, education policy, inclusive teaching methods and well-being in education. He has worked in the non-profit sector, government, and academia.

30. REAL SITUATION OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS' LIVES

Minh Ha T. Le[1] and Nga T. Hoàng[2]

[1]Van Lang University

[2]Ho Chi Minh City University of Education

Minh Ha T. Le Email: lethiminhha@yahoo.com

Conceptual Framework and Background

According to the results of the 2016 national survey on persons with disabilities conducted by the General Statistics Office (2018), by the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, there were 6,199,048 persons with disabilities living in households throughout Vietnam, including 663,964 children aged 2–17. There are 5 million families with persons with disabilities, with over three-quarters of these families living in rural areas. Persons with disabilities have needs in terms of healthcare, education, employment, and social assistance.

This article analyzes and evaluates the current situation of teachers and parents in caring for and supporting persons with disabilities. It also examines the impact of these works on their personal and family lives, their efforts to overcome challenges in their works, as well as their lives.

Research

We surveyed 77 teachers who provide support to persons with disabilities and 103 parents of children with disabilities. This is a cross-sectional study using a convenient sampling method with quantitative research methods. The questionnaire in Google Form was sent out to the parents and teachers. Their personal information was confidential. SPSS 22.0 was chosen for data processing.

Results

Teachers

The research results on teachers show that supporting persons with disabilities (PWDs) is very challenging. Eighty-five point seven percent of teachers reported facing many difficulties in this work. The difficulties are ranked as follows: teaching vocational/life skills (33.8%), followed by caregiving and teaching life skills (15.6%), and teaching academics and life skills (14.3%).

The study also found that teachers have to dedicate a significant amount of time to supporting PWDs. Forty point three percent of teachers support PWDs for over 8 hours per day, while 40.3% of them work for 7–8 hours, 2.6% work for 6–7 hours, 5.2% work for 5–6 hours, and 11.7% work for 4–5 hours per day. Additionally, there is a strong correlation between the number of hours teachers spend supporting PWDs and the number of hours they spend on household chores (Phi=.56; Sig=.016). As a result, 19.5% of teachers neglected household chores for a whole week, 13% neglected them for over 3 days, 18.2% neglected them for 2–3 days, and 20.8% neglected them for 1 day.

The number of hours spent supporting PWDs also affects teachers families; 23.4% of teachers stated that they do not have time to take care of their families, 14.3% of teachers are at low income but do not have time to work extra to increase their income, and 15.6% are too tired to do household chores. Due to exhaustion, teachers cannot take care of themselves, leading to 28.6% of teachers reporting physical health issues such as back pain, muscle pain, joint pain, or headaches, dizziness, etc., and 10.4% of teachers experiencing mental health issues such as stress, irritability, etc. (Phi=.689; Sig=.000). However, the teachers’ income is not high. According to their own assessment, only 8.7% of teachers have above-average income, 71.8% have average income, and 19.4% of teachers have below-average income.

Parents

Research on parents shows that 57.3% of parents live in families with 3–4 people, including PWDs, 33.0% of families have 5–6 people, 6.8% of families have 7–8 people, and 2.9% of families have 9–10 people. Fifty-one point five percent of families have one child under 6 years old, 6.8% have two children, and 1.9% of families have three children; 29.1% of families have one person over 60 years old and 28.2% of families have two people. Eighty-nine point three percent of families have one disabled person, 9.2% have two disabled people and 1% of families have three disabled people. Thus, many parents not only take care of PWDs but also take care of other children under 6 years old or the elderly. Research results also show that 41.7% of parents who take care of PWDs, take care of children under 6 years old, and are housewives; 28.2% of parents take care of PWDs while taking care of the elderly and doing housework; 19.4% of parents take care of PWDs while also being housewives. However, only 5.8% of parents believe themselves to have above average income, 51.5% have average income, and 42.7% have below average income. There is a strong relationship between parents' income and their occupation (Phi = .712; Sig = .000), whereby among 42.7% of parents with below average income, 16.5% of parents are housewives and 22.3% of parents are workers/self-employed. Among the 5.8% of parents with above average income, there are no parents who are housewives and are workers/self-employed.

Parents also spend different amounts of time taking care of PWDs each day. There are 34% of parents working 4–5 hours/day, 9.7% of them working 5–6 hours/day, 3.9% of them working 6–7 hours/day, 15.5% of them working 7–8 hours/day, and 36.9% of parents work over 8 hours/day. Thus, more than half of parents work over 8 hours and 7 to 8 hours/day.

There is a fairly strong correlation (Phi = .721; Sig = .000) between the number of hours parents spend caring for PWDs and the number of hours they spend on household chores. According to the data, among the 35% of parents who neglect household chores for the entire week, 24.3% of them spend over 8 hours per day caring for PWDs, and 4.9% spend 7-8 hours per day. Among the 15.5% who neglect household chores for over 3 days, 4.9% spend over 8 hours per day caring for PWDs, and 3.9% spend 7 to 8 hours per day. The number of hours spent caring for PWDs also affects the parents' lives, with a correlation (Phi = .526; Sig = .028).

Among the 36.9% of parents who care for PWDs over 8 hours per day, 10.7% of them feel too busy to have time for their families, and 24.3% have low income but no time to work extra to increase their income.

The number of hours spent caring for PWDs also affects the parents' lives with a fairly strong correlation between related factors (Phi = .632; Sig = .001). Due to exhaustion, 41.7% of parents have no time for leisure or learning, 35% have no time to rest and take care of themselves, 9.7% feel that their physical health is affected, and 12.6% are affected mentally.

Conclusions

This study is an initial step in describing the real life experiences of teachers and parents in supporting and caring for PWDs to help them integrate into society. From the research data, it is evident that the lives of those who care for and support individuals with disabilities are still very challenging. This requires close collaboration between management levels, social organizations, and the community to ensure that the most vulnerable individuals benefit comprehensively and sustainably from these policies and services

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Biographical Information

Minh Ha T. Le

Minh Ha T. Le, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Van Lang University of Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam. She holds a master's degree in Pedagogy and doctorate in Psychology. She has many years of special education teacher training and research on children with special educational needs.

Nga T. Hoàng

Nga T. Hoàng is the Lecturer and Dean of the Special Education Department of Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. Her research interest focuses on improving the early intervention services for children with developmental disabilities, evidence-based practice, and promoting the inclusive education for children with disabilities in Vietnam.

31. THE IMPACT OF HEARING IMPAIRMENT AND PREFERRED COMMUNICATION SYSTEM ON FATIGUE IN THE DAILY LIFE OF ADULTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT

Katerina Hadkova, Miroslava Kotvova, and Kamila Kucerova

Charles University

Katerina Hadkova email: katerina.hadkova@pedf.cuni.cz

Miroslava Kotvova email: miroslava.kotvova@pedf.cuni.cz

Kamila Kucerova email: kucerova.kami@gmail.com

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Charles University, Faculty of Education

Magdaleny Rettigove 4, 116 39 Prague 1, Czech Republic

Study Background

This project is based on the results of a published research study (Holman et al., 2021), which indicated that the well-being of people with hearing impairment can directly and indirectly be connected to: the hearing impairment, the use of compensatory aids, the fatigue related to listening, and the level of everyday activities of the given individual. It can also be linked to the preferred communication system. Hearing impairment can directly influence the fatigue and its intensity caused by making more efforts when listening, and communicating information. It can indirectly lead to changes in work-related, social and physical activities of a person with this impairment. Holman et al. (2021) show that fatigue caused by hearing loss can indirectly influence well-being, and changes in activities linked to the hearing loss (through the changes due to the fatigue) can directly or indirectly impact the individual's perception of well-being.

The study analyzes the influence hearing impairment has on the everyday fatigue of people with hearing impairments and identifies potential differences in the well-being of people communicating with spoken language and people using sign language. A qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews was conducted with six participants with hearing impairment who used compensatory tools (hearing aid(s)) and spoken language to communicate (P1-P6) and six participants who preferred using Czech sign language (P7-P12). Ten women and two men, ages 23 to 79, participated. The gained data underwent thematic analysis by means of open coding. On its base, themes related to the research questions were defined.

Study Findings

The processed and categorized information gained from the interviews—personal perception of the hearing impairment, sign language, relationship between well-being and fatigue—became the base for formulating the conclusions of the research.

Personal Perception of the Hearing Impairment

The observed participants frequently mentioned the acceptance of the hearing impairment—they had got used to their impairment and did not mind it (P1, P2, P4, P5, P8). Some participants linked this acceptance to the fact that their impairment had come into existence a very long time ago, so that they had adapted to it well (P3, P7). P6 has reported that in her childhood she experienced her impairment in a negative way, but nowadays a hearing impairment can be compensated well with the help of quality hearing aids. P9 has admitted that the possibility of losing her hearing worries her. P10 has pointed out that her perception of her impairment gets influenced by the situation she is in: “When I meet some strangers, it is a problem because communication with them is very demanding for me. I feel restricted because I don't understand what they are saying.” P11 confirmed this feeling and added, “Functioning in the hearing world where communication depends on lip-reading is demanding. One ends up looking for seclusion, for a place where he/she can switch off.” In addition to that, P11 pointed out the fatigue growing during the day, which has to do with the demanding communication that also causes stress about a possible misunderstanding. P12 also mentioned that everyday situations cause her trouble and are linked to the communication barrier.

Sign Language

This topic has to do with the statements of the people communicating with the help of the Czech sign language (P7–P12). None of these persons stated that he/she believed fatigue was linked to communicating in sign language, especially when his/her communication partner masters the sign language. However, it all depends on the level of his/her language competences. P11 pointed out that communicating in Czech sign language narrows the number and choice of people with whom one can communicate without problems. P8 adds: “When I communicate with a deaf person, I have a sense of peace and comfort because I know that they will understand me perfectly. When I'm communicating with a person who has a lower level of sign language, I have to concentrate more and I feel more tired." With regard to assessing the fatigue resulting from communication in the spoken language, which means the necessity to rely on lip-reading in order to perceive speech, it was specifically the activity of lip-reading which got named unanimously by all participants (P7–P12) as very demanding, clearly causing fatigue.

Relationship between Well-being and Fatigue

This relationship is very complicated. In participants communicating with the spoken language, well-being is threatened due to fatigue resulting from social activities and to a certain extent, well-being also gets negatively influenced by unwanted reduction of occupational activities and by physical inactivity. In participants communicating in the Czech sign language, well-being is linked to the feeling of fatigue resulting from communication situations that occur in a communication system other than the Czech sign language. Such situations frequently happen in the workplace where the participants are in contact with hearing people. P10 states: "If hearing colleagues are communicating with each other at work, I find it difficult to engage in their conversation. If deaf colleagues are communicating, the situation is different because sign language is visual, so I can see what they are talking about. In this case, I don't feel a barrier." Perceived fatigue resulting from the hearing impairment is of a very individual nature. In people with hearing impairment, fatigue arises due to higher efforts made when communicating with hearing people. This conclusion corresponds with other research studies (Hornsby et al., 2016; Pichora-Fuller et al., 2016). According to Holman et al. (2021), the hearing impairment can directly influence deepening of fatigue during auditory perception, which corresponds with our results. The same applies to communication with the help of lip-reading. Indirect influence of the hearing impairment can be registered in occupational, social, and physical activities of the respective person. Participants P1–P6 have in common avoiding bigger, louder social events where audibility is worse. This result matches the conclusions of other research studies (Holman et al., 2021; Pichora-Fuller et al., 2016), which demonstrates the influence the hearing loss has on the reduction of social activities. This conclusion does not apply to the group of people communicating in the Czech sign language, P7–P12, who meet in their free time people that communicate the same way. The relationship between well-being and the perceived fatigue in people with hearing impairment appears highly individual with limited correlation. The reason for this is an excessive variability of factors which can influence this correlation.

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Biographical Information

Katerina Hadkova

Katerina Hadkova, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education of Charles University. Dr. Hadkova specializes in hearing impaired education and cochlear implant users.

Miroslava Kotvova

Miroslava Kotvova, PhD, is a university teacher. She specializes in deaf education and sign language interpreting.

Kamila Kucerova

Kamila Kucerova is a graduate of the Faculty of Education at Charles University in the specialization of speech therapy.

32. FOSTERING INCLUSIVE TRANSITION IN THE SPECIAL CLASSES OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MĚSTO TOUŠKOV

Lenka Mouleová, Jana Ševčíková, and Tereza Paidarová

Město Touškov Primary School and Preschool

Lenka Mouleová email: mouleov@kpg.zcu.cz

Jana Ševčíková email: sevca.jana@seznam.cz

Tereza Paidarová email: terezapaidarova@gmail.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Primary School and Preschool Město Touškov

Čemínská 296, 330 33 Město Touškov

Czech Republic

Transition Planning

In contemporary society, the provision of quality education to all individuals holds considerable importance, serving as an indicator of societal maturity. A fundamental human right is the entitlement to suitable and free education. In the Czech Republic, education is not limited to typical students but those with special educational needs as well. This education is still delivered either in mainstream or special schools, including those catering to pupils with intellectual disabilities. These establishments encompass elementary schools, special classes (Amendments to the Education Act, 2015), and 1-year and 2-year practical and vocational schools. The period of leaving compulsory schooling or leaving secondary education is a particularly demanding phase in life for any individual, as young people go through many changes. For young people with intellectual disabilities, this period is even more challenging. In order for the pupil to manage the transition between individual levels of education and subsequently to the next stage of life, they can be supported by transition planning, a process in which the young person with an intellectual disability, the school management, the young person's family, the social worker, and possibly the future employer participate in its implementation (Maštalíř et al., 2022).

In numerous European and non-European countries, legal regulations governing specific support have long been in place, mandating its practical implementation. This is substantiated by numerous scientific studies and professional literature (Maštalíř, 2021). In stark contrast to this reality, the field of concluding compulsory schooling or secondary education for pupils with special educational needs and planning their transition to the next stage of life in the Czech Republic is not adequately explored at the level of scientific research and theoretical knowledge. Transition programs are implemented in a very limited and unsystematic manner, likely occurring mostly within projects. Currently, in the Czech Republic, there is no legislative support for transition planning for students and young people with disabilities.

What We Do

Czech organizations provide education to children in mainstream education settings, and educate both pupils with and without special educational needs. They provide education within special classes dedicated to students with intellectual disabilities, combination of impairment, autism spectrum disorders, and children with speech impairments. They embrace projects that enable a teachers' team to offer comprehensive support to pupils on their life journey.

Teachers integrate acquired knowledge, experience, and skills in daily interactions with pupils, emphasizing person-centered planning tools. Life story, "Circle of Relationships," "My Dreams," "Gifts and Talents," and "What I Need to Get Support" are employed in the mapping phase; this is summarized in a one-page profile. In the support planning phase, collaboration with partners helps identify concerns, desired changes, and crucial elements for functionality. Planning meetings, based on a person centered approach, use specific making action plans (MAP) and PATHWAY methods to illustrate life possibilities outlining necessary tasks. Coordination of task fulfillment is crucial for initiating changes based on individual student needs (Maštalíř et al., 2022).

Teachers acknowledge life's inherent risks and carefully plan each step to ensure safety. Simultaneously, they avoid letting unjustified fears hinder students' dreams and wishes. Inclusivity is crucial, involving the student's closest individuals in all activities and discussions to ensure a sense of security. Continuous plan evaluation and reflection involve assessing achievements, the student's current position, and future directions. Success relies on feedback from everyone engaged in plan implementation, especially the student, fostering an environment where progress can be openly commented upon.

Insights Gained through Engaging in Collaborative Projects

We teachers are aware that our pupils, like their peers without disabilities, aspire to lead fulfilling lives, contribute to the workforce, and pursue their dreams. Teachers strive to facilitate a smooth, natural transition for students with disabilities from school to their next stage in life.

Collaboration among families, teachers, teaching assistants, school counseling experts, the University of West Bohemia, medical professionals, the Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children, social service providers, and our school’s founder is integral to this process. Located in a small town, some of the students aspire to work locally, a dream that has been found to be achievable. Partners also include colleagues from vocational schools and one-year and two-year practical schools. The process is started early to identify each student's needs, dreams, and aspirations, fostering self-realization. Trust among all partners is vital for effective recognition and addressing of these needs.

As work is pivotal in lives of individuals with disabilities (Šiška, 2005), plans integrate practical work where students cultivate vital skills at school, engaging in activities in the practice kitchen, school garden, and art classes. Supportive environments for developing work and social skills are provided. Guided by mentors, students explore diverse job opportunities, reflecting on future career paths. Collaborative assessments help identify enjoyable, beneficial work activities aligning with students' aspirations. We believe work fosters economic independence, improves quality of life, facilitates connections, and enhances societal standing.

Ending education and planning the transition to adulthood bring about changes that are crucial not only for the student but also for their entire family and all close individuals. Our experience underscores the need to provide families with necessary support during their child's transition. Families must prioritize their child's independence as the optimal outcome.

Conclusion

Transition planning, a widely debated topic, involves engaging with students, delivering presentations, and participating in discussions for regional and national strategic documents. We advocate for incorporating transition programs in all schools to enable practical implementation, drawing inspiration from various European and non-European countries.

In the last 3 years, our team has evolved significantly by adopting a new perspective on the lives of individuals with disabilities. Recognizing that prejudices and fears can impede their development, it is understood that these students share similar needs and desires. With proper support, they can lead fulfilling lives. Thus, teachers have learned that changing laws alone is insufficient; a shift in mindset is crucial. It is essential to acknowledge that even ambitious goals can be achieved by people with disabilities.

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Biographical Information

Lenka Mouleová

Lenka Mouleová serves as the deputy director for special classes at the Elementary School and Preschool in Město Touškov. Concurrently, she is affiliated with the Faculty of Education at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, focusing on coordination and supervision of students' practical training at schools and organizations.

Jana Ševčíková

Jana Ševčíková is a special classes teacher at the Elementary school and Preschool in Město Touškov, focusing on pupils and young people with intellectual disabilities. She actively participates in various projects related to special education and the lives of young people with disabilities.

Tereza Paidarová

Tereza Paidarová works as a teacher in special classes at the Elementary school and Preschool in Město Touškov. Concurrently, she is pursuing studies in Special Education at Charles University in Prague, with a focus on pupils and young people with intellectual disabilities.

33. UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON A TRANSITION PEER PROGRAM FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Kristýna Soukupová[1], Šárka Káňová[1], and Jan Šiška[2]

[1]University of West Bohemia in Pilsen

[2]Charles University

Kristýna Soukupová email: kykasoukupova@seznam.cz

Šárka Káňová email: kanova@kpg.zcu.cz

Jan Šiška email: jsiska@kpg.zcu.cz

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Peer Programs Background

The transition from school to adulthood is one of the most challenging periods in human life. Wehman (2001) describes this as “a period of significant life changes.” A common prejudice towards individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) is the belief they are “overgrown children” who will never mature (Slowík, 2016). However, for a person with an ID, transitioning from school to adult life is a significant and demanding life change (Šiška, 2005). Within the Researching Transitions of Young People with Intellectual Disabilities (PEDAL) project, we are examining the transition period of young people with ID using a wide range of social and artistic methods. As a part of the PEDAL project, and its associated art workshops, there is also a peer program, which is the subject of this contribution. Peer programs can be a useful tool in supporting a wide range of people. Specifically, we can mention peer programs focused on individuals with addictions, those in need of support in the school environment, or people with disabilities (Dvořák, 2007; Marder et al., 2017; Mádlová, 2006). The essence of peer programs lies in the influence of peers on each other. When focusing directly on individuals in adolescence, it is important to emphasize that adults do not intervene in this relationship. A significant role is played by the shared reality experienced by peers. Both are in fundamentally similar social positions, experience similar situations, and both prepare for the future (Dvořák, 2007). The primary subjects of the peer program are adolescents with ID during the transitional phase, accompanied by their counterparts, college students, who are in the role of buddies.

Methods

The research sample consisted of six college students in the peer program, in the role of buddies. For one year, they met with their peers with ID during the transition from school to adult life. Face-to-face contact should have occurred once every 2 weeks and online contact once every 2 weeks. They also participated together in art workshops, part of the PEDAL project. All buddies are females, studying Special Education or Social Work, and were 21 to 22 years old at the start of the program (Soukupová et al., 2023). Data collection took place as three series of semi-structured interviews from December 2022 to February 2024. Data collection took place within the Microsoft Teams platform. Each interview lasted from 40 to 60 minutes.

MegaWord was used to transcribe recordings. During transcription, names of individuals were replaced with specific characters (e.g., "////"). Respondents were assigned abbreviations R1 through R6. For the analysis of interviews, a coding method was used, where longer sequences (sentences, clauses) were assigned simple codes to capture their meaning.

Preliminary Findings

Respondents learned about the program in lectures at school from their teachers. Reasons for joining included to gain new experiences with individuals with ID, the idea of regular meetings with a peer with ID during a specific transition period, and the idea of combining meetings with art workshops. Regarding evaluation of previous experiences, respondents stated that before joining the program, they had little to no experience with individuals with intellectual disabilities. When asked if they prepared theoretically for the program, respondents answered negatively. Respondents indicated that their greatest concerns were communication with the participant with an ID and mutual "incompatibility" with them (the fear that they will not like each other). Some buddies also expressed concerns about the time demands of the program.

After a few months, we focused on the practical course of the program and the subjective perspectives of buddies on the impact of their participation in the program, on themselves, and on the participants with ID. Guided meetings were held regularly according to five respondents. Only one pair interrupted their contact, mostly on the buddy's side, for a longer period. Most of the buddies described their relationship with the participant as “friendly” and they expected that the contact with the peer with ID would continue after the official end of the peer programme. Respondents reflected that both sides have improved their communication skills thanks to the participation. Some respondents mentioned that participation in the program also affected their professional development. Some respondents could imagine working in a field focused on ID. One respondent stated that participation had the opposite effect on him/her, and he/she does not want to pursue this area. The impact of participation in the program on the participant was described in two extremes. Approximately one-third of the buddies reported that in their opinion, participation in the program did not affect the participant in any way or the program's impact was very small. However, two-thirds of respondents mentioned progress in the participant, for example, in communication with others, building relationships, and overall expression. Workshops were mostly evaluated positively. According to buddies, five out of six participants with ID also perceived workshops positively and beneficially. They considered the idea of creating an inclusive environment where each participant can express themselves fulfilled. Buddies only had reservations about the “chaos” that prevailed during workshops and the length of the meetings – workshops could be shorter in their opinion.

Conclusions

From preliminary results, it is apparent that peer programs can serve as valuable tools, not only for the development of participants, but also for the advancement of inclusive society. Across initial concerns of communication, buddies now refer to peers with ID as “friends.” This fact highlights that despite societal prejudices against intellectual disabilities, we can cultivate equal relationships characterized by respect, understanding, and mutual enrichment with individuals with ID. After a few months of meetings, students reflected on the progress in their communication skills and mentioned the impact of these encounters on their professional development. According to the testimonies, art workshops were perceived as useful and enriching, too. Respondents viewed art workshops positively. Most participants, as reported by the buddies, also perceived them positively and felt comfortable during these workshops. The idea of creating an inclusive space, where all workshop participants could freely express themselves using artistic and dramatic techniques, was fulfilled from the buddies' perspective.

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Biographical Information

Kristýna Soukupová

Kristýna Soukupová is a senior student of Special Education at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. She is involved in the analysis of data obtained within researching transitions of young people with intellectual disabilities (PEDAL) project, organizes art and drama workshops, and serves as the coordinator of college students in the peer program for young people with intellectual disabilities.

Šárka Káňová

Káňová, PhD, leads the University of West Bohemia's Special and Inclusive Education Unit, and previously pursued a 2018–2019 scholarship at the University of Kent's Tizard Centre, focusing her research on the quality of life for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Globally involved in disability advocacy, she co-founded a social enterprise, Cafe-Restaurant Kačaba.

Jan Šiška

Jan Šiška, PhD, is an Associate Professor at Charles University and completed a Fulbright research scholarship at the University of Minnesota, researching transition in disability policy. His work spans international perspectives on deinstitutionalization, monitoring, and governance, aligning with human rights policies. Leading national and international projects, Dr. Šiška authored protocols and guidelines on disability support services, active citizenship, and community participation.

34. INCLUSION TEACHING AT NHUT TAN PRIMARY SCHOOL IN VIET NAM:

AN INCLUSION MODEL FOR VIETNAM

Huyen Vu T.Thanh

Nhut Tan Primary School

Huyen Vu T.Thanh email: Vuhuyen.vnd@gmail.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Huyen Vu T.Thanh

Nhut Tan Primary School

03, 09 stress (Le Van Tho), Go Vap District

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Inclusion Teaching Model Framework and Background

The trend of inclusive education for students with special needs is being promoted and actively developed in Vietnam:

> Inclusive education is an educational approach that responds to the diverse needs and abilities of learners; ensures equal learning rights, quality education, and meets the needs, characteristics, and abilities of learners; respects the diversity and differences of learners and does not discriminate. (Education Law, 2019, Article 15).

"There are several models of inclusive schools for disadvantaged children, in which children learn in general schools and have adjustments: curriculum, teaching supplies, aids and teachers' specific teaching skills" (Nguyen, 2010, p.15). To meet the learning needs and ensure the quality of inclusive education for students with special needs, I conducted research using the model of "Inclusion Teaching at Nhut Tan Primary." With this model, in particular, I emphasized the adaptations by considering the following factors: (a) environment, (b) teaching content, and (c) coordination among staff in the school. The environment needs to be properly prepared to create the most convenient conditions for students to participate in learning, easily absorb knowledge, and develop skills. The instructional content needs to be refined and selected to ensure that students grasp the core content, avoiding excessive workload. The last factor largely determines the success of students' inclusion. The close connection among staff in the classroom and in the school directly impacts the students' progress. All of these factors need to be closely coordinated and applied according to a specific process in order to achieve the highest level of effectiveness.

Research Goals, Methods, and Skill Areas

The goal of the project is to address the educational needs of students with disabilities.

The model’s purpose is to promote the full participation and integration of individuals with special needs into various aspects of society, particularly in education and community settings. This model is designed to ensure that individuals with disabilities, whether physical, intellectual, emotional, or developmental, have equal opportunities, access, and support to engage in activities, interact with others, and achieve their full potential.

The Inclusion Teaching Model at Nhut Tan Primary aims to address the educational requirements of students with disabilities. This entails enabling these students to participate alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms for subjects and activities suitable to their educational needs. Additionally, curriculum adjustments were made to cater to the specific educational requirements of students with disabilities. In particular, students with special needs were required to attend three common core classes instead of five. Additionally, the general education students were required to read 50 words per minute while students with special needs were required to read only 30 words per minute. After an in-depth assessment/diagnosis of each student with special needs, the individualized education plan (IEP) team and general education representatives determined the appropriate class placement and program.

Inclusion Teaching at Nhut Tan Primary includes the following elements:

1. Inclusion teaching includes an IEP is required for every student with disabilities.
2. Inclusion teaching includes dedicated classrooms provided for targeted and effective intervention.
3. Inclusion teaching provides that students with disabilities be assigned to the classes that best suit their needs and abilities.
4. Inclusion teaching provides that the general education curriculum be modified to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities.

5. Inclusion teaching includes that there is a close connection and coordination between specialized teachers and inclusive classroom teachers throughout the student's learning process.

Inclusion Teaching at Nhut Tan Primary includes five main skill areas: language and communication, functional learning, social skills, attention and behavior, and independent living.

Results and Discussion

In our 10 years working with students at Nhut Tan Primary School, there was an average of 12 students with special needs participating in the Inclusive Teaching Model each year. This is equivalent to 5% of the total student population of 250 per year.

Our data shows that students with special needs participating in the Inclusive Teaching Model in Grade 1 (G1) accounted for 31% of all students and gradually decreased in each subsequent grade, where only 4.4% of the senior class (G5) participated. The results of this data indicate that the Inclusion Teaching Model has shown to be very effective and helps students reduce their need for support, becoming more independent year after year due to fewer inclusion practices in the higher grades.

In the 2020–2021 school year, the total number of students with special needs decreased by nearly 40% during the COVID-19 epidemic. Students with special needs could not attend school and these students could not participate in the online learning program at home without the support from the inclusive teaching model provided by the school or the additional support of parents on the online program. The data shows that the inclusion teaching model needs to be maintained for the first 3 years so that the benefits of this teaching strategy can be seen most clearly.

Recommendations

With the inclusion teaching model, schools have the flexibility to address all three factors: (a) environment, (b) teaching content, and (c) the interaction of staff, or place emphasis on each one of the three factors independently to achieve notable effectiveness. A modified curriculum framework should be developed for grades at the primary level in Vietnam. It is necessary to develop a comprehensive and consistent development program for students with special needs from early intervention to career orientation as adults in Vietnam.

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Biographical Information

Huyen Vu T. Thanh

Huyen Vu T. Thanh holds a master's degree in special education from HaNoi National University of Education. She has over 14 years of experience working with students with special education needs, ranging from preschool to lower secondary school. She spent 10 years developing and implementing inclusive teaching programs in preschool and primary school.

35. INDIVIDUALIZATION OF THE CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS WITH TWICE EXCEPTIONAL NEEDS

Monika Kadrnožková

Faculty of Education, Department of Special Education, Charles University

Monika Kadrnožková email: monika.kadrnozkova@pedf.cuni.cz

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Monika Kadrnožková

Charles University, Faculty of Education

Magdalény Rettigové 4

116 39 Praha 1

Czech Republic

Identifying the 2e Students

The Czech education system has long struggled with educating gifted students, an issue closely related to appropriate design of their educational curriculum (Klimecká et al., 2022; Jabůrek et al., 2023). Also overlooked is the education of students with above-average intelligence but who grapple with developmental or learning differences, a condition known as double exceptionalism (2e students[1]). The 2e students excel in certain areas but face challenges in others. They typically have a diagnosis alongside their giftedness, commonly involving specific learning difficulties[2], autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or physical and sensory disabilities[3] (Baum et al., 2021). They are also prone to perfectionism, frustration with failure, and can experience emotional instability. This combination of disability and giftedness affects both cognitive and behavioral aspects of the student, requiring a specific pedagogical approach. The 2e students may excel in one area but exhibit lower skills in others, like reading and writing, or organizational skills. Some teachers argue that the gifted must excel in all areas and do not require additional support[4] (Klimecká et al., 2022), a stance that is not realistic for the 2e students.

Identification of 2e students is complicated by more significant needs masking skills, leading them to appear mediocre. Winebrenner (2003) asserts teachers may lose confidence in 2e students who only exhibit excellence in certain areas. Baldwin et al. (2015) categorize 2e students as follows:

1. The 2e students are identified as gifted (without an identified disability) because difficulties are masked by their talents.

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[1] The abbreviation e2 is used in English-speaking countries.

[2] For example, dyslexia, dysgraphia, or a nonverbal learning difficulty.

[3] For example, vision or hearing impairment.

[4] The concept of giftedness, which presumed that students with high cognitive potential must excel in all areas of schooling, had already been overcome by the 1980s. An example could be a student who is exceptionally musically gifted but does not achieve academically outstanding results.

2. The 2e students are diagnosed with a disadvantage (without an identified giftedness) because giftedness is masked by their disability. Rarely are they educated as gifted, as their potential often goes unrecognized.
3. The 2e students are identified with neither a disability nor as gifted, categorizing them as average. Early identification of 2e students should pave the way for creating conditions in which they can excel and reach their maximum potential.

Curriculum for Gifted Students and the 2e Students

If the gifted are identified, the challenge is adjusting the curriculum for their optimal development. In the Czech Republic, teachers recognize the need for a more profound curriculum, leading to a demand for curriculum enrichment. However, this enrichment is often inadequately prepared, as school programs primarily target the needs of regular students (Pavlas et al., 2022). Gallagher (2008) notes that gifted students express dissatisfaction with low difficulty, repetition, and memorization, which can lead to boredom, frustration, inappropriate behavior, and a loss of motivation and cognitive potential. Jabůrek et al. (2023) add that the gifted may hide their abilities and choose easier material to avoid effort in uninteresting areas. Thus, a curriculum that is too easy can be as frustrating as one that is too hard. Allowing gifted students to learn according to their interests and pace is challenging but essential for them to find meaning and intrinsic motivation in learning.

In enriching the curriculum for the gifted, several forms of education are commonly used. External acceleration (skip grade), which is not suitable for the 2e students due to their unstable emotional-social development. A more appropriate option for 2e students is internal acceleration, allowing them to progress more rapidly within the mainstream classroom in certain subjects. The second form is enrichment, a strategy aimed at deepening curriculum. 2e students can be supported in both areas where they excel and areas of need. A third form in the Czech Republic is ability grouping, where gifted students are placed in subject-specific groups across grades (Havigerová et al., 2011). The 2e students can also receive education in alternative, individual settings outside the school environment, typically provided by parents or private tutors. Individual needs can be met in the non-formal education sector, especially in leisure activities. Cooperation between schools and local organizations, clubs, or centers is a key element of support; however, it is uncommon in the Czech Republic (Pavlas et al., 2022). According to VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006), an appropriate curriculum for 2e learners should include acceleration, depth, complexity, challenge, creativity, and abstraction, promoting appropriate pacing, cognitive maturity, and higher-order thinking. Though instructional materials for gifted students exist, teachers rarely use them or are unsure how to do so (Jabůrek et al., 2023). The Czech Republic lacks a systemic solution to support gifted/2e pupils, putting them at risk despite long-standing warnings from experts (Havigerová, 2011; Pavlas et al., 2022). Lessons from abroad can help structure curricula, introduce enrichment and ability grouping, and support mentors for mini-lessons. However, a systemic approach is still needed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing the educational needs of gifted and 2e students in the Czech Republic presents a significant challenge. Although teachers recognize these needs, practical implementation of enriched curriculum remains insufficient. Gifted students often express dissatisfaction with the low difficulty and repetitiveness of standard curriculum, which can lead to boredom, frustration, and demotivation. For 2e students, emotional and social aspects complicate the situation, requiring more nuance, like internal acceleration and targeted enrichment. International experiences can provide valuable guidance for improving curricula.

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Biographical Information

Monika Kadrnožková

Monika Kadrnožková is in the Faculty of Education of Charles University in the Department of Special Education. Her research primarily focuses on identification, diagnosis, and education of gifted, exceptionally gifted, and twice-exceptional children. Her long-term research is dedicated to understanding the dynamics of heterogeneous classrooms and devising strategies for fostering equal educational opportunities.

36. IMPORTANT MILESTONES THAT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE FORMATION OF A CHILD'S PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIOR

Kamila Kopsová and Petr Kops

Self-Employed Therapists

Kamila Kopsová email: kkopsova@seznam.cz

We have no known conflicts to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:
Kpt. Jaroše 2403, 39003
Tábor, Czech Republic

Background

The inclusion of people with disabilities is influenced by a number of factors. It is crucial to recognize that, in addition to their own disability, current concerns, experiences, or life situations, the way their childhood unfolded strongly influences this inclusion.

Let us focus on one of the fundamental factors that profoundly affect the subsequent behavior and actions of individuals, usually manifested in the inclusion process. We can call this a general principle, and it is a recurring part of a child's development. We have been exploring this topic for over 10 years and present our findings from working with children from the age of 2.5 years to adulthood and subsequent transfers into adulthood. The main tool we use in our work has been the diagnostic method, the Kops Method®, of which we are the authors.

Important Milestones in Child Development: Reflection and Exploration

From birth, a child goes through the first period, which we call the survival phase. It is roughly the first year when the child should have the opportunity for the full provision of conditions for "survival." This includes a complication-free birth (without hypothermia, without resuscitation, umbilical cord strangulation, etc.), but it also involves an adequate supply of suitable nutrition (e.g., no breastfeeding problems). Put simply, the basic physiological needs should be fulfilled. If these needs are not met, this information and experience are stored in the subconscious. This can manifest over the course of a lifetime, as we personally observed in children in a small, private children's home where children had been taken from parents due to neglect. Children with this trauma became restless whenever they realized that food supplies were decreasing by half. The greater the difference between full supplies and their decrease, the more this restlessness increased. Before the children's home management realized the reasons for this behavior and strictly monitored a constant level of food supplies, several children exhibited aggressive behavior. This behavior disappeared once a constant fixed amount of supplies was ensured.

Another example from our practice is a client who had long-term respiratory problems in adulthood. By working through a traumatic experience, strangulation by the umbilical cord during birth, the respiratory problems subsided. This illustrates how a traumatic experience associated with survival can be transferred. It is essential to keep in mind that similar situations may be reflected in some moments of ongoing inclusion, and one should be prepared for this possibility.

Another milestone that can significantly impact the positive course of inclusion is the period around 1 to 1.5 years of age. According to our findings, this period is crucial for what we call acceptance, or acceptance by the closest family. This acceptance should ideally be unconditional — regardless of gender, health, or any other handicap — acceptance that this child was born, that it was wanted, and similar aspects.

From our research, it follows that even very young children are aware of these facts, react to them, and trauma related to non-acceptance is formed. This may manifest as non-acceptance of oneself as a person, with subsequent difficulties in self-identification. Other manifestations of this non-acceptance may include the rejection of one's body, autoimmune diseases. It is a manifestation going against oneself. Another common manifestation is seeking approval and inclination towards relational dependence. Therefore, acceptance is one of the main themes that should be systematically addressed during the inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

To process acceptance in young children, we have found the model of working with externalization useful, which we have developed and named Tiger's World®.

Another milestone that can significantly influence the course of inclusion is the period of discovery and personality formation in a child. This period peaks around the age of 3. A common question posed by parents or educators is how to set boundaries for children. How to teach them to accept the limits and rules given to them by us adults. Our answer is usually that we see it a bit differently. That a parent should be a guide for the child, a support and an advisor, in the process of the child discovering itself. When it discovers its own limits, it establishes its boundaries. And we, as adults, should oversee their safety and lend a helping hand in difficulties. When we do not respect this, we confine children to our rules, our limits and our perceptions of them. In fact, we break their boundaries and teach them to tolerate this boundary breaking. That is why people in adulthood often have trouble maintaining their own boundaries and are prone to manipulation. A strong and well-structured personality is very helpful in the inclusion process, so it should be a priority to discover the source of intervention in a child's personality, to name and address it.

The last milestone we will mention is the period around the sixth year. It is a period in which, according to our research, socialization peaks as preparation for education. It is also a period when a child begins to understand the concept of cooperation and can manage it under proper guidance. It is clear that successful inclusion requires the mastery of cooperation and socialization. However, if it is disrupted by previous periods, mainly related to personality development or non-acceptance, the child will struggle with socialization and cooperation.

Results

From the above, it is evident that for an optimal inclusion process, not only for individuals with disabilities, it is necessary for the child to achieve unconditional acceptance during the child's development, to receive the opportunity to develop a mature individual personality, and to develop the ability to socialize and learn to cooperate effectively. The tool we have developed for this purpose is the Kops Method®.

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Biographical Information

Kamila Kopsová

Kamila Kopsová has worked with children and adults for over 12 years, helping them uncover the causes of stored traumas and emotional injuries. She has co-authored several books and in 2017 received Honorable Recognition from the Faculty of Psychology at KIU University, Sri Lanka, for her work with children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Petr Kops

Petr Kops is a co-author of the Kops Method® and of several books on understanding a child's internal processes and perception. For over 12 years, he has been involved in processing traumas in children and adults, exploring and uncovering transfers and patterns and their impact on a person's life.

37. INCLUSIVE CENTRES AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA

Shabina Bano, Sandeep J. Kapur, and Sudeep Sinha

The Hans Foundation

Shabina Bano email: shabina@thfmail.com

Acknowledgement:

The study and project are initiated and funded by the Hans Foundation in India.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

The Hans Foundation

Wing B, 7th Floor, Milestone Experion Centre,

Sector 15 Part 2, Gurugram, Haryana - 122001

India

Background

In India, there are around 2.68Cr (26.8 million) people with disabilities (PwDs) (Office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, 2021), while it is estimated to be a broader range of 55 to 90 million people with disabilities (O'Keefe et al., 2009). The World Health Organization's (WHO) (2022) global report on health and equity on persons with disability estimates that 1.3 billion people worldwide experience a significant disability of any type. This figure will continue to rise due to demographic and epidemiological changes, underscoring the urgency for action (WHO, 2022). Disability is an important public health problem especially in developing countries like India (Kumar et al., 2012). PwDs reside disproportionately in rural and urban areas characterized by health issues, malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty, requiring comprehensive early intervention and lifelong rehabilitation services. This research study and a pilot project were initiated by The Hans Foundation (THF) in India, aiming to provide health care, and supportive rehabilitation services to PwDs at their doorstep, under one roof, through mobile therapy buses. To date, the project has benefitted 1,800 PwDs with health, rehabilitation and social security services. The project is scaled up in various regions, West, East and North, including Mumbai, Ajmer, Kolkata, Ghaziabad and Noida.

Methods

THF conducted a study using a mixed method approach regarding benchmark social, economic, physiological, psychological and health status of PwDs and their caregivers/families in Gautam Buddh Nagar, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India. A random sample of 311 subjects were enrolled for quantitative and qualitative interviews, and focused group discussions.

Analysis

Findings highlighted challenges related to community perception and attitudes, access to health and rehabilitation, education services, affordability services, mobility and accessibility, disability awareness and knowledge amongst caregivers, knowledge and skills for self-care, and self-perceptions due to disability. Almost one-third of the PwDs were illiterate (32.3%). The prominent disabilities identified were related to locomotor impairment (54%), speech impairment (27%), and mental illnesses (14%). More than half of PwDs earn less than USD $120 per month and the rest earn USD $250-300 monthly. Public health and rehabilitation services are not reaching every corner of the community and private services are exorbitantly priced between USD $50-155 for six to eight sessions of therapy per month, including doctor fees, therapy, education, counseling, etc. About 81% of caregivers acknowledge that supporting a child or adult with disabilities impacts their livelihood and poses financial constraints. Government health facilities and rehabilitation services, crucial for PwDs, are located 5 to 7 kilometers away from settlements, posing a substantial obstacle to frequent access to services by PwDs and caregivers. Based on the data the study recommends commitment from various multi-stakeholders to create services and demand change to improve the life of PwDs.

The Mobile Therapy Bus Project

In collaboration with the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disability (NIEPID), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, and Government of India, THF initiated a project, “Mobile Community Outreach Services,” known as the “Mobile Therapy Bus” or “the bus,” in Gautam Buddh Nagar, district of Uttar Pradesh. The project was implemented with the goal that “persons with disabilities (PwDs) are to have improved health, and overall well-being and are socially included through a community outreach program,” in alignment with the motto of “[l]eaving no one behind” (United Nations, 2016, p. 11). In alignment with the global shift towards a rights-based approach to disability, the project promotes inclusion, removing barriers, fostering connections, and implementing various services and programs to transform the lives of PwDs. The bus is strategically designed and includes three-small cubical/rooms and one big room to accommodate therapy, education, counseling and group sessions led by professionals. The annual budget utilization for the entire operational cost has been approximately USD $240,928.08 including capital cost. The project bus visits all stand-points/communities twice a month for better outcomes of the services provided to PwDs.

The bus promotes inclusion in the schools and immediate environment to nurture the children with disabilities' socially valued roles as students. They are given age-appropriate "Teaching Learning Materials" scientifically designed to support their school education. Front-line government health workers are regularly provided training for early identification, screening and guidance. In each standpoint, community mobilizers are deployed to enhance participation of local leaders, building trust and monitoring the project on the ground. A real-time dashboard is in place to make evidence-based decisions, analyze and monitor.

Implication of the Project in Community

The project has demonstrated improvements in development of communication, behavior, enhanced attention span, gross motor skills, and becoming independent in mobility and self-care activities among children and adults with disabilities. Some children begin school and take part in extracurricular/cultural activities. The service is also improving the mental well-being of parents, siblings, couples, and especially mothers. The wider community has increased their awareness levels on disability, its services, and government provisions. The team expressed that the project's services and approach are highly gratifying despite facing numerous challenges.

Recommendations

The project will be replicated in other parts of the country in collaboration with multi-stakeholders for greater outreach and quality. The project stands as a pioneering initiative in India, demonstrating effective ways to address the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities and bridging the gap between inaccessibility and non-affordability and accessibility and affordability, thus impacting multiple lives at a single point of time.The project's standalone funding model and dearth of trained professionals may soon pose certain limitations.

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Biographical Information

Shabina Bano

Shabina Bano is Senior Programme Manager at The Hans Foundation where she leads the Mobile Therapy Bus Project. Having 13 years of work experience, Ms. Bano completed an American with Disabilities Act fellowship program focused on inclusive education from the United States, a master's degree in Disability Studies and Action from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Mumbai, a post-graduate diploma in Developmental Therapy from the University of Delhi, and many certificate courses.

Sandeep J. Kapur

Sandeep J. Kapur is Chief Executive Officer of The Hans Foundation and is dedicated to the corporate and social development sector for the last 40 years. He holds an MBA degree from Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies (JBIMS), Mumbai and a bachelor's degree in Economics from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai.

Sudeep Sinha

Sudeep Sinha is Director of Program and Strategic Initiatives at THF, with 27 years experience in the social sector in National and International organisations. He holds a post-graduate diploma in Rural Development from Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS), Ranchi and a postgraduate diploma in Management. He has completed courses in Visionary Leadership Program in Population and Development from International Council on Management of Population (ICOMP), Malaysia and the Catalyst Leadership Program led by Care International-USA.

38. TEACHER COMPETENCY IN PHONEMIC AWARENESS INSTRUCTION

Mary S. Nkatiah

University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

Mary S. Nkatiah email: sima.nkatiah@gmail.com

I have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Department of Special Education, University of Education, Winneba

P. O. Box 25

Winneba, Ghana

Research Background

By the end of primary 2 (P2), all pupils in Ghanaian public schools are expected to have acquired reading skills and read fluently in both their mother tongue and in the English language (Ministry of Education, 2012). However, by the end of P2, the majority of public school pupils in Ghana struggle to read (National Education Assessment Unit, 2016). Without early reading intervention, pupils with reading difficulty would continue to struggle with their reading throughout school (Bursuck & Damer, 2007).

To help pupils develop reading skills and overcome reading difficulties, teacher competency in phonemic awareness instruction is key as phonemic awareness is identified as a strong predictor of future reading achievement (National Teaching Council, 2017). Consequently, in expectation that early grade teachers should develop competency in phonemic awareness instruction, a lot of research (Cohen et al., 2016; Uhry, 2011) has been conducted on this topic. However, there is a dearth of research in that area with regards to Ghana and the Effutu Municipality in particular. This study therefore seeks to ascertain the competency of early grade teachers in teaching phonemic awareness in the Effutu Municipality. Useful information on the competency of early grade teachers could inform preservice and in-service training.

Methods

This paper is based on a cross sectional survey I conducted as part of my Master of Philosophy thesis at the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana. The study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross sectional survey, conducted in May 2019. A questionnaire, with Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.75, was used for the data collection, targeting the 134 teachers who taught kindergarten to P2 in the 27 public primary schools within the Effutu Municipality. One hundred-sixteen teachers responded to the questionnaires, a response rate of 86.57%. Collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 23). Descriptive statistics, frequency, simple raw percentages, and means with corresponding standard deviations were used for analysis.

Teachers' level of competency in phonemic awareness instruction was measured using three variables: (a) preparedness, (b) knowledge (definitional knowledge), and (c) ability (application knowledge). On each variable, respondents were ranked as 1 (Not at all competent), 2 (Minimally competent), 3 (Moderately competent), 4 (Very competent), or 5 (Extremely competent). Preparedness ranking was based on respondents' number of reading instruction credit hours and professional development (PD) training sessions, and ranking of definitional knowledge and application knowledge was based on scores on five questions assessing definitional knowledge and 10 questions assessing application knowledge, respectively.

Results

In terms of their level of preparedness to teach phonemic awareness, the respondents appeared generally competent, with 75.0% of them being at least moderately competent. Only 19.8% and 5.2% of respondents were found to be minimally competent and not at all competent, respectively. However, they showed significant inadequate competency in knowledge and ability in phonemic awareness instruction. On definitional knowledge, more than 59% of respondents were ranked either minimally competent or not at all competent, with only 14.6% being extremely competent or very competent. In terms of application knowledge, 91.4% respondents were found to be either minimally competent or moderately competent, with 3.4% being not at all competent. In terms of their overall competency level, an overwhelming majority (95.7%) of respondents were at best moderately competent with only 4.3% being very competent and no respondent being extremely competent. The respondents had a mean total competency score of

2.72 (SD=0.59) with the level of preparedness being slightly above moderately competent at a mean score of 3.12 (SD=0.92) and knowledge and ability at means of 2.55 (SD=0.81) and 2.53 (SD=0.65) which were above minimally competent but below moderately competent.

Findings suggest that, despite high scores on the number of reading instruction credit hours and PD training sessions, early grade teachers in Effutu Municipality of Ghana generally had limited competency in phonemic awareness instruction. Findings are consistent with previous studies like Bos et al. (2001), Moats (2009), and Cohen et al. (2016), suggesting that frequently teachers in early grades who are supposed to be teaching phonemic awareness have limited competency themselves which may be attributed to several factors, including limited teacher educator competency in phonemic awareness (Washburn et al., 2011), wrong selection of textbooks chosen for reading and literacy courses (Joshi et al., 2009), and limited coverage of relevant structured knowledge and content (McCombes-Tolis & Spear-Swerling, 2011).

Based on the study findings, it is recommended that early grade teacher preparation institutions should design programmes that equip teachers with fundamental knowledge and skills for systematic reading instruction. Furthermore, the institutions responsible for pre-service and in-service training for early grade teachers should design their instructional programmes in phonemic awareness to enable the teachers to fully apply their definitional knowledge.

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Biographical Information

Mary Sima Nkatiah

Mary Sima Nkatiah is a PhD Candidate in Special Education at the University of Education, Winneba in Ghana, researching engagement of learners with disabilities. She is passionate about reading and volunteers to teach reading in basic schools in Winneba. She is married and a mother of three boys.

39. SUPPORTING PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER

Kateřina Habrdová

Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice

Kateřina Habrdová email: habrdk00@pf.jcu.cz

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice

Jeronýmova 10

37115 České Budějovice, CZ

Background

Developmental language disorder (DLD), also known as specific language impairment (SLI) is one of the most severe conditions concerning the development of children. A child with this disorder struggles speaking or understanding speech or both (Dlouhá et al., 2017). The child’s parents are very close to the child, in the role of primary caretakers, spending a remarkable portion of time with the child. They also are in a position of being co-therapists and managers, bearing the financial burden, and investing their time, enthusiasm, emotions and effort with their child (Mikulajová & Kapalková, 2002). This creates a challenging situation in their lives.

The incidence of DLD is widely agreed to be approximately 5-7% — that means on average there are two students with DLD in a common classroom (Turner, 2021). DLD is usually diagnosed between the ages of 3 to 6 years, although some cases may remain undetected until school age (Mikulajová & Rafajdusová, 1993). The neurodevelopmental character of DLD makes the diagnostics and coping more confusing (Krejčířová, 2006; Pospíšilová, 2014). There is a system of education support, medical and counseling care for individuals with DLD in the Czech Republic, yet there is a lack of support for parents who take care of children with DLD (Doležalová & Chotěborová, 2021).

Methods

This research used qualitative methods, mainly semi-structured, in-depth interviews and journaling. The data were analyzed through atlas.ti software and processed into a grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbinová (1999). The interviews were conducted during 2020-2022. There were 20 Czech families with a minimum of one child diagnosed with DLD (25 parents, mothers and fathers) involved in the study. It investigated the specifics of parenting in the context of DLD, parental experience, their strategies and the factors which influence them. Support provisions (systemic and personal) for parents of children with DLD have emerged as the central category of the paradigmatic model.

Results

The research has shown the complexity of the hardships in most aspects of life of parents of children with DLD, comparable to those experienced by parents of children with more serious handicaps. Four types of support provision have been identified based on different levels of expertise and the personal contact between the provider and the person receiving the support. The potential for support seems to come mostly from speech therapists, pediatricians, special education counselors and teachers on the side of professionals, and grandparents and friends, especially the "DLD-aware" ones, on the side of personal relationships. We can see an ascending potential in online media (social media support groups, blogs etc.).

Expertise, awareness, individual characteristics, and the support provision system were identified as the intervening variables. The main characteristics of effective support provision were found to be orientation, the time-aspect, accessibility, and communication. There is a shift from focus on tasks and performance to focus on relationships between parent and child in some parents' references. The parents perceive the support provided to their child is the support provided to themselves. Sufficient supply of information on DLD and DLD-awareness overall, as well as sufficient capacity of professional care providers and empathetic attitude of support providers have been mentioned as the greatest needs by the parents who took part in the interviews.

As a result of proper support, the parents have enhanced their competencies and coping strategies. Their self-efficacy is increasing and they tend to be proactive, passing their know-how and experience on and creating new support opportunities for others. Otherwise, if their sources of support fail, the parents tend to be on the verge of breakdown and fail in different life dimensions.

Conclusions

The consequences of support provision for parental coping suggest the importance of combining different support types and the significance of parent–provider dynamics. Effective support is crucial to the parents, who further pass on the support to their children with DLD, especially in the area of education and socialization. It is important that they feel safe, have courage and be hopeful on their journey.

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Biographical Information

Kateřina Habrdová

Kateřina Habrdová, PhD, is a speech therapist/language pathologist, currently at the Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia. Her current research interests include neurodevelopmental disorders, communication disorders, and parenting.

40. PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS USING AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

Francis K. Anku[1], Florence A. Mensah[1], and Alexander Gariba[2]

[1]Department of Special Education, University of Education, Winneba

[2]Kent State University

Francis K. Anku ankufrancis20@gmail.com

Florence A. Mensah email: amenuvorflorence@gmail.com

Alexander Gariba email: agariba@kent.edu

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Francis K. Anku

Department of Special Education, University of Education, Winneba

P. O. Box 25

Winneba, Central Region, Ghana

Background

Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods for children with intellectual disabilities (ID) who have speech and language difficulties. Extant literature has shown that not all children with ID possess speech abilities, making interaction challenging (Frolova et al., 2023). AAC tools offer them a means to express themselves, engage, and participate actively in learning (Schlosser, 2023). Despite documented efficacy, gaps persist in prospective teachers' perceptions and approaches to AAC integration, emphasizing the need for investigation (Frolova et al., 2023). It is believed that teacher perceptions significantly influence classroom practices, with knowledge and experience as influential factors (Ruppar et al., 2016). Also, negative perceptions and unpreparedness regarding AAC implementation might prevail for various reasons, including lack of familiarity, limited training, and resources (Ruppar et al., 2016). In conducting this study, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) by Bandura (1986) was used to emphasize observational learning and social influences on perceptions. The findings would inform educational practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to promote inclusive education for children with ID by addressing existing gaps in prospective teachers' perspectives on AAC usage. This study, therefore, explored prospective teachers' understanding of AAC tools, their attitudes, and potential barriers to integration.

Methods

This study employed a pragmatic research paradigm, emphasizing practical insights into integrating AAC in educating children with ID. Utilizing a mixed methods approach and a convergent design, qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently but analyzed separately, allowing for triangulation of perspectives. Forty-four prospective teachers of children with ID were purposely sampled from the Department of Special Education at the University of

Education, Winneba (UEW). A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide were used to assess knowledge, attitudes, and challenges related to AAC. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative insights, with findings integrated during the discussion to offer a cohesive narrative. Triangulation of data enhanced validity and reliability for a holistic understanding of prospective teachers’ perceptions towards AAC integration in the education of children with ID.

Results

The study revealed prospective teachers’ adequate knowledge about AAC tools for children with ID, with a majority (84.1%) expressing confidence in their understanding and familiarity with various AAC tools (79.5%). Additionally, most respondents (88.6%) felt that their coursework adequately prepared them to implement AAC methods in classrooms. Moreover, the attitudes of prospective teachers towards AAC strategies were affirmative, with 95.5% believing in their effectiveness and 100% acknowledging their potential to positively impact learning experiences for children with ID. They also expressed confidence that adequate support and training could enhance AAC strategies’ effectiveness. However, potential barriers to implementation were identified, including lack of training (88.6%), limited resources (84.1%), and negative attitudes towards AAC methods (77.3%), highlighting challenges that need to be addressed to facilitate the successful integration of AAC tools in the classroom for children with ID.

Interview Results

The interview data revealed that prospective teachers exhibited a comprehensive understanding of AAC methods, encompassing both high-tech and low-tech solutions, acquired through specific training in AAC as part of their teacher education programme. They strongly believed in the effectiveness of AAC in supporting communication for children with ID, perceiving it as essential for fostering inclusion. Challenges anticipated in incorporating AAC strategies included limited resources, lack of training or support for teachers, and difficulty in individualizing AAC interventions. Prospective teachers envisioned integrating AAC into their teaching practices by creating supportive and inclusive classroom environments, collaborating with professionals, and staying updated with emerging technologies. In all, participants felt adequately prepared to incorporate AAC into their teaching but recognized the need for ongoing support and training to ensure continued effectiveness.

Discussion

The findings revealed that prospective teachers exhibit adequate knowledge and confidence in using AAC methods for children with ID. They expressed familiarity with various AAC tools and affirmed that their training has adequately prepared them for its implementation in the classroom. These findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive training, increased resource allocation, and efforts to change negative attitudes to create an inclusive educational environment that maximizes the potential of AAC strategies for communication and learning (Schlosser, 2023). Challenges such as limited resources, lack of training or support for teachers, and difficulty in individualizing AAC interventions emerged (Andzik et al., 2019). Applying Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory to the findings clarifies how observational learning, self-efficacy, reinforcement, feedback, and social interactions contribute to shaping prospective teachers' perceptions and readiness to embrace AAC strategies in their future classrooms.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Prospective teachers demonstrated a strong understanding and positive attitude towards AAC methods, indicating readiness to advocate for inclusive learning environments. However, challenges like limited training and resources might hinder its effective implementation in classrooms. To address this, the Unit for the Education of Individuals with ID should prioritise comprehensive AAC training and support systems in their teacher education courses to enhance teacher efficacy in AAC usage for children with ID who have communication difficulties.

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Biographical Information

Francis Kwame Anku

Francis Kwame Anku is a special education lecturer at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), Ghana. He trains prospective teachers of learners with ID. As a doctoral candidate at the University of Cape Coast, Francis is researching the clinical teaching of adaptive behaviour skills to learners with ID.

Florence Akua Mensah

Florence Akua Mensah is a senior lecturer and head of the Department of Special Education at UEW. She has considerable years of experience in informal assessment practices and interventions for learners with reading difficulties. She is a doctoral candidate in special education at the same university.

Alexander Gariba

Alexander Gariba is a doctoral student in special education at Kent State University, USA. Before his doctoral programme, he had trained pre-service teachers for both general and inclusive classrooms in Ghana. His research interest is in evidence-based practices that ensure universality for learner diversity.

41. STRATEGIES AND EXPECTATIONS TO IMPROVE COPING SKILLS OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Dung Doan and Khuyen Le

Potential Development Center of Psychological and Speech-Language Therapies

Dung Doan email: doanthedungpsy@gmail.com

Khuyen Le email: khuyenlnt1987@gmail.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Potential Development Center of Psychological and Speech – Language Therapies

18/29 Nguyen Cuu Van Street, Ward 17

Binh Thanh District, Ho Chi Minh City

Vietnam

Conceptual Framework and Background

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition involving emotional, social and behavioral difficulties (American Psychiatric Association, 2021). A child's diagnosis with ASD may affect every member of the family (Shore & Rastelli, 2006). Intervention specialists have found therapeutic intervention processes take lots of time and effort for all the family. Most parents find themselves overwhelmed and others look for ways to overcome the situation. A number of parents face the situation where a second child is diagnosed with autism.

Family, the primary role in the child's intervention, needs to be strong enough in the process measured in years. Many concerns regarding the parents and the family's quality of life are financial stability, spousal relationship, the children's other siblings, social relationships, etc. Some parents choose to work harder to earn more to be able to care for their child in the long run. Others temporarily quit their jobs to focus on the child's treatment. Which of these is more appropriate? What are other strategies better for supporting parents at each stage of intervention?

There are many international studies on parental coping strategies for children with autism (Ali Samadi, 2021; Balubaid & Sahab, 2017; Reddy et al., 2019). There are currently no studies on this topic in Vietnam. I conducted this study to find out how Vietnamese parents cope, which strategies are being used and effective. From there on, besides treating the children, intervention specialists can also support parents for better quality of life.

Research

A convenience sample of parents of children with ASD was recruited from a number of Ho Chi Minh City intervention centers. Data was collected via anonymous online survey questionnaires. One hundred-and-one parents of 2- to 14-year-old children with ASD participated from July to August in 2021. Fifty children have been receiving intervention from and under 2 years and another 51 have been receiving for more than 2 years.

The survey included five parts. First from the demographic questions we collected parents' and children's information. The second part was about challenges these parents may face. The third section asked them to rate the helpful coping strategies they used. The fourth section requested them to identify factors affecting their coping choices. And for the last part, the parents were asked to choose the most helpful way to improve their coping ability.

The third section is a focused point of this research, which was based on the Coping Health Inventory for Parents (CHIP). According to the American Psychological Association, this measure was standardized and has been widely used in studies of families with chronically ill and disabled children (2020). CHIP was first published by McCubbin et al. (1983) in their research and has been used in international research studies of parental coping strategies (Zanon et al., 2017; Gothwal et al., 2015). These studies all found that parents of children with chronic illness and disability all face challenges which affect their lives more than those with healthy children (Gothwal et al., 2015; Zanon et al., 2017).

Results

As studied, because of the need to have more time to take the child to intervention and to play with him or her at home, many parents (41.6% of fathers and 59.4% of mothers) decided to reduce their working hours or change to another job with flexible hours.

Parents mostly frequently (74.3%) had to face challenges caused by their children's sensory, emotional, behavioral and social difficulties. Other challenges sometimes affected the parents, such as lack of information and ways of response (56.4%), family life issues (46.5%), negative reactions from others (42.6%), and lack of support from grandparents, community, and the government (40.6%). Difficulties children with autism encounter (all of 5 sub-factors accounted for more than 50%) and the parental inability to understand their children's condition due to lack of knowledge (62.4%) had a high impact on the parents' coping strategies. Among 42 strategies utilized by parents, 25 were reported to be most helpful (over 85% chosen for each item). These parents prioritized maintaining family integration, co-operation, and an optimistic situation over maintaining social support, self-esteem, psychological stability, and understanding the healthcare situation through communication with other parents and consultation with the healthcare team. Families with children in intervention from and under 2 years chose to do everything for the children, while those for more than 2 years tended to support and help the children to be more independent. At the end of the study, the parents expected to receive more sources of ASD knowledge and information (100%), to get training from experts (99%), and to receive more counseling and support from school psychologists/applied psychologists (99%).

Conclusions

Based on the results, intervention specialists can help the students' families as much as possible. Knowledge of ASD and parental resources should be prominently displayed on social media and websites. Intervention experts may provide training for parents with suitable skills for at-home interaction. Experts can guide parents to effectively cope with children with autism by distributing the free “Coping Strategies for Parents – A Handbook for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.” Additionally, the handbook can be shared with schools, intervention centers, and autism support communities for better approach to other parents in need.

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Biographical Information

Dung Doan

Dung Doan has almost 15 years of experience in clinical practice related to early intervention, psychotherapy, speech-language pathology and sensory integration for children in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He is the founder and director of the Potential Development Center of Psychological and Speech-Language Therapies. He has completed a 2-year Speech-Language Pathology Program (2014) and has master’s degree in Psychology (2021).

Khuyen Le

Khuyen Le has been managing human resources and marketing at the Potential Development Center of Psychological and Speech-Language Therapies since 2018. Ms. Le graduated from San Jose State University, California, USA (2011) with a major in Marketing and a minor in Advertising.

42. EXPLORING LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES LIVING IN COMMUNITY SERVICES

Anna Králová[1], Šárka Káňová[1], and Julie Beadle-Brown[2]

[1]University of West Bohemia, Pilsen, Czech Republic

[2]University of Kent, Canterbury, United Kingdom

Anna Králová email: anikralova@seznam.cz

Šárka Káňová email: kanova@kpg.zcu.cz

Julie Beadle-Brown email: J.D.Beadle-Brown@kent.ac.uk

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Background

During the 20th century, sociologists, psychologists, and historians began to use life story approaches and life course theory in their research (Elder et al., 2003). The introduction of this approach is one of the greatest "...achievements of the social sciences of the second half of the 20th century," according to psychologist Anne Colby (1998, p. 10). Role theory, the idea of the life cycle, and some aging research served as the foundation for life course theory. The life course research method now adds to these theories. In life course methodology, the life course is understood through five concepts: resources and capital, trajectories, pathways, turning points, and transitions (Elder et al., 2003).

According to Elder et al. (2003), a *transition* is a discrete life change or event within a trajectory. Examples of transitions include moving out of the family home, transitioning to and between social services, retirement, and moving from single to married status. On the other hand, a *trajectory* is a sequence of states that are linked and occur in a chronological format (e.g., education or employment career). A *turning point* is something that in some way changes or disrupts a trajectory. For example, meeting the person you fall in love with, which results in the transition from single to married in your relationship trajectory. *Resources and capital* influence the possibilities people experience. Resources include educational culture, social services, family support, and access to information.

Methods

In our study, the Life Course Approach (LCI) was used to create life stories of five people with intellectual disability (PwID) living in a group home in the Pilsen Region. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with PwID. The interviews were supplemented with information provided by a key worker. The exact location of the interview was always of the respondent's choice – where they felt the most comfortable. The interview was adapted to the communication skills of the respondent. The researcher had prepared and verbally presented questions supplemented by a document with easy-to-read text and images that underlined the meaning of the question and in addition included smileys (I agree / disagree).

The recorded interviews were transcribed using MegaWord. Subsequently, the coding of individual interviews was carried out according to the LCI elements using the MaxQDA program. Parts of the conversation were allocated to one of the five LCI domains where they were assigned a code. In this paper, the preliminary results are presented as a summary of the themes for each LCI element (Králová, 2024).

Findings

Trajectories

Four respondents experienced a problem-free childhood, which they often remember. The fifth respondent had a difficult childhood in that she entered a psychiatric hospital at the age of 3. While in the psychiatric hospital, she was disoriented and forgot things she had previously learned. In terms of educational trajectories: two respondents went to a special kindergarten for a month, one respondent was educated by nuns in an institution, and one respondent did not attend school at all as a child. All four of these respondents received education in adulthood from a teacher who came to their sheltered living home. One respondent completed primary school at the age of eighteen. None of them had a paying job.

Pathways

All respondents reported limited autonomy, and none of them could vote. Respondents had no interest in political events, although they sometimes had been to observe the election process with their families. At the point of interview, four participants had family members serving as their guardian. The other participant initially had an institution worker as a guardian but currently has the municipality as their guardian.

Turning Points

The most notable turning point for individuals and their families was when they became aware of their intellectual disability. Other turning points included transition from a social care institution to a community-based service and parental divorce—four respondents reported substantial impact from their parents' divorce, although they are still in regular contact with their parents. Another key turning point was the death of a parent.

Resources

Respondents most often mentioned their families and sheltered living social workers as resources. Two respondents have a partner in another sheltered living setting. All respondents were satisfied with their social services and would not change anything; they also said that this service provider was the only organization that has supported them in their life. Respondents engaged in leisure activities such as reading, writing, playing dominoes, walking in the woods, and visiting shops and pubs. One respondent enjoyed using his tablet and taking photos.

Transitions

For every respondent, the shift from institutional care to community-based services was crucial. The respondents were raised and cared for by their parents during their childhood. Between the ages of 5 and 7, the respondents entered either an institution or a day care centre. The respondents transitioned to institutional social care for various reasons, including the closure of the facility, dissatisfaction with the service provided, and reaching the maximum age limit. One of the respondents entered the institution at the age of 47 following the death of family carers, and another did so aged 30 after completing elementary school. As part of the deinstitutionalization process, the institution they were living in was being transformed. All respondents were offered, and accepted, the opportunity to transition to a sheltered living setting in the community.

Conclusion

From the above preliminary findings, there is evidence of the significant influence of institutional care as the predominant way of life of adults with ID in the Czech Republic at that time. Before the 1990s, PwID were not educated in institutions. After the major change of regime in 1989, respondents were provided with basics of literacy skills, especially to sign and re-write words from books, as a part of further education. Respondents were satisfied with their current lives and liked living in sheltered living more than in the institution. Greater satisfaction was related to better support from social workers and greater opportunities for achieving their independence. According to them, they have greater possibilities to develop their skills in sheltered living.

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Biographical Information

Anna Králová

Anna Králová studies special and inclusive education in the Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia (UWB). During her studies, she focuses on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her work involves exploring the subjective perspectives of people with intellectual disabilities on their quality of life.

Šárka Káňová

Šárka Káňová, PhD, leads UWB's Special and Inclusive Education Unit and pursued a 2018–2019 scholarship at the University of Kent's Tizard Centre, focusing on the quality of life for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Globally involved in disability advocacy, she co-founded a social enterprise, Café Restaurant Kačaba.

Julie Beadle-Brown

Julie Beadle-Brown, PhD, is Professor at the University of Kent and Project Manager for the California Community Living Network. She has 30+ years of international experience in research, teaching, and consultancy that focuses on enhancing the quality of community–based services and quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

43. UNDERSTANDING QUALITY OF LIFE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Šárka Káňová[1], Anna Králová[1], Kristýna Janyšková[1], Julie Beadle-Brown[2], and Karel Řezáč[1]

[1]University of West Bohemia

[2]University of Kent

Šárka Káňová email: kanova@kpg.zcu.cz

Anna Králová email: anikralova@seznam.cz

Kristýna Janyšková email: janyskov@kpg.zcu.cz

Julie Beadle-Brown email: J.D.Beadle-Brown@kent.ac.uk

Karel Řezáč email: rezack@kss.zcu.cz

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Background

This paper examines the quality of life (QoL) of individuals with intellectual disabilities in Czechia, using a Personal Outcome Scale as part of a larger project (i.d. 20-08327Y) within community-based services. Prior to this, there was no assessment of QoL for Czech individuals with intellectual disabilities, nor professional literature on the topic.

In the 1970s and 80s, foreign literature defined QoL for individuals with intellectual disabilities through adaptive behavior or intelligence scores. This concept, prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s, shaped early research (Schalock et al., 2007). Scholars urged considering social indicators and subjective well-being separately for a comprehensive understanding (Cummins, 1997). Measuring QoL adopts a multidimensional approach, incorporating subjective and objective measures. It considers fundamental domains and indicators, adopting methodological pluralism. Efforts emphasize systemic perspectives and increased involvement of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the assessment process (Verdugo et al., 2005).

The international consortium led by Schalock et al. (2007) put forward eight QoL domains: personal development, self-determination, interpersonal relationships, social inclusion, rights, emotional well-being, physical well-being, and material well-being. These domains, encompassing independence, social participation, and well-being, are central to QoL assessment. Various tools, including the Personal Outcomes Scale (POS), have been developed based on this framework. The POS captures perspectives from individuals with intellectual disabilities and proxies, enabling a comprehensive evaluation that combines subjective and objective viewpoints (van Loon et al., 2008).

Methods

Our study utilized the POS to evaluate the QoL of 36 individuals in community-based settings across three Czech regions. From 42 participating settings in a broader study on community-based support, one participant was recruited per setting. However, six settings declined survey participation (van Loon et al., 2013).

The POS questionnaire, conducted through semi-structured interviews, comprises 42 questions, six per domain. Responses are on a 3-point Likert scale: 3 = always, 2 = sometimes, 1 = never, yielding a maximum domain score of 18. Scores from each domain are aggregated for an overall QoL index. Analysis was done using IBM Statistics SPSS version 25, comparing mean scores with a recent study in Portugal (Jacinto et al., 2023).

Findings

Czech respondents scored higher overall, and in most domains, compared to the Portuguese sample. The Czech total QoL index averaged 113 (range: 36-135) out of a maximum of 144, higher than Portugal's 87 (range: 71–101). Domain scores in the Czech Republic ranged from 12 to 16, with physical well-being and emotional well-being scoring highest, and other domains ranging between 14 and 15. In Portugal, the domain scores ranged from 8 (5–12) in the material well-being domain, 9.4 (7–15) in interpersonal relationships, and 9.6 (7-14) in personal development, to 13 (10–15) in the physical well-being domain and 14 (10–15) for emotional well- being. The remaining scores were between 10 and 11.

Conclusion

In interpreting these findings, it is vital to note that Portuguese participants lived in a "support institution," while Czech participants resided in small, community-based settings, likely explaining score differences. Interestingly, Czechs scored lowest in community inclusion and rights, while Portuguese scored lowest in material well-being and interpersonal relationships. Despite higher Czech scores on average, significant variation exists, with some community members scoring as low as institutional residents, aligning with past research on QoL in different settings.

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Biographical Information

Šárka Káňová

Šárka Káňová, PhD, leads the University of West Bohemia’s (UWB) Special and Inclusive Education Unit. She pursued a 2018-2019 scholarship at the University of Kent's Tizard Centre, focusing on the quality of life for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Dr. Káňová is globally involved in disability advocacy, and she co-founded the social enterprise, Cafe Restaurant Kačaba.

Anna Králová

Anna Králová studies Special and Inclusive Education at the University of West Bohemia. In her studies, she focuses on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her work involves exploring the subjective perspectives of people with intellectual disabilities on their quality of life.

Kristýna Janyšková

Kristýna Janyšková, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at UWB's Special and Inclusive Education Unit, specializing in deinstitutionalization, community living for people with intellectual disabilities, and grieving in this population.

Julie Beadle-Brown

Julie Beadle-Brown, PhD, is a Professor at the University of Kent and Project Manager for the California Community Living Network. She has 30+ years of international experience in research, teaching, and consultancy that focuses on enhancing the quality of community-based services and quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

Karel Řezáč

Karel Řezáč, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher and senior lecturer at UWB, focusing on the professional boundaries of social work, deinstitutionalization, foster care, human development, and well-being.

44. EFFECTS OF INCLUSION ON CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD) FROM PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE – AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Lily Dyson

University of Victoria

Lily Dyson email: ldyson@uvic.ca

I have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Lily Dyson

2926 Sea View Rd.

Victoria, B.C., Canada V8N1L1

Background

In the United States the term “inclusion” refers to “students with disabilities [who] are served primarily in the general education classroom . . .” (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010, p. 7). Such an educational practice has been promoted since the mid-1980’s (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Inclusion is now a common practice worldwide and a legislative mandate in the United States, as noted in the Individuals with Disabilities EducationAct (IDEA, 2004). The rationale for inclusion is the gains available to the students with disabilities in the academic and the social domains (Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

While popular and legal, the practice of inclusion has raised an important question: What has been the effect of inclusion on students with disabilities? Research has reported the positive effect of inclusion (Laia & Gil, 2014). However, indirect feedback found that despite the substantial recognition of the potential benefits of integration for children with disabilities, unfavourable opinions about the program were also reported by teachers and parents (Laia, 2007). Moreover, most of the research has grouped all types of disabilities together (Laia & Gil, 2014). Yet, the effect of inclusion may be determined by the specific type of disability.

Learning disability (LD) represents a unique type of disability due to its low visibility. It is possible that the effect of inclusion for children with LD may differ from other more visible disabilities. Moreover, parents, as the main caregiver of children, would have the most extensive knowledge of the life of children with LD and hence would add to the understanding of the effect of inclusion on children with this disability. There is, however, a lack of parents' input in the research on inclusion. A question thus has arisen which is: What is the effect of inclusion on children with LD from the parents' perspective? Such information would increase the understanding of the effect of inclusion on children. The question was examined.

Theoretical Framework

The ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and a model of the ecology of school provided a framework for the present study. According to the model, the child is enveloped within an ecological system consisting of different layers of the ecological entity, with the closest one being the school. Within the school, there exist important elements, among them, peer network and learning provisions (Eccles & Roeser, 1999). Based on this proposition, inclusion would influence the child with LD along these domains: peers and learning provision. This model was tested.

Method

Participants were 13 parents from 12 families who had a child with LD who were enrolled in schools in different grades, from elementary to high school, in Canada.

A qualitative method using the focus group discussion was applied for the present study. The group was divided into two groups and the discussions took place separately. The discussion was led with predetermined questions. One of the questions formed the center for the present analysis. The question was: “How does inclusion affect, if any, your child with LD?” Probe questions were added and included such as: “How did that happen? Can you explain more?” The discussion was tape-recorded and later transcribed by an assistant.

Transcriptions of the recorded interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method (Johnson & LaMontagne, 1993; Dyson, 2007), in which each meaningful unit of speech was analyzed using constant comparison to generate major themes. The credibility of the coding was examined with the coder-consistency being 90%.

Results and Discussion

The analysis generated several themes, each with sub-themes. The two major themes included two opposite effects: negative and positive. The negative effects included exclusion, victimization, and needing extra time for tutoring. The positive outcomes included: a higher self-esteem, more social supports from teachers and peers, and realization of the need for inclusion. The children also learned to be assertive and to defend themselves.

Exclusion occurred in a variety of occasions such as: activities, peers, and programs. There was also extra time needed for private tutoring, which was carried out outside the school. Tutoring outside the home created more time and travelling for the child and the parents.

Victimization took place in the form of bullying and labelling. Children with LD were labelled and called names. Worse than that was bullying, chiefly through negative verbal teasing and enticing the child into breaking rules.

Positive attributes included the development of a higher self-esteem. There was also an increase of social support from teachers and friends because of inclusion. Further positive gains occurred in the child's realization of the need for inclusion.

This study examined the effect of inclusion for children with LD based on the parents' perspective. Both positive and negative effects were found in both the peer and program domain. There is a need to mitigate the negative effects. The negativity appeared to occur mostly within school. Lack of understanding of disability and specifically, LD, may be a contributor. Educating children on disabilities may increase their understanding of disability and hence, result in more positive attitudes toward children with LD. This study has initiated research of inclusion involving learning disabilities. Future quantitative research would advance this area of research.

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Biographical Information

Lily Dyson

Lily Dyson, PhD, is a former Professor of Special Education and Educational Psychological at the University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. She is now a researcher. Her major research interest focuses on child and family development in the presence of a child's disabilities, cultural diversity, or a disadvantaged socio-economic status.

45. LITERACY INSTRUCTION FOR NON-VERBAL AUTISTIC CHILDREN: THE MIB APPROACH

Nataša Dolović

Angerona, Education and Rehabilitation Private Practice

Nataša Dolović email: dolovic.nat@gmail.com

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Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Nataša Dolović

Angerona, Education and Rehabilitation Private Practice

Ivana Gorana Kovačića 46

40000 Čakovec

Croatia

Background

Since Kanner's seminal observations (1943) delineating early manifestations of “autistic” behavior characterized by deficits in social reciprocity, communicative impairments, empathy deficiencies, nonconformity to social conventions, and constrained expressive capabilities, the understanding of autism spectrum condition (ASC) has evolved over 80 years. Despite Kanner's diagnostic criteria persisting as fundamental benchmarks of early identification and assessment protocols, contemporary perspectives view ASCs as neurodevelopmental disorders evincing multifaceted clinical heterogeneity unique to each individual. Scholarly inquiry now gravitates towards elucidating the cognitive and intersubjective dimensions inherent to the autistic spectrum. Conventionally, literacy denotes proficiency in reading and writing, alongside the comprehension and interpretation of written word (Perry, 2012). However, for non-verbal autistic children, proficiency in reading and writing, as well as comprehension and interpretation of written language, may not be applicable in the conventional sense. Non-verbal autistic children typically face challenges in verbal communication, which can extend to written language skills. Therefore, their literacy development usually involves alternative forms of communication and comprehension strategies, such as visual supports, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems, picture-based communication systems, or assistive technology devices (Van Grunsven & Roeser, 2022). When discussing non-verbal (NV) or minimally verbal (MV) autistic children, we are specifically referring to individuals who exhibit limited or absent verbal communication abilities (Koegel et al., 2020). Autistic children exhibit a heterogeneous spectrum of communication abilities, encompassing a subset of individuals who present as non-verbal or exhibit limited verbal communication skills. The acquisition of literacy skills among non-verbal autistic children poses notable challenges, given that conventional pedagogical approaches to literacy instruction predominantly hinge on verbal language modalities and auditory processing mechanisms (Valle et al., 2021). This inherent misalignment between traditional instructional methodologies and the unique communication profiles of non-verbal autistic individuals underscores the exigency for the development and implementation of efficacious literacy interventions meticulously tailored to address the distinct needs of such children. The absence of literacy proficiency exerts substantial ramifications on holistic personal development, affecting educational pathways, identity formation, and social integration among this population (Valle et al., 2021). Hence, literacy emerges as an elemental skill set essential for optimizing life prospects, particularly among non-verbal autistic individuals.

The Biopsychosocial Framework of a Non-Verbal Autistic Child

The biopsychosocial framework for non-verbal autistic children's personality encompasses biological, psychological, and social factors shaping their mental health and quality of life. Despite the contemporary emphasis on inclusive and holistic approaches to educating autistic children, the predominant focus of research lies on those with robust verbal capabilities, leaving nonverbal or minimally verbal children marginalized and relatively underexplored. This disparity persists despite evidence suggesting that this subgroup constitutes a significant proportion, estimated at 25–30%, of the autistic population (Anderson et al., 2007).

The Metacognitive-Intellectual-Behavioral Approach (MIBa) and Literacy Instruction

Over the past 15 years, the metacognitive-intellectual-behavioral approach (MIBa) has emerged as a comprehensive and innovative educational methodology, the subject of my extensive investigation. This approach is tailored to the education of autistic children, with a specific focus on cultivating metacognitive skills, fostering intellectual development, and implementing strategic behavioral interventions. MIBa integrates principles and strategies from various theoretical perspectives to offer a contemporary and all-encompassing approach for autistic children, aiming to intervene as early as possible to mitigate the development of more pronounced clinical presentations of ASC as outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (DSM-V) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Central to MIBa are its three primary components: the child, the family, and cognitive-intellectual growth and development. Emphasizing cognitive flexibility, adaptive behavior, and the dynamics of social interactions, MIBa recognizes their crucial roles in fostering the holistic development of autistic individuals. Additionally, within the family context, MIBa underscores the importance of enhancing resilience by considering various factors that influence family dynamics. Moreover, MIBa acknowledges the significant impact of cognitive and intellectual growth on autistic individuals' development, emphasizing personalized teaching and learning methods, fundamental behavioral repertoires, and the promotion of independence and autonomy. Within the framework of MIBa, there is a primary emphasis on the intellectual-cognitive dimensions of a child's functioning, cultivated and diversified through various instructional approaches where the child's autonomy holds paramount significance. This instructional paradigm extends its focus to parents, who are educated in these methodologies, thereby contributing to the realization of the child's educational objectives. Integral to this pedagogical process is the cultivation of the child's self-regulatory capacities, which play an instrumental role in acquiring competencies essential for fostering constructive collaboration and facilitating the literacy acquisition process.

Conclusion

While understanding ASC has evolved significantly over the past 80 years, there remains a gap in research focusing on non-verbal or minimally verbal autistic children, who represent a substantial portion of the autistic population. MIBa has emerged as a comprehensive educational methodology for addressing specific needs of autistic children, emphasizing cultivation of metacognitive skills, intellectual development, and strategic behavioral interventions.

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Biographical Information

Nataša Dolović

Nataša Dolović holds a master’s degree in Educational Rehabilitation and Elementary School Teaching. She is a neurofeedback therapist and a licensed ADOS-II protocol administrator. With a special interest in autism, she focuses on educating children with autism spectrum conditions (ASC), combining expertise in education, therapy, and assessment. Currently, she is a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb.

46. EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO ADULTHOOD FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Šárka Káňová, Jan Šiška, Tereza Havránková, and Marie Černíková

Special & Inclusive Education Unit, University of West Bohemia, Czechia

Šárka Káňová email: kanova@kpg.zcu.cz

Jan Šiška email: jsiska@kpg.zcu.cz

Tereza Havránková email: tuzicko@kan.zcu.cz

Marie Černíková email: mcerniko@kpg.zcu.cz

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Background

We share research findings from the Czech Republic, focusing on transition from school to adulthood. Individuals who have been historically burdened by exclusion, segregation and institutionalization have seen a shift towards societal inclusion and community-based services, influenced by the human rights movement and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Part of a broader research initiative funded by the Czech Research Foundation, this study focuses on the transition period of young adults with intellectual disabilities (IDD), one of the most demanding phases in a person's life (Ghanouni & Raphael, 2022). This research addresses gaps in understanding experiences of young people with IDD and their parents during the transition period.

Methods

This study is focused on understanding successful transition to adulthood for young adults with IDD and their families, and their perspectives on effective support. Through six focus groups in two Czech regions, lasting about 1 hour and 25 minutes each, we explored the experiences of (a) students and recent graduates with IDD and (b) their parents. Two researchers facilitated and recorded discussions, transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA 24 Software. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) identified patterns, prioritizing the young people's perspectives. Inductive coding by two researchers, refined through collaborative discussions, categorized data. Initial themes emerged from common codes across transcripts, rigorously reviewed against the dataset and objectives. Transparency was maintained through field notes and documentation. Peer debriefing and collaborative coding enriched interpretation. This comprehensive approach offers insights into effective support during the critical transition from school to adulthood for individuals with IDD.

Findings

Responses of 23 young people, including 10 females and 13 males, aged 18 to 26 years old, and parents aged 41 to 58 years old (9 females, 1 male) were utilized. All students identified as having IDD, some with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities or autism, and some with both. Most participants described having received support at school. After leaving the school, the majority of young people were staying home with their parents, some using disability services.

Parents agreed that successful transition in general poses universal challenges and underscores the importance of becoming “ordinary” individuals. Independence, viewed as a critical component, granted through parental guidance and completion of school, is identified as a pivotal milestone. The transitional journey encompasses multifaceted aspects such as seeking a partner, job, and housing, acknowledging these as integral elements. Parents underscored the subjective nature of success, emphasizing their recognition of people’s individual definitions of accomplishment and fulfillment as they navigate the intricate path to adulthood.

Analyzing parental perceptions of their child’s transition reveals a range of emotions and challenges. Parents commonly characterized this phase as a turning point, noting its inherent difficulty and complexity. Some expressed reservations, asserting that their child may not be mature enough to undergo the transition, leading to concerns about their readiness for adulthood. Key components of housing, work, and partnership were emphasized as integral facets of the transitional journey. Interestingly, parents noted that they may unintentionally hinder their child's experience of adulthood, potentially due to protective instincts or concerns. The extent to which transition is perceived varies and depends significantly on the level of disability, suggesting that unique needs and capabilities of the child play a crucial role in shaping parental perspectives.

People with IDD commonly identified family members as crucial sources of positivity and support during transition, fostering a sense of connection and understanding. They experienced joy from forming new bonds and friendships, suggesting the potential for positive social engagement. Conversely, negative aspects emerged, comments on depression among individuals with IDD during the transition period. Young people with IDD expressed concerns about lack of a clear idea regarding future paths, necessitating parents make decisions for them.

Post-transition for individuals with IDD unveiled varied paths. Some finished schooling but struggled with unemployment, others were dependent on care. Varied educational journeys were evident, with transitions between fields. Support perception varied, with reports of inadequate external support from peers, teachers, or self-help networks. Many individuals resided with parents and worked in sheltered workshops. These findings underscore the diverse challenges and support needs during this critical period of transition.

Parents expressed need for comprehensive and coordinated support during the transition of their adult offspring with IDD, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration seeking proper and timely assistance for families, with a particular focus on addressing institutional inertia. Parents highlighted the value of planning and dedicating more attention to the transition period, advocating for informed guidance for parents and students. They desired greater support throughout their child's life, emphasizing targeted guidance and family and partnership counseling. Also, parents stressed the significance of a holistic approach to support, viewing individuals with IDD as unique and requiring timely assistance. They called for increased information about the nature and availability of educational fields, with conditional admission based on interviews and enhanced awareness of schools. The family's pivotal role was underscored, emphasizing that luck becomes essential in the absence of family support. Systemic support is also deemed crucial, including assistance for self-help through learning from other parents, open and intensive communication with adult offspring with disabilities, avoiding artificial projects, and advocating for additional services tailored for individuals with autism. These collective insights highlight the multifaceted and comprehensive nature of the support parents seek, underscoring the necessity for a holistic and systemic approach in addressing the diverse needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities during the transition period.

Conclusion

The study explores the transition to adulthood for individuals with IDD and their families in the Czech Republic. Parents recognize common challenges and stress the importance of authenticity in achieving "ordinary" status. Successful transition relies on independence, guided by parental support and education completion. It involves finding a partner, job, and housing, with subjective success as a focus. Parental perspectives vary based on emotions, challenges, and disability levels. Post-transition reveals diverse paths, highlighting the need for tailored support. Parents advocate for interdisciplinary collaboration, informed guidance, counseling, holistic approaches, and systemic support, underscoring the necessity of a multifaceted approach.

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Biographical Information

Šárka Káňová

Šárka Káňová, PhD, leads the Special and Inclusive Education Unit at University of West Bohemia (UWB), and pursued a 2018–2019 scholarship at the University of Kent's Tizard Centre, focusing on the quality of life for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Globally, she is involved in disability advocacy; she also co-founded a social enterprise, Cafe Restaurant Kačaba.

Jan Šiška

Jan Šiška, PhD, an Associate Professor, concluded a Fulbright scholarship at the University of Minnesota, emphasizing transition in disability policy. His work spans international perspectives on deinstitutionalization, monitoring, and governance, aligning with human rights policies. Leading national and international projects, Dr. Šiška authored protocols and guidelines on disability support services, active citizenship, and community participation.

Tereza Havránková

Tereza Havránková, PhD, is a lecturer and researcher at the Department of English Language and Department of Computer and Didactic Technology, Faculty of Education, UWB. She has been working for a long time on the use of iPads in education, especially in language teaching.

Marie Černíková

Marie Černíková, PhD, is a lecturer, performer, and artist. She instructs pre-graduate students of Education in Personal and Social Development and Drama Education at UWB. Her doctoral thesis explored the connection between costume, self-presentation, and theatrical activities, examining the intersections of lived and staged reality.

47. EMPLOYING OBSERVATION AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION FOR INSIGHTFUL TRANSITION NARRATIVES

Tereza Havránková, Marie Černíková, Šárka Káňová, and Jan Šiška

University of West Bohemia

Tereza Havránková email: tuzicko@kan.zcu.cz

Marie Černíková email: mcerniko@kpg.zcu.cz

Šárka Káňová email: kanova@kpg.zcu.cz

Jan Šiška email: jsiska@kpg.zcu.cz

Background

The transition from school to adult life is a pivotal and multifaceted stage, especially for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) (Wehman, 2001). The PEDAL project (researching transitions of young **p**eople with int**e**llectual disabilities) investigates this transition phase, aiming to articulate and model successful transitions that reflect the lived experiences of young people with IDD. Through this work, the project strives to bridge existing knowledge gaps, aiming to shape policies and practices that better serve individuals with disabilities on a broader scale (Šiška et al., 2017). As a qualitative study, the PEDAL project identifies the experiences, obstacles, and enabling factors contributing to a successful transition to adulthood for individuals with IDD within the Czech Republic. The study tailors its approach to be relevant and actionable in the Czech context by developing specific definitions and potential models for successful transition. This paper presents preliminary findings from case studies, which included site visits and art workshops as primary methods to collect in-depth experiences from seven young people with IDD.

Methods

The PEDAL project conducted an 18-month case study to examine the transition of seven young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities from school to adult life (Šiška et al., 2017), employing diverse creative methodologies to capture this pivotal phase. In collaboration with the drama department at the University of West Bohemia (UWB), the research team created video narratives through drama and film workshops, video diaries, and interviews, highlighting each participant's journey, the support they received, the decision-making process they engaged in, and their level of involvement (Bigby & Beadle-Brown, 2018).

Site visits were an integral part of the research, providing the team with a vantage point to assess educational settings, support mechanisms, and adaptations within the environment to foster student independence. These visits also included comprehensive interviews with educators to gain deeper insights into the challenges and enablers within the educational system. The art workshops, which spanned 18 months and included various sessions, allowed participants to articulate their experiences through spoken word and visual arts, offering them a secure platform to convey their narratives and foster shared understanding (Butcher et al., 2023).

Findings

The preliminary findings from the site visits indicate that the presence and implementation of a transition plan varied significantly among the individuals observed. Notably, a minority had an established plan that was actively being followed. These plans ranged from structured activities and community engagement to undefined or tentative future engagements. The site visits revealed that family involvement and support were crucial in planning and executing these transition plans. However, there was an apparent lack of continuity and confirmation in executing these plans, leading to uncertainty about the sustainability and effectiveness of the transition strategies.

Moreover, the involvement of young individuals in their transition planning was inconsistent. Some showed active participation with a clear understanding of their preferences and needs, while others were less involved, often due to communication barriers or lack of structured planning processes (Test et al., 2009). Despite these inconsistencies, there was a common understanding among educators and family members regarding the individuals' preferences and interests, although this did not always translate into formal planning (Šiška et al., 2017). The observation's recurring theme was the need for a more individualized approach that includes the young individuals' active participation in planning their transition to adulthood.

As the next phase of the study, the analysis will extend to the creative outputs from the art workshops. These outputs will provide additional qualitative data reflecting the experiences and emotions of the participants regarding their transition. The forthcoming step will involve a detailed examination of the art workshop results, followed by a synthesis and comparison with the findings from the site visits. This comprehensive approach aims to merge insights from structured observations and expressive arts, providing a holistic view of the transition experience and informing more nuanced support strategies.

Conclusion

The PEDAL project's qualitative investigation into the transitional experiences of young people with IDD has revealed the pivotal role of personalized planning and family engagement. While the presence and active implementation of transition plans varied, the need for a tailored approach incorporating the youths' voices and preferences emerged as a consistent theme (Molfenter et al., 2018). The next step in this insightful journey is the analysis of the art workshops' outputs, which promises to enrich the current findings with deeper emotional and experiential insights. By comparing and synthesizing these results with the observations from site visits, the PEDAL project aims to construct a holistic narrative that will guide the development of more nuanced and effective support strategies, ultimately empowering young people with IDD to participate fully and effectively in society as they enter adulthood.

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Biographical Information

Tereza Havránková

Tereza Havránková, PhD, is a lecturer and researcher in the Department of English Language and Department of Computer and Didactic Technology, Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia (UWB). She has been working for a long time on the use of iPads in education, especially in language teaching.

Marie Černíková

Marie Černíková, PhD, is a lecturer, performer, and artist. She instructs pre-graduate students of Education in Personal and Social Development and Drama Education at UWB. Her doctoral thesis explored the connection between costume, self-presentation, and theatrical activities, examining the intersections of lived and staged reality.

Šárka Káňová

Šárka Káňová, PhD, leads UWB's Special and Inclusive Education Unit and pursued a 2018–2019 scholarship at the University of Kent's Tizard Centre, focusing on the quality of life for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Globally involved in disability advocacy, she co-founded a social enterprise, Cafe Restaurant Kačaba.

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48. USE AND EVALUATION OF AI-BASED VOICE ASSISTANCE IN EVERYDAY LIVES OF OLDER PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT ID: RESULTS OF A 4-WEEK FIELD STUDY (AI-AGING PROJECT)

Peter Zentel[1], Torsten Hammann[2], Anna Schlomann[2,3], Christiane Even[3], Vera Heyl[2],
Christian Rietz[2], and Hans-Werner Wahl[3]

[1]Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, [2]Heidelberg University of Education
[3]University of Heidelberg

Peter Zentel email: Peter.zentel@edu.lmu.de

Torsten Hammann email: kraemer@ph-heidelberg.de

Anna Schlomann email: schlomann@nar.uni-heidelberg.de

Christiane Even email: even@nar.uni-heidelberg.de

Vera Heyl email: heyl@ph-heidelberg.de

Christian Rietz email: rietz@ph-heidelberg.de

Hans-Warner Wahl email: wahl@nar.uni-heidelberg.de

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Peter Zentel
Lehrstuhl Geistigbehindertenpädagogik
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1, 80539 München, Germany

Background

Older people, especially those with disabilities, are often excluded from the digital world (Chadwick et al., 2022). In addition, there is little research on voice assistance (VA) for older people with intellectual disabilities (ID) (Even et al., 2022). The AI-Aging project has addressed this gap through interdisciplinary research to understand the use, potentials, challenges and accessibility issues for older people with different levels of competence. The aim was to explore the benefits and associated pleasure or burden of a commercial VA in the lives of older people with and without ID. The article will focus on the results of the group of older people with ID.

Method

The project investigated the use of a commercial VA device (i.e., Amazon Echo Show) in a heterogeneous group of older people with and without ID (n = 60, average age without disability: 73, average age with disability: 57). Recruitment for the group of older people with ID was carried out by contacting residential facilities. We were dependent on so-called gatekeepers who granted us access to this group of people. In our case, these were managers, family members and legal representatives. In some cases, group employees also had to be considered.

After several days of individual training, in which the different functions of the devices were explained, the participants used the VA device during a four-week field study according to their personal preferences in their everyday lives.

The user experience was documented using interviews, surveys, usage statistics, a digital diary, and video data. The central aim was to correlate objective usage data with the subjective experience of the interaction with the VA and to combine the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The interaction logs with the voice assistant were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The participants were filmed only while using the device, and the video material was analyzed with regard to the emotional expression shown in their mimic. The electronic diary was started once a day to record the current view of the use of the device.

Results

The results obtained are varied. In the context of the actual study, fundamental attitudes towards media use by people with ID were identified. For example, 47 of the 50 institutions contacted declined to participate in the study. The reasons given varied. In some cases, the relevance of VA for the target group was questioned, in others, the technical framework conditions were not available (i.e., no internet access for residents). There were also major reservations with regard to the planned video recordings when using the device, relating to the personal rights of both the residents and the employees who could potentially be filmed.

The usage data itself, which was the focus of the research interest, showed a multi-layered picture of usage. The usage frequency among participants with ID was higher than those among participants without ID, varied greatly and tended to decrease over the course of the 4-week study. While one user made more than 3000 voice inputs, the average for the 23 participants was 517 inputs. In terms of content, based on the metadata analysis of the Amazon data, 32% of the inputs were about information, 40% about entertainment, 12% about communication with Alexa, 5% about organization, and 11% about other topics. The VA was rated both positively and frustratingly. In the overall evaluation of the VA use, 88% indicated that they liked using Alexa. When asked whether the use of Alexa was frustrating, 18% answered “yes,” 35% “partially,” and 47% “no.” Some statements of participants underline these negative experiences: “Whenever I wanted an answer, she said, ‘I don't know’” or “I wanted to press but that didn’t quite work.” Based on the pilot study (Hammann et al., 2022), the emotion analysis focused on the four most promising participants with ID based on the inclusion criteria (e.g., higher usage, different age, good video, and interaction quality). With regard to this sample, the video data covered 11 of 28 study days. The emotional valence shown was mostly neutral and no downward or upward trend was discernible. It is striking that negative valence was also recorded on all days, while on 3 of the 11 days only neutral and negative valence and no positive valence was measured. In addition, no connection was found between valence and the type of voice inputs (i.e., successful or unsuccessful voice inputs).

Interpretation

The use of the VA does not appear to have a direct effect on emotional expression, as primarily neutral valence was recognized. Different explanations can be discussed. For example, the strong emotion regulation can be attributed to the established expectations and habits of use or the lack of social human interactions on the one hand. On the other hand, it may be due to the technical limitations of automated emotion analysis software. In total, the data shows that the VA was integrated into everyday life for very various purposes. The very different frequency of use measured with a generally decreasing trend indicates on the one hand a novelty effect, which leads to very intensive use at the beginning, but which weakens over time. On the other hand, however, it is not possible to speak of uniform use. Rather, the participants showed very different usage both in terms of frequency and content focus. This means that VA is not fundamentally beneficial for all older people with ID, but the data also suggests that some participants used it very intensively and in a differentiated way for specific purposes, thus expanding the existing media settings in a meaningful way. This calls into question the very negative attitude that was evident in the requests for participation in the study. Do the gatekeepers have the fundamental right to deny access to technologies such as the VA? And is it acceptable that people with ID have no internet access at all in their care facilities?

Conclusion

The AI-Aging project addressed digital exclusion through interdisciplinary research on VA. Despite varied user experiences including both positive and frustrating aspects, the study highlighted the impact of VA on everyday habits. Nevertheless, achieving digital participation of older people with ID in residential care facilities remains a challenge. Questions remain regarding the impact of VA on autonomy and well-being. Furthermore, the successful implementation of AI depends on comprehensive educational support both for people with ID and their caregivers. Moving forward, research and practice on responsible AI must involve all stakeholders to ensure awareness and openness to this technology.

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Biographical Information

Peter Zentel

Dr. Zentel graduated from the University of Cologne and received a PhD at the University of Tuebingen. He is a Professor for Special Education at the University of Munich, and his research focuses on the areas of disability and technology as well as profound intellectual and multiple disabilities (PIMD).

Torsten Hamman

Torsten Hamman, née Krämer, graduated from the University of Education Heidelberg and specializes in leveraging technologies to improve the quality of life and foster inclusive, participatory processes for individuals with intellectual, severe, and multiple disabilities. His work focuses on developing methods to support pre-verbal communication and the expression of emotions.

Anna Schlomann

Dr. Schlomann graduated from the University of Cologne, where she also earned her PhD. She is interested in technology usage and attitudes in the elderly, information and communication technology utilization and subjective well-being in later life, and digital inequality.

Christiane Even

Christiane Even, née Opfermann, is a research assistant in the project "AI-based voice assistance for older adults," employing mixed methods. Her PhD at Heidelberg University of Education explores user adaptation to voice interfaces through conversation analysis.

Vera Heyl

Dr. Heyl graduated from the University of Heidelberg, where she also earned her PhD. She is a Professor of Psychology for the Blind and Visually Impaired at the University of Education Heidelberg. Her research interests include experiences and behaviors across the lifespan under the conditions of blindness or visual impairment.

Christian Rietz

Dr. Rietz graduated from the University of Bonn and earned his PhD at the Technical University of Berlin. He is Professor of Research Methods and Mixed Methods at the University of Education Heidelberg. His interests include statistics, mixed-methods research, and the application of artificial intelligence across various aspects of life.

Hans-Werner Wahl

Dr. Wahl graduated from the University of Heidelberg and earned his PhD at the Free University of Berlin. He is a Senior Professor and Director of the Network for Aging Research at Heidelberg University. His interests include aging from a lifespan perspective and the role of physical and technological.

49. INCLUSION THROUGH LOBBYING AND ADVOCACY WITH COMMUNITIES' STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT

Viviana Contreras

Centro Maya Servicio Integral, Guatemala Centroamérica

Viviana Contreras email: direccioncentromayasi@gmail.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Viviana Contreras

3 Av. 3-36 zona 2

Cantón Tzanjay, San Juan La Laguna Sololá

07017 Guatemala, Centroamerica

Community Based Rehabilitation Overview

Community-based rehabilitation (CBR), an initiative by the World Health Organization (WHO), along with the Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978, is designed to improve access to rehabilitation and health services in developing countries. CBR evolved into a community development approach, focused on rehabilitation, poverty reduction, equalization of opportunities and social inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwD). It is currently promoted as a multi-sector development strategy to address the needs of PwD, guarantee their participation and inclusion in society and improve their quality of life. The CBR matrix seeks to guide how this can be carried out. In the CBR strategy, we are all important for the achievement of independence, participation, equalization of opportunities, and inclusion of people with disabilities. In November 2004, the WHO, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) convened 65 experts in disability development and CBR to begin the design of the CBR guidelines, an activity that culminated in the development of the CBR matrix which provided the scope and structure for the guidelines (International Labor Organization et al., 2004). In 2010, the publication of the CBR guidelines was approved. It provided more than 46 years of practice, a common approach, bringing together everything that is currently known about CBR in the world thus enabling a new framework for action. It provided practical suggestions for their implementation, ensuring that people with disabilities and their family members have access to existing programs and benefits in the communities.

CBR as a strategy contributes to the implementation of the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and national legislation that promotes processes of participation and inclusion and advocacy of people with disabilities. The axes contemplated by the CBR matrix are: education, health, social sustenance, and empowerment.

CBR Services through Centro Mayo

Since 2021, in Centro Maya, we have been providing CBR therapies to over 150 children, which have contributed to their inclusive education. We have provided training to 60 local teachers on inclusive education and supported them to make reasonable adjustments to the National Based Curriculum to help include all of our students in the formal school program. Last year we accomplished the inclusion of 56 students in public and private schools. We also monitored and solved discrimination cases in the public and private schools. Every child now has their individual yearly plan, through which we can monitor their progress both in therapies and in their education.

The implementation in private and public schools involved reasonable adjustments so children with disabilities can have an inclusive education. This experience will contribute to Centro Maya continuing the work in each of the seven municipalities and more than 20 communities in the Department of Sololá. In Sololá, where we work in favor of inclusive education in areas in poverty and extreme poverty, we provide the necessary tools to children with disabilities not only for their inclusion in schools but also for opportunities to have a dignified life and eventually an independent life to the extent their disability allows. These tools will also provide them an opportunity to be accepted and included in their community and break the stigma that still exists in our communities and stops children from living a full life to which they have every right. Parental empowerment through our Parent Schools provides support and serenity in a climate of trust in which parents can join groups that strengthen ties and represent a space for family growth and responsibility. These directly benefit the children, as parents learn to give them effective support through learning tools that promote autonomy and independence for the PwD. Locally Centro Maya continuously provides trainings to empower parents on different topics. These actions lead parents to get more involved in their children's rehabilitation and inclusion by becoming members of Centro Maya´s board of directors. Before it was difficult to get them involved.

With parents involved in the local government it is more likely to be open and willing to help, if the parents are the ones demanding for their children's human rights. Utilizing the population censuses in order to identify the PwDs in the communities leads to their inclusion in the formal educational system. For Centro Maya it is important to focus on dignity and respect for the human rights of the children we serve. Our commitment to social justice achieved through political advocacy and lobbying with the local government, with institutions, other non-governmental organizations, community leaders, municipalities, and other government institutions remains strong in order to promote the inclusion of PwDs, especially children.

Conclusion

Advocacy and lobbying have come together around a common issue, leading to changes in government, public policy, society, and law. We do this by providing access to inclusive education, health and mental care, and social care services, for people with disabilities and their families, and also by providing practical support to be included in their communities. Through trainings and awareness campaigns we hope to eradicate the stigma of disability and discrimination. Our commitment is to continue with concrete actions and networking, and with our Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 2024-2026, in defense of the fundamental human rights of people with disabilities and for their inclusion in their communities.

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Biographical Information

Viviana Contreras

Viviana Contreras is Director at Centro Maya Guatemala. She has a bachelor’s degree in Social Communication and a master’s degree in Politics. She is currently in her fourth year of law school. She has 20 years experience lobbying and promoting human rights for vulnerable populations. Her social-political knowledge allows her to specialize in executing, monitoring and evaluation on strategic planning.

50. EDUCATION INDEX FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF EQUALITY WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Cristina Miralles-Cardona, Esther Chiner, Marcos Gómez-Puerta, and María C. Cardona-Moltó

University of Alicante

Cristina Miralles-Cardona email: cristina.miralles@ua.es

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Cristina Miralles-Cardona

University of Alicante

Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n, San Vicente del Raspeig

Alicante, PC 03690, Spain

Background

The United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015) address the most important global challenges of the 21st century, such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, violence, and injustice. According to the UN *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition* (UN, 2023), more than half the world is falling behind in achieving those goals. Progress on more than 50% of the SDGs has been weak and insufficient, and progress on another 30% is stagnant or has regressed. As a result, this report calls for ambitious national benchmarks to reduce inequality, focusing on, among others, improving the quality of education to address gender inequality. Despite the fact that the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) clearly establishes through SDG 4 that by 2030 we must "[e]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" and, specifically, through Target 4.7, "… ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development …, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence," in practice, there are no precise indicators to measure the extent to which education for sustainable development (ESD), including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels "in (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment" (UN Global Indicator 4.7.1) (United Nations Statistical Commission, 2024, p. 6). Since this indicator measures each of the four components using the 1974 UN *Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,* which evaluates the national implementation of ESD by yes/no answers and since, in addition, only the answers for the primary and secondary educational level are taken into account for the calculation of the indicator, it is necessary to have instruments that include specific quantifiable aspects to measure the components of the Global Indicator 4.7.1 at the local, regional, and national level. Since gender equality is especially important in education, this study's purpose was to design a tool to identify student learning and the methods and strategies used by teachers to achieve Target 4.7.

Method

The instrument, the ESD 5 index, was designed to measure education for sustainable development of equality with a gender perspective in teacher training. It was developed following a graduated sequence of steps (a) literature review (Fischer et al., 2022), (b) expert assessment, and (c) piloting. The first step involved looking into the equality plans of Spanish universities. This allowed for the verification that, in compliance with PL 3/2007 (Equality Law, 2007), all higher education institutions have created equality plans that include teaching with a gender perspective as one of their priority actions. To assess the first bank of 106 items, quantitatively and qualitatively, six gender experts with experience in scale development formed a discussion group. Qualitative analysis consisted of evaluating the relevance, clarity and understanding of each item, and the directions on how to respond to the items. Observations contributed to improving the wording of some items, increasing the face validity of the first version of the ESD 5 index. The same expert group satisfactorily assessed content validity.

Results

The ESD 5 index explores, based on a set of indicators, the impact of ESD for gender equality on the competencies of pre-service teachers and how it can contribute to transforming future generations into agents of change committed to a gender-sensitive pedagogy. It consists of 106 items grouped in four subscales. The first subscale “Mainstreaming Gender into Teaching” measures the incorporation of a gender perspective into teaching from an institutional and curricular approach through 12 items. The degree of agreement is assessed using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 6 = *Strongly agree*). An example of items are: Item 1 'My college is committed to gender equality.' The second subscale "Contents and Teaching Methods," measures the contents (20 items) and the methodological strategies (12 items) that teachers use to educate on equality from a sustainable perspective; it uses a 5-anchor frequency scale (1 = *Never*; 5 = *Always*). Regarding methodological strategies, respondents are usually asked how frequently they are used as a methodological resource for teaching. The third subscale, "Teacher Efficacy for a Gender-Sensitive Practice" measures through 58 items the perceived competency (1 = *Very low*; 6 = *Very high*) in developing a professional, gender-sensitive practice. The subscale consists of three components: knowledge (16 items), skills (15 items), and attitudes (7 items) that allow obtaining a score per item, per component and a total score of the subscale. Finally, the fourth subscale,"Training Needs," with 24 items, evaluates the level of training needed to acquire and develop knowledge and skills in the gender equality field; it uses a 6-anchor level of need scale (0 = *I do not need it*; 5 = *Very high need*). A maximum score (120 points) indicates a very high need for training, while a score of 0 indicates that no training is needed in that area. An example is Item 3, 'Analysis of gender inequalities in the social context.' The revised version of the ESD 5 index is currently in progress; it has been administered in the 2023–2024 academic year to student teachers and social workers from four public universities. It is hoped to soon provide results from the analysis of its psychometric properties through the study of its construct validity.

Conclusion and Suggestions

In order to measure Target 4.7 for gender equality, the current study suggests that the items, scales, and indicators of the ESD 5 index could be considered for inclusion in current reports on ESD for gender equality at the institutional, regional, and national levels. However, some aspects to consider for further reports are: (a) limitations of data obtained from the ESD 5 index, since it is limited to pre-service and/or inservice teachers, and (b) limitations of the information, scales, items, and potential scores obtained from the ESD 5 index due to the conceptual framework used. Although there is a high level of coverage of what we understand to be the ESD indicators of equality with a gender perspective, the content and topics covered in the different subscales may not be complete. The next practical steps are: (a) conduct a broader consultation with interested parties regarding the current proposal's content, focusing on the topics and the elements that will be represented, and (b) this consultation could lead to an expansion of the topics covered on ESD as well as the collection of data suitable for other, non-university educational levels and other disciplines besides teacher training.

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Biographical Information

Cristina Miralles-Cardona

Cristina Miralles-Cardona is a Juan-de-la-Cierva research fellow at the University of Alicante. She holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary-Gender-Studies and a master's degree in Educational Psychology (UMN). Her previous professional activity was developed as a psychotherapist and teacher-on-special-assignment. Her research focuses on education for gender equity, mental health, and inclusion.

Esther Chiner

Esther Chiner is an Associate Professor of Educational Research and Assessment in the School of Education at the University of Alicante, Spain. She holds degrees in Psychology and Education and a PhD in Education. Her research interests are related to educational and digital inclusion of diverse students.

Marcos Gómez-Puerta

Marcos Gómez-Puerta is an Associate Professor of Instruction and School Organisation at the University of Alicante, Spain. He has a degree in Psychopedagogy and a PhD in Educational Research. His research interests are mainly related to the educational, digital, labor and social inclusion of people with disabilities.

María-Cristina Cardona-Moltó

María-Cristina Cardona-Moltó is an honorary Professor at the University of Alicante, international affiliate at the University of Helsinki (AGORA Center for the Study of Social Justice and Equality), and a visiting scholar at the Institute on Community Integration (UMN). She holds a master's degree in Psychology and a PhD in Education.

51. PHONICS INTERVENTION TO REDUCE READING DIFFICULTIES IN GHANAIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Florence A. Mensah and Francis K. Anku

Department of Special Education, University of Education, Winneba

Florence A. Mensah email: amenuvorflorence@gmail.com

Francis K. Anku email: ankufrancis20@gmail.com

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Florence A. Mensah and Francis K. Anku

Department of Special Education, University of Education, Winneba

P. O. Box 25

Winneba, Central Region

Ghana

Conceptual Background

The acquisition of reading skills is crucial for academic success and lifelong learning. Despite efforts to improve educational access and outcomes, a significant proportion of Ghanaian primary school students continue to struggle with reading proficiency, which has long-term implications for their educational attainment. The 2018 Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) revealed that only 35% of primary-2 students in Ghana could read a simple English sentence (Ghana Education Service, 2018). Moreover, there has not been any significant improvement, as the 2022 National Standardized Test also reported that 62% of primary-2 students could not read (Annim, 2023). The implication of this development is significant, indicating a concerning level of reading difficulty among primary-2 students in Ghana and the urgent need for targeted interventions to address reading difficulties.

Research suggests that reading difficulties often stem from inadequate foundational skills, particularly in phonemic awareness and phonics (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). That is, phonics instruction, teaching letter-sound relationships, has been widely recognized as an effective approach to addressing these foundational skills and improving reading outcomes (Thoma, 2020). The automaticity theory (Samuels, 1997), which posits that cognitive processes become automatic with practice, guided this study to investigate how participation in phonics intervention influences the development of automatic word recognition skills among Ghanaian primary school students. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of phonics intervention in remediating reading difficulties among Ghanaian primary school students.

Methods

The study utilized a multiple baseline across individuals design with a sample size of six Grade 4 students exhibiting deficits in word recognition. Baseline data on students’ reading skills were collected over 2 weeks before the intervention began to establish stability and serve as a control condition. The phonics intervention was introduced sequentially to each participant, with staggered start times. Reading performance data were continuously collected throughout the intervention phase for each participant. Data from baseline and intervention phases were overlaid for each participant to track changes in reading skills after the intervention.

Results

Baseline

Baseline results for six Grade 4 students with deficits in word recognition revealed distinct patterns in their phonics skills. Student 1 consistently scored below expectations across three pretests, indicating significant deficits with an average score of 2.3. Student 3 showed initial improvement but regressed in subsequent assessments, also averaging 2.3 points. Conversely, Student 2 demonstrated progress, increasing from 2 to 3 points, with an average score of 2.6. Student 4 mirrored this progression with an average score of 2.6. However, Students 5 and 6 consistently scored below expectations, indicating persistent deficits. Despite differences in gender, age, and school attended, targeted interventions are crucial for addressing these deficits and fostering growth in phonics skills to enhance overall reading proficiency.

Posttest

The posttest results indicated significant improvements in phonics and reading proficiency following the phonics intervention. Student 1 showed remarkable improvement, achieving perfect scores in all posttests with an average score of 7.6, indicating a strong understanding of phonics concepts. Student 2 also demonstrated notable progress, maintaining proficiency with an average score of 7.6. Students 3 and 4 consistently performed at a proficient level across all posttests, with average scores of 8.3, indicating a strong foundation and consistent mastery of tasks. Similarly, Students 5 and 6 showed consistent progress and proficiency, with average scores of 7.6 and 8.3 respectively.

Comparison of Baseline and Posttest

The results revealed a substantial improvement in phonics skills among the group after the intervention. The average pretest score of approximately 2.35 significantly increased to around 7.88 in the posttest, indicating a noticeable improvement. A graphical representation of the data depicts a clear upward trend, affirming the improvement in phonics across the group. This suggests that the intervention had a positive impact, as evidenced by the significant increase in average scores. The intervention likely played a crucial role in improving the group's ability to recognize and manipulate phonics, essential skills for reading and language development.

Discussion

The study's findings, supported by existing literature, emphasize the crucial role of phonics instruction in improving reading skills and literacy outcomes (Thoma, 2020; Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). The research underlined the effectiveness of phonics interventions across various age groups and educational settings, contributing to supportive learning environments and sustained progress in reading proficiency. The study aligns with the automaticity theory, highlighting the importance of repeated practice and exposure to text in developing fluent reading skills (Samuels, 1997).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study emphasized the significance of phonics instruction in improving phonics and reading proficiency among students. Teachers should prioritize implementing phonics interventions in primary education settings to address reading difficulties and support literacy development. Further research is needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of phonics intervention and its impact on reading outcomes across diverse populations and settings.

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Biographical Information

Florence Akua Mensah

Florence Akua Mensah is a Senior Lecturer and head of the Department of Special Education at the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. She has considerable years of experience in informal assessment practices and interventions for learners with reading difficulties. She is a doctoral candidate in Special Education at the same university.

Francis Kwame Anku

Francis Kwame Anku is an Assistant Lecturer of Special Education at the University of Education, Winneba. He trains prospective teachers of learners with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD). As a doctoral candidate at the University of Cape Coast, Francis is researching the clinical teaching of adaptive behavior skills to learners with NDD.

52. PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG NIGERIAN PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

Esther O. Oyefeso[1], John O. Oyundoyin[1], and Adenike Adeegbe[2]

[1]Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan

[2]Department of Educational Psychology, Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology

Esther O. Oyefeso email: estheroyefeso@gmail.com

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Esther O. Oyefeso

Department of Special Education

University of Ibadan

Ibadan, Nigeria

Background

The well-being of parents plays a crucial role in the overall development and care of a child. Parenting children with intellectual disability (ID) could lead to psychological distress for the parents. This is heightened by the nature and prognosis of intellectual disability being a life-long condition due to incomplete mental development during the developmental period (Oyundoyin & Oyefeso, 2016). American Psychological Association (2020) defined psychological distress as a set of painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood in most people and is typically characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety. The World Health Organization (2023) defined depression as a mood disorder that causes persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, loss of interest and decreased energy. A diagnosis of major depression means symptoms have been consistent nearly every day for at least 2 weeks. It can be severe enough to interfere with relationships, work, school, and other daily activities. Anxiety however is a heterogeneous group of disorder and each disturbance has a different etiology and outcome, and different physiological characteristics.

Some studies have investigated the prevalence of psychological distress among parents of children with intellectual disability. Olagunju et al. (2017) reported a prevalence rate of about 40% in their study conducted in Lagos, Nigeria. Azeem et al. (2013) also reported that a significantly high proportion of mothers (89%) and fathers (77%) of children with intellectual disability in Pakistan had anxiety, depression, or both anxiety and depression. This implies that psychological distress is common among parents of children with intellectual disability. There is however paucity of information regarding prevalence of psychological distress among parents of children with intellectual disability in Ogun State, Nigeria, hence, this study.

Method

This study adopted a descriptive research design. Respondents were 50 parents of in-school students with intellectual disability in Ogun State, Nigeria, selected using convenience sampling technique. Parents were informed about the study, and those who were willing to participate consented and were included in the study. A structured questionnaire titled "Psychological distress, anxiety and depression among parents of children with intellectual disability" was used. The questionnaire is comprised of four sections. Section A is on demographic information. Sections B, C, and D elicited responses on psychological distress, parental anxiety and parental depression respectively. They each have 15 items. Section B had items with 4-Likert scale items, specifically, Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly disagree (SD). Sections C and D were rated on a scale of 0 to 3. Zero indicates very low level, 1 is for low level, 2 is for high level, and 3 indicates very high level. In section C, a total score of between 0 to 21 indicates low anxiety, a score of 22 to 35 indicates moderate anxiety, while 36 and above shows high anxiety (potential cause for concern). In Section D, a score of 1 to 10 indicates normal level, 11 to 16 indicates mild mood disturbance, 17 to 20 reflects borderline clinical depression, 20 to 30 indicates moderate depression, 31 to 40 reflects severe depression while a score above 40 indicates extreme depression. The instrument was trial tested and gave a reliability coefficient of 0.72. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean, percentage, and frequency count.

Results

Regarding the level of psychological distress among parents of children with intellectual disability, a weighted mean of 3.1 was obtained which indicated that the calculated mean is less than the fixed mean. This implies that the prevalence level of psychological distress among parents of children with intellectual disability in Ogun State is high. Regarding the frequency and percentage distribution of prevalence of anxiety among parents of children with intellectual disability in Ogun State, six of the respondents (12.0%) have low anxiety level, 42 (82.0%) have moderate anxiety level, while two (4.0%) have severe levels of anxiety (potential cause for concern). From the analysis above, it is apparent that the greatest number of respondents have moderate anxiety. Therefore, it shows that the prevalence level of anxiety among parents of children with intellectual disability in Ogun State is moderate.

Regarding frequency and percentage distribution of prevalence of depression among parents of children with intellectual disability in Ogun State, nine of the respondents (18.0%) have normal level, three (6.0%) have mild mood disturbance, two (4.0%) have borderline clinical depression, six (12.0%) have moderate depression, 20 (40.0%) have severe depression, while 10 (20%) of the respondents have extreme depression. From the analysis above, it is apparent that there is a greater number of respondents with severe to extreme depression. Therefore, it shows that the prevalence level of depression among parents of children with intellectual disability in Ogun State is high.

Recommendations

This study recommends that Clinicians should be aware of the high prevalence of psychological distress among parents of children with ID and should provide appropriate support to them.

Parents of children with ID should be educated about the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression and be offered evidence-based treatments for anxiety and depression.

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Biographical Information

Esther O. Oyefeso

Esther O. Oyefeso, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of Special Education at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. She has a bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate in Special Education. She specializes in intellectual disability and is currently studying for a Masters of Science in Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

John O. Oyundoyin

John O. Oyundoyin, PhD, is a Professor in the Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan. He is currently the Nigerian National Chair for IASE. He specializes in the education of persons with intellectual disabilities.

Adenike Adeegbe

Adenike Adeegbe is a graduate student of the Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan. She is also a lecturer at the Department of Educational Psychology, Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology, Omu Ijebu, Ogun State, Nigeria.

53. REFLEXIVITY AS A PEDAGOGY FOR INCLUSIVITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION: SUPPORTING INCLUSION WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACROSS THE LIFE SPAN

Levan Lim and Thana Thaver

Psychology and Child & Human Development Academic Group,

National Institute of Education (NIE)

Levan Lim email: levan.lim@nie.edu.sg

Thana Thaver email: thana.thaver@nie.edu.sg

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

1 Nanyang Walk

Singapore 637616, Singapore

Conceptual Background of Reflexivity

Reflection is a core practice for personal and professional learning and development in many fields, including teacher education, where the work of Donald Schön (1983) has contributed significantly to teachers learning how to process their experiences for the aim of improving their practices. Many pedagogical strategies and approaches used in education, such as inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, the use of case studies and scenarios, and action learning/research, to name a few, rely on reflection to support and enhance learning.

While involving aspects of reflection, reflexivity goes beyond reflection to the dimension of critically interrogating how one's beliefs, assumptions, values, and perspectives—such as concerning persons with disabilities—have been influenced by one's situatedness within sociocultural, historical and sociopolitical contexts and legacies. By “bending back” to recognize with greater clarity one’s own “situated” self, say in response to one's own position to persons with disabilities as influenced by one's social contexts, one can better understand the limitations of one's own knowing and appreciate the social realities of persons with disabilities. This process of engaging in reflexivity to clarify one's position towards persons with disabilities and their status quo in society can involve the unsettling of personal beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives and how one might be complicit with society’s normative discourse surrounding disability and special needs (Lim & Thaver, 2022).

Implementing Reflexivity Training in Teacher Education

While several fields in the social sciences and management have already incorporated the use of reflexivity in higher education to enhance personnel professionalism, the use and application of reflexivity in teacher education for the professional learning and development of teachers to become inclusive educators has so far received limited attention. Reflexivity has been adopted in the fields of occupational therapy (Phelan, 2011), social work (Watts, 2019), medicine and health professions (Ng et al., 2019), and management education (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015) to enhance professionalism in personnel through the questioning of assumptions underlying normative practices. Within the teacher education literature on preparing teachers for inclusive education, there are very few published applications of using reflexivity within higher education with teachers to become more inclusive of diverse students (Lim & Thaver, 2022).

These few studies (Bentley-Williams & Morgan, 2013) reported that pre-service teachers were able to develop themselves as inclusive practitioners through reflexive learning that involved deepening their understanding of the influence of their biographical real-life experiences, questioning their own assumptions as well as actions, and having professional discourses about inclusive education while engaging in situated learning experiences. Reflexivity is therefore relevant to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in that it offers an exploratory space for teachers and other school personnel to question and interrogate how their own subjective and locally situated learning experiences and perspectives contribute to the biographical formation of their own and societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities, and their social realities, such as the lack of social connections and exclusion. In a review of professional development literature on supporting teachers for inclusive education, Waitoller and Artiles (2013) highlighted the need for teachers to understand local forms and expressions of exclusion as situated within their own social contexts through probing their own subjective thoughts and feelings related to construed meanings about and responses to difference accrued from their everyday lives situated within their own communities of practice.

At the National Institute of Education, the sole teacher-accreditation education body in Singapore, a key tenet in our use of reflexivity with teachers and school personnel involves the explicit recognition of the role of local contextual influences (Lim et al., 2019) and the situatedness of learning in everyday life to the meaning-making process of how disability is construed. In a country like Singapore where many teachers have grown up and been schooled in a dual system of education where students with and without disabilities have generally been perceived as belonging to separate education systems (Lim & Thaver, 2018), having the learning opportunity within teacher education for teachers to be reflexive of the influence of their own biographical life-histories and societal structures is crucial for teachers to directly participate in activating self-awareness and personal agency towards more inclusive attitudes and practices. For more information on how reflexivity has been woven as a pedagogy for inclusivity within teacher education at the National Institute of Education, please refer to Lim and Thaver (2022).

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Biographical Information

Levan Lim

Dr. Levan Lim is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Child & Human Development in the Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research and teaching interests are focused on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, teacher development for inclusion, and interventions for teaching and supporting individuals with disabilities.

Thana Thaver

Dr. Thana Thaver is a Senior Lecturer with the Psychology and Child & Human Development Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. She is currently Assistant Dean, Professional & Leadership Development at the Office of Graduate Studies and Professional Learning, NIE.

54. EMPOWERING PERSONS WITH DISABILITY THROUGH LITERACY EDUCATION FOR LIFE LONG INDEPENDENT LIVING AND SOCIETAL INCLUSION

John O. Oyundoyin

Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

John O. Oyundoyin email: johnoyundoyin@gmail.com

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

John O. Oyundoyin

University of Ibadan

Department of Special Education,

Oduduwa Road, Ibadan 200132

Oyo, Nigeria

Background to the Study

Independent living is a cherished virtue in all cultures and societies of the world. Dependence on people for sustenance is an unwholesome attitude not acceptable in most cultures worldwide. Independent living for persons with disabilities means having every opportunity to be as self-sufficient as possible. Essentially, it is living just like everyone else—having opportunities to make decisions that affect one's life and the ability to pursue activities of one's own choice. Literacy is a process by which one expands one's knowledge of reading and writing in order to develop one's thinking and learning for the purpose of understanding oneself and the world. Persons with disabilities are not to be excluded from participating in any life activity that they are capable of doing regardless of their disabilities. Madella and Madella (2018) reported an unemployment rate of 80% among persons with disabilities in the Asia Pacific region alone. They should be provided with all the supports needed to help them live a meaningful life without any form of discrimination.

Literacy Education

Literacy is a process by which one expands one's knowledge of reading and writing in order to develop one's thinking and learning for the purpose of understanding oneself and the world. This process is fundamental to achieving competence in every educational subject. Also, Alberta Education (2020) defines literacy as the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living.

Literacy enables an individual to engage with the written word in everyday life, and being able to read and write means being able to keep up with current events, communicate effectively, and understand the issues that are shaping our world. Literacy involves digital, computer, media, information, technology, political, cultural, multi-cultural and visual components. Literacy education is the responsibility of all educators, as well as that of significant others who relate with an individual on a day to day basis. Jani et al. (2020) found from their study that persons with disabilities (PwDs) with high academic qualifications enjoyed a better quality of life than their counterparts with low academic qualification.

Literacy is very fundamental to life and learning as it cuts across all subject areas and spheres of life. This emphasizes the need to ensure literacy education for all persons, including persons with disabilities. The average person with disabilities has physical and social barriers that hinder them both from learning and participating in society. The liberation process for persons with disabilities will be considered in three spheres. These are:

1. Providing wholesome and qualitative literacy education through inclusive formal educational settings;
2. Non-formal literacy education for out-of-school persons with disabilities;
3. Complete integration into the society.

Wholesome and Qualitative Education through Inclusive, Formal Educational Settings

A large population of persons with disabilities are excluded from formal education, especially in developing countries, despite several laws and legislatures insisting on the right of every child to education. The National Commission for Civic Education (2014) reports an unequal access to education by PwDs in Ghana, as parents refused to enroll their children in specialised schools created for them, and those that have completed their education found it difficult to secure employment. Few PwDs who attend formal schools have access to quality education tailored to meet their individual needs. Empowering PwDs through literacy education therefore begins with quality inclusive education. This is because PwDs have equal rights to quality, inclusive education just as their regular peers.

Inclusive education does not merely mean teaching and learning. It must incorporate all needed support and adaptations based on the needs of individual PwDs irrespective of financial status, religion, cultural or other differences. Inclusive education implies that all children attend any school of their choice, their disabilities notwithstanding. It also implies that the school must be open to receive them, while providing reasonable accommodations needed for comfortable movement within and outside the classroom (maximum accessibility).

Quality inclusion also implies providing reasonable support services for the PwD. These should be captured in the individual's individualized educational plan (IEP). An IEP is a legal document developed for learners with disabilities describing the strengths, needs and learning goals to be reviewed yearly. It is jointly planned by relevant school authorities, relevant supporting professionals, the parents of the PwD and sometimes, the PwD. The environment, the teaching process, the content, and the products required of PwDs must be differentiated. Emphasis must be placed on enhancing the maximum independence in these persons.

Non-formal Literacy Education for Out-of-School Persons with Disabilities

Many factors hinder PwDs from receiving formal education, especially in developing countries. These include poverty, rejection from schools, lack of nearby schools to attend, parents/guardians' belief that educating PwDs is a waste of resources, and so on. These should, however, not be the end of the road to literacy education for such PwDs.

Community based provisions can be made to enhance literacy education for out-of-school persons with disabilities. This could take the form of evening classes focusing on functional academic skills, community libraries or even literacy education incorporated into vocation skills training. The motivation for these outlets should stem from the need to empower PwDs with the much-needed literacy education for success in life.

Complete Integration into the Society

The world does not end in the classroom. PwDs will interact with others in society. Whether or not this interaction enhances their empowerment through literacy education will be largely determined by societal awareness and attitude towards PwDs. A key clue as to how to relate with PwDs can be summarised as empathy (treating persons with disabilities the way you would like to be treated if you had a disability).

Recommendations

1. PwDs should be provided with quality inclusive education to ensure that they are empowered through literacy education provided in school.
2. PwDs should also be accepted and incorporated into all spheres of the society to enhance their literacy skills through interaction with other members of their communities.
3. Community-based, informal settings should provide literacy education for out-of-school PwDs.

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Biographical Information

John O. Oyundoyin

John O. Oyundoyin, PhD, is a Professor in the Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria and a visiting Professor to the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. His area of specialization is the education of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He is currently the National Chair of IASE, Nigeria.

55. GIVING VOICE TO THE FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN CAMBODIA

Anne E. Crylen

School of Public Service, DePaul University

Anne E. Crylen email: acrylen@depaul.edu

I have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Anne Crylen

DePaul University, School of Public Service

14 E Jackson Blvd #1600

Chicago, IL 60604, USA

Research Background

Since 2008, the Royal Government of Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has supported the inclusion of students with disabilities. In 2017, the MoEYS established the National Institute for Special Education with a focus on teacher training, building capacity for disability education, and developing programs to support curriculum standards. The need for special education continues to rise, as the National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning (2017) reported in the 2017 Cambodian Socio-Economic Survey that 4.6% of children ages 6–17 years do not attend school due to a disability or due to a long-term (over 3 months) illness.

Methods

In 2015, while on a Fulbright Fellowship, I conducted a qualitative case study illuminating the challenges parents face while navigating the dynamics of parental, medical, and academic systems of support for school-aged children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in Cambodia. Their journey is captured through narratives describing a special school in Phnom Penh, highlighting mental health, intellectual disability, the rise of a "new" diagnosis of ASD in Cambodia, and the shifting placement of disability within the government structure. Parent narratives of children with ASD articulated similarities to those whose children "experience[d] … acquired disability," as explored in my previous work on return-to-learn following traumatic brain injury (Crylen, 2019). Both groups of parents searched for answers to why their children were behaving differently, which was later explained with a diagnosis of a disability not generally recognized in their community or supported through educational accommodations.

Discussion

As a cultural norm in Cambodia, many parents of children with ASD relied on the advice of their village elders before seeking medical advice. Conventional wisdom relayed to concerned parents alluded to physical growth. Adhering to this advice, several parents tried to send their children to public school. In most cases, the classroom experience included bullying from other students and discrimination by teachers.

Seeking clear and consistent information about ASD from official sources proved difficult. The lack of equity of access to health care in Cambodia contributed to parents waiting to find answers. Once parents made their way to medical clinics, guilt and grief were exacerbated as parents received reassurances from government doctors that were later shattered at the international, non-governmental clinic for mental health. As parents met other parents with children with ASD, they began to come up with answers. For some, the public health system did not provide a diagnosis but rather a category of mental illness. For those parents who did receive a diagnosis, the explanation remained in the broader use of “intellectual disability,” an abstract concept for many parents.

Recognizing that parents wanted a treatment for ASD, one non-governmental health clinic offered 6-week classes focused on life skills for caregivers. However, some parents wanted more formal education for their children, which resulted in referrals to the only special school in Phnom Penh. Working over a decade with support from disability organizations, the school has woven its way into the MoEYS and is building inclusion classrooms in public schools. The common thread for parents interviewed was a misconstruction of ASD as a mental illness rather than a disability. They spoke to a universal desire for their children to grow up independently and be accepted socially.

Conclusion

As the findings of this study show, the invisible disability of ASD brings a different set of needs for identification, diagnosis, treatment, and inclusion. It will provide families with a diagnosis and a prognosis that will shape their child's quality of life. Utilizing a new, integrated trifecta of support model for the three agencies of health, education, and disability rehabilitation in Cambodia will promote a common language, strengthen channels of communication and equitable education services, and promote social inclusion for those with invisible disabilities.

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Biographical Information

Anne E. Crylen

Anne E. Crylen, PhD, is adjunct faculty in the School of Public Service at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, United States. She is a Fulbright fellow, returned Peace Corps volunteer, and global educator who has led international schools in India and China. As a champion for students with disabilities, she works on education equity through inquiry-based learning and teaching, emphasizing student voice and ownership.

56. COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON ADULTS WITH CEREBRAL PALSY: A BIO-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY, ZAMBIA

Daniel Mpolomoka[1], Mutinta Mutinta[2], Moono Muvombo[3], Rose Chikopela[4], and Francis S. Sikanyika[5]

[1]School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, Unicaf University, Zambia

[2]Educator, Consultant, Zambia

[3]School of Education, Nkrumah University, Kabwe, Zambia

[4]Chalimbana University

[5]Educator, Ministry of Education, Author and Counsellor

Daniel Mpolomoka email:ikanyika,mpolomokadl@gmail.com;l.mpolomoka@zambia.unicaf.org

Mutinta Mutinta email: mutintanandy@yahoo.com; nandially@gmail.com

Moono Muvombo email: muvombomoono22@gmail.com

Francis S. Sikanyika email: sikanyikaf@yahoo.com

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Background

This study documents life-like, bio-ethnographies of adults with cerebral palsy (CP) amidst varying perceptions in the public domain. In Zambia, there has been an increase in the number of non-government organizations (NGOs) that are supplementing government efforts to help adults with CP, including Cerebral Palsy Africa, the Zambian Association for Physiotherapists in Cerebral Palsy (ZAPCP), Action on Disability in Zambia (ADD Zambia), and Appropriate Paper Technology (APTERS) (producing mobility aids for children) all who work hand-in-hand with other entities who cater to the needs of persons with CP, like the community based rehabilitation workers (CBRW).

This paper crystalizes ethnographies of persons with CP and how they engage in personal and community activities and national development-oriented programmes. The goal is to build role models, from persons with and without CP, and encourage support from government and financial institutions.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted to explore dynamics of CP across the globe, in Africa and Zambia. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) domains served as an anchor of the review. Key informants familiar with literature in Africa were contacted and provided names of researchers who focus on CP in an African context. They used research tools to catalogue relevant articles. Inclusivity and exclusivity criterion was used. Key informants in Zambia, educationists, stakeholders and individuals who care for persons with CP were interviewed. Themes were categorised using secondary and primary data, and results were analysed according to the ICF domains identified.

Findings and Discussion

Findings revealed that adults with CP (AwCP) engage in work-related and community practices that contribute to sustainable development at individual, community, and nation levels. The profiles of the five AwCP are as follows:

- Female AwCP$_1$: Is a marketeer, freelance trader.
- Male AwCP$_2$: Is married, has 4 children, and is a full-time driver.
- Female AwCP$_3$: Just remarried and has three children. She sometimes sells vegetables and tomatoes at her home stand.
- Male student, AwCP$_4$: Educated at a renowned special school in Zambia, he then enrolled into public university. He stutters, drills, has difficulty walking from one class to the other, sits for a long time in one spot, dozes while sitting anywhere. Given presenting characteristics, the University had turned down his application but a lot of effort from the Department of Special Education resulted in his admission. Now, he is identified as the most intelligent in his civic education class. Someone writes for him. Ordinarily, universities run 3-hour examinations, in his case, he takes more than 1 hour to write one question, and about 3 hours to write two examination questions. The student lacks assistive technology (AT).
- Male, Street Adult, AwCP$_5$: In Lusaka is a man who walks using his legs and hands, begs for a living, attends physiotherapy, and due to mobility issues, said the community looks down upon him.
- Female parent of child with CP, AwCP$_6$: One centre that offers physiotherapy to members of the community recounted that most of their clients have grown and managing their mobility is a problem as they can no longer be carried on their mothers' or siblings' backs.

Lifting them and covering distances to homes is a challenge. This has led to a reduction in the number of those attending physiotherapy. The centre disclosed that some parents lock up their children in homes as they undertake their daily business errands.

- Female AwCP$_7$: Aged 21 years, diagnosed with severe CP when she was 8 years. At 15 years old, her parent attempted to have her uterus closed but did not manage to as they needed the child's consent. She is totally dependent on significant others for support.

The findings, which show both aggravated states of adults with CP and those with mild CP who are integrated in society, corroborates what the literature points to: few adults with CP engage in typical screening and health promotion activities due to a variety of barriers. There is still much to be learned and disseminated to improve the care of adults with CP (Turk, 2009).

This paper is anchored on the principles of the ICF, which focuses on functioning and disability across four related domains: body functions and structures, activities and participation, environmental factors, and personal factors (Rosenbaum & Stewart, 2004). Scenarios depicted coincide with what literature advances. Literature posits that commonly reported age-related changes and secondary conditions involve pain/fatigue, physical performance, and the musculoskeletal system (Straus et al., 2004). Not all adults with CP have serious health problems, and many now recognize the aging process as a natural course of events and devise coping strategies for daily living.

Conclusion

This study presents typical scenarios of persons with CP in Zambia, detailing how they are viewed by communities and how they cope with life. Findings show how some persons with mild CP engage in activities for daily living for their survival and others in entrepreneurial activities, with some pursuing further studies at colleges and universities. This study impacts policy and practice.

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Biographical Information

Daniel L. Mpolomoka

Daniel Mpolomoka, PhD, is an educationist, substantive Dean, School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences at Unicaf University Zambia. He is an author and researcher, whose interests include: special education, adult education, literacy education, higher education and instructional technology. Mpolomoka has presented papers at both local and international conferences.

Mutinta Mutinta

Mutinta Mutinta is a trained specialist teacher, who has taught in government schools, before taking up the specialist teacher-trainer mantle at university. She has published in local and internal peer reviewed journals and has over 28 years of teaching experience and advocacy for persons with disabilities. Currently, Mutinta is a PhD fellow.

Moono Muvombo

Moono Muvombo heads the Special Education Department at Nkrumah University, Zambia. She has 8 years of experience teaching in higher education. She is one of the trained Speech Therapists in Zambia. Moono has published in local and international peer reviewed Journals. She is a PhD fellow at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Rose Chikopela

Rose Chikopela, PhD, is a lecturer, researcher and consultant at Chalimbana University. She heads the Department of Primary and Secondary Education and serves as the chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee and Directorate of Research and Postgraduate Studies. Her areas of specialization are special education, guidance and counselling. She has published various articles in peer reviewed journals.

Francis Stanley Sikanyika

Francis is an educator, author and counsellor. He holds a Master of Science in Counselling from the University of Zambia in collaboration with Zimbabwe Open University (UNZAZOU) and a Bachelor of Education in Special Education from the University of Zambia.

57. NUTRITION LITERACY FOR ADULTS WITH LOW LITERACY IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN LUSAKA AND COPPERBELT PROVINCES IN ZAMBIA

Selina Banda[1] and Daniel L. Mpolomoka[2]

[1]Department of Social Studies, Copperbelt University

[2]School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, Unicaf University, Zambia

Selina Banda email: bandaeli67@gmail.com

Daniel L. Mpolomoka email: mpolomokadl@gmail.com

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Selina Banda
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
The Copperbelt University
P.O Box 21692
Kitwe, Zambia

Daniel L. Mpolomoka
School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences
Unicaf University Zambia

Background

This study was needed because of the crucial role that adult education plays in facilitating nutrition literacy for communities. Using principles inherent in adult education, the study incorporated community members by according them an opportunity to give their perceptions on the delivery of nutrition information meant to improve their lives (Palumbo, 2016; Mpolomoka & Banda, 2017; Banda & Mpolomoka, 2019). While the National Food and Nutrition Commission concentrates on micronutrients, which are a missing component in diets of vulnerable sections of the community, there is also a need to address the usage of macronutrients in people's diets. Literacy has an empowering effect on individuals which propels them to perform certain activities, based on given knowledge and skills. It allows individuals to become functional in specific areas.

This paper is significant to Zambia as it advocates for improved nutrition knowledge and skills among mothers. Mothers, who happen to be adults, require education attained through required basic skills in non-formal education programmes including nutrition and functional literacy. The Eighth National Development Plan that Zambia set includes provision of education and health services which are responsive to these real needs of the people.

Adults with low literacy levels have families that they have to provide for nutritionally. In Zambia's education system, there is no specific provision to educate adults with low literacy levels on nutrition matters. This paper is, therefore, significant to Zambia with regard to the development of plans for increasing nutrition literacy in adults with low literacy as well as other literate adults who lack nutrition knowledge and skills.

Objective

This study explored nutrition practices of adults with low literacy levels.

Theoretical Framework

A model which supports nutrition literacy in more ways than one was described. Begley and Vidgen (2016), and Gillis (2016) described a model in which nutrition literacy can be grounded. This is Nutbeam's model, which theorized constructs of functional, interactive, and critical health literacy, and encompasses reading and understanding, exchanging, and critically analyzing and using health information to gain greater control over life events and situations.

Research Methods

We used applied research and mixed methods research (Creswell, 2014; Delport & Fouché 2011; Banda, et al., 2017), comprising adults with low literacy (n=100) sampled conveniently and purposively. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect data, which were sorted descriptively and thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Caulfield, 2022).

Findings

Nutrition for adults is provided in various forms by many organizations and individuals. Concentration has mainly been on vulnerable sections of the population, particularly children, women, elderly people, and the physically challenged. Provision of nutrition has helped in addressing the nutritional needs of different types of people. Findings point to a segregated group of people who still require nutrition attention. Adults with low literacy are faced with difficulties in choosing food sources and methods of cooking which contribute to their wellbeing. Findings systematically show that the increase in development of adverse conditions due to poor dietary practices among adults is a source of concern. This is because adults with low literacy are limited in the way they access nutrition information and skills (Palumba et al., 2017). Literature confirms the study's findings that food literacy is the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities, and nations to protect diet quality through change, and supports dietary resilience over time. Food literacy is regarded as a key factor in population health and a promising approach to address complex public health problems from obesity to environmental sustainability (Palumbo, 2016; Banda & Mpolomoka, 2019).

Conclusion

The study contends that nutrition literacy is crucial in curbing the poor dietary practices among adults. Nutrition literacy empowers community members by giving them knowledge and skills required for them to function effectively. Through adult education, communities can be reached through education programmes designed to meet real nutritional needs.

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Biographical Information

Selina Banda

Selina Banda, PhD, is a nutritionist and Lecturer at the Copperbelt University. She has published research articles on nutrition, education, and adult literacy. She is passionate about community nutrition. Selina taught in public primary and secondary schools for 19 years. She also has more than 15 years experience in university teaching.

Daniel L. Mpolomoka

Daniel L. Mpolomoka, PhD, is an educationist and substantive Dean, School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences at Unicaf University, Zambia. He is an author and researcher, whose interests include: special education, adult education, literacy education, higher education and instructional technology. Dr. Mpolomoka has presented papers at both local and international conferences.

58. COMPENSATORY EXERCISE PROGRAM AS A POSSIBLE HEALTH-ORIENTED ACTIVITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Věra Knappová, Gabriela Kavalířová, and Tereza Fajfrlíková

Center of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia, Pilsen

Věra Knappová email: knappova@ktv.zcu.cz

Gabriela Kavalířová email: kavaliro@ktv.zcu.cz

Tereza Fajfrlíková email: fajfrlit@ktv.zcu.cz

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Věra Knappová and/or Gabriela Kavalířová

Univerzitní 8, Plzeň, 301 00

Czech Republic

Background

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are serious childhood neurodevelopmental disorders. ASDs are congenital disorders of brain functions arising on a neurobiological basis. These children have problems with social integration, communication, and imagination. There are no typical cases. Each individual is unique, and according to Gillberg and Peeters (2008), differences outweigh similarities. Common features are primarily stereotypical to ritualistic behavior, worse acceptance of changes, liking unusual objects, limited verbal/non-verbal communication and lack of interest in social interaction (Thorová, 2016).

Most common preschool and school-age children's motor difficulties include deficiencies in coordination, especially balance, distance and depth estimation, and fine motor skills (Gillberg & Peeters, 2008). Regarding postural deviations, Nazary et al. (2016) found children with ASD show increased prevalence of increased thoracic kyphosis, scoliosis, and medial knee collapse.

When preparing exercise units for individuals with ASD, it is necessary to keep in mind that the task of the instructor is mainly to convey the activity to the pupils in such a way that they understand its content as much as possible. We can use the means of structuring and visualization. For individuals with ASD, the easiest and most popular activity is the individual one, especially by an assistant. Learning by imitating an activity of the instructor, or other pupils, works well. Physical education classes in schools can be difficult for students with ASD, even though they do not show any movement limitations. The problem can be verbal instructions, which can be too abstract for them and harder to understand. It is important, especially in the beginning, for the pupils to always visualize the exercise in such a way that they understand it. It is advisable to use a work schedule in the gymnasium, helping pupils predict what will be done in the lesson and increase their independence during the lesson. Furthermore, it is important to take the demands of the environment (noise, acoustics, lights, etc.) into account.

For individuals, the most important benefit is the development of fundamental motor skills in the area of functional skills, which are necessary to perform the movements required in everyday life (Eichstaedt & Lavay, 1992). Lack of movement coordination in children with disabilities is reflected in their quality of life and negatively affects, among other things, their mental health and position in the group. According to Bhat et al. (2011), there is a developmentally important link between motor impairments and social communication impairments in autistic individuals.

Interventions

After taking all the mentioned aspects into account and based on long-term cooperation with the civic association ProCit, z.s., during the COVID-19 pandemic, we introduced individual lessons of compensatory exercises. First, they were carried out in a one-on-one mode, and then when the pandemic measures were eased, in a small group in a gym of the Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. Targeted and individually adapted compensatory exercises for children optimize body posture and the condition of the flat feet have a positive effect on the perception of the body scheme and thus contribute to the awareness of tension and relaxation in muscles and the relative position of individual body segments.

Activities were primarily chosen that did not require creativity, imagination, knowledge of language, mitigating inappropriate behavior, and on the contrary improve coordination of movements and possibly physical fitness.

Results

During the lessons it is important to expect a higher demand for assistants, as children with moderate-functioning autism or greater motor difficulties will work best in an individual one-on-one mode. Nevertheless, a wider social group of participants is suitable support for practicing social skills, integration into a group, and cooperation.

These non-competitive and non-limiting activities generally develop the child in terms of his motricity and social contacts. Based on the findings published on the appropriateness of various movement interventions developing motor competencies in intact children, it was decided to apply selected specific movement activities to the target group of children with ASD. It seems appropriate to use the means of health, physical education, relaxation and breathing exercises, psychomotricity, and physiotherapy. This targeted intervention was chosen to contribute to improving the level of motor and social competencies of these individuals as well as to encourage a better quality of their everyday life.

Although the effects of inactivity and social isolation on children with disabilities have already been sufficiently described and experts draw attention to them (Hymas et al., 2022; Bauminger & Kasari, 2000), a set of methodically conducted movement activities, which would be available when working with these children, is currently missing. The number of integrated children with neurodevelopmental disorders in schools is increasing, but apart from relatively well-processed special pedagogical interventions and psychosocial therapies, verified methodologies for movement activities with children with ASD that would be suitable for their motor development and could be included to teaching in primary and secondary schools are lacking. The main outcome of this investigation is therefore a set of suitable methodologies aimed at these children, summarizing and unifying proposed movement activities verified in practice.

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Biographical Information

Věra Knappová

Věra Knappová, MS, PhD, has been teaching at the Center of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen since 2002. She deals with the issue of autism and movement activities for individuals with disabilities and cooperates with the ProCit, z.s. (www.autismusprocit.cz) center in Pilsen. Other interests include fitness, martial arts and exercise in general.

Gabriela Kavalířová

Gabriela Kavalířová, MS, PhD, is an expert in the field of gymnastics, psychomotricity, movement choreography, and dance. She also focuses on the education of primary and kindergarten teachers in the area of movement activities. She has been teaching at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen since 2003. She is a longtime coach and a judge of rhythmic gymnastics.

59. ROBOTICS AND EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN JAPAN

Satomi K. Shinde[1], Brian Abery[2], and Renáta Tichá[2]

[1]Department of Teacher Education, University of Wisconsin River Falls

[2]Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota

Satomi K. Shinde email: satomi.shinde@uwrf.edu

Brian Abery email: abery001@umn.edu

Renata Ticha email: tich0018@umn.edu

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Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Satomi K. Shinde

University of Wisconsin River Falls

410 S. 3rd Street

River Falls, WI, USA

Background

The United Nations (UN) promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all (Division for Sustainable Development Goals, 2015). This goal includes persons with disabilities (PwD). To achieve this goal, the demand for technology has been increased for the last few decades. In 2016, the Japanese government enacted the *5th Science and Technology Basic Plan* (the Society 5.0 Plan) (Cabinet Office, n.d.). Its focus is on facilitating Japan taking a fifth step in the evolution of society, creating a new social contract and economic model by fully incorporating the technology of the fourth industrial revolution. The Society 5.0 Plan aims to achieve a forward-looking society and to address societal issues by converging cyberspace, technology from Society 4, and physical space (Cabinet Office, n.d.). To accomplish Society 5.0, using robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been encouraged.

The unemployment rate of PwD is twice as high as those without disabilities in the United States (U.S.) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Even though the employment rate for PwD is increasing, they still face various barriers to being hired and maintaining their jobs, which leads to issues with poverty, independence, quality of life (QOL), etc. Although assistive robotics technologies have advanced in the last few decades and have been used increasingly to improve the independence and QOL of PwD (Brose et al., 2010), it is critical to increase the technology that fits the needs of the users (i.e., individuals with disabilities) (Matsumoto et al., 2011). Using robotics to help PwD in their employment is relatively new and should be investigated.

Purpose

The current project was a preliminary study to investigate and understand the experience of PwD using robotics for their employment. The researchers partnered with OryLab, Inc. (OryLab Inc., n.d.), a robotics company in Tokyo, Japan, and interviewed their participant pilots (i.e, their robotics product), OriHime, and users with disabilities. OriHime has been mainly used by individuals with physical disabilities and mental illnesses. The project goals were to investigate users' experience of using the robots in their employment and their beliefs. OriHime is an avatar robot that allows users to communicate remotely. It has been developed to provide PwD with employment opportunities and reduce societal problems, such as isolation and loneliness, which is aligned with the concept of Society 5.0.

Methods

Six participant pilots (4 females and 2 males) of OriHime working remotely from all over Japan were recruited, and the researchers interviewed them via OriHime, the avatar robot, in the robotics café where OryLab is located in Tokyo, in 2022. The interviews were recorded by Zoom, and the researcher summarized the pilots' audio responses to the interview questions. The interview questions were prepared prior to the interviews and included the following components: (a) lengths of using OriHime, (b) types and locations of employment, (c) initial interest (i.e., motivation), (d) life changes (i.e., outcomes), (e) prior challenges (i.e., experience), (f) challenges overcome (i.e., experience outcomes), (g) current experience (h) training involvement (i.e., experience), (i) expectation of future changes (i.e., program involvement), (j) PwD's barriers in Japan (i.e., socio-ecological), (k) benefits and challenges of using robotics in Japan (i.e., socio-ecological), and (l) needs of additional programs and opportunities in Japan (i.e., active citizenship). The researcher analyzed the pilots’ responses thematically.

Results and Discussions

The researchers found that all participant pilots worked at Café Dawn, owned by OryLab, Inc., ranging from one to four years as servers taking orders, serving food and beverages through OriHime, and assisting customers. In addition to their experience at Café Dawn, two worked at an amusement park, and one at a fast-food restaurant, using OriHime. The pilots' responses revealed the following themes about their experience of working and using the avatar robots: employment opportunities, social connectedness, a sense of inclusion in the community, increased overall happiness and satisfaction, increased communication, and a sense of fulfillment by helping other pilots by training them, which supported their initial interest of increased opportunities and communication with others, despite their challenges prior to becoming the pilots, such as rejection of employment opportunities due to not being able to work in person or commute. The following themes surfaced through the questions about socio-ecological aspects, program involvement, and active citizenship: the need for increased employment opportunities for PwD, diverse employment opportunities, understanding of challenges of PwD, and reducing judgment toward PwD and types of jobs.

The themes identified warrant further investigation and conducting interviews with larger groups of pilots, employers, families, and colleagues. The current preliminary study supports that the PwD using the avatar robots experienced positive outcomes and increased QOL through employment opportunities. The current study implies that we need to explore the use of robotics technologies further and expand employment opportunities to achieve an inclusive society for people with and without disabilities.

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Biographical Information

Satomi K. Shinde

Dr. Shinde is Professor of Special Education and Chair of the Teacher Education Department at the University of Wisconsin River Falls. Dr. Shinde's research interest is promoting inclusion, and she has worked on projects supported by state/federal grants.

Brian Abery

Dr. Abery, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, co-director of the Global Resource Center for Inclusive Education, and co-director of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Home and Community-Based Services Outcome Measurement. Dr. Abery has designed and managed numerous research projects to promote inclusion.

Renáta Tichá

Dr. Tichá, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, co-director of the Global Resource Center for Inclusive Education, and co-director of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Home and Community-Based Services Outcome Measurement. Dr. Tichá has designed and managed numerous research projects to promote inclusion.

60. SLOW MOTION SOCCER DEVELOPMENTAL BALL: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO INDEPENDENT BALL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Pamela Skogstad[1] and David Ratsakatika[2]

[1]Accessible PE Consulting, LLC

[2]United World College, East Africa

Pamela Skogstad email: akskogstad@aol.com

David Ratsakatika email: davidratsakatika@gmail.com

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

David Ratsakatika

65 Keswick Road

Great Bookham, Surrey, KT23 4BG (UK)

Conceptual Framework and Background

As an adapted physical education specialist for over 25 years, I observed students with disabilities, sensory integration disorders, and developmental delays struggle with ball skills. A critical need to create a ball affording students opportunities to work independently (not relying on peers, teaching assistants, or teachers) was long overdue. Children with disabilities need opportunities to engage in activities with their peers with modified equipment (Downs, 2007).

During the fall of 2009, while finalizing an equipment order for the Anchorage School District's adapted physical education collaborative model, I searched all equipment catalogs to be found, both hard copy and online, hoping to find an adaptive ball that would meet criteria for developing independent kicking, dribbling, tossing, and catching skills for students with special needs. The extended search provided no new insights on novel equipment to promote independent kicking, tossing, and catching. Soccer trainers, cloth balls, balloon balls, and peer mentors are some adaptations used for incorporating ball skills (perceptual and sensory motor stimulation) for students with disabilities. All of these adaptations do not support independent skill acquisition as they involve support staff and/or peers. Staff or peers are needed for support as the ball's speed of movement is too fast for tracking and focusing on tasks. Developmental Ball remains a successful, positive physical education experience for all students.

This Study

Reaching a dead end with options in catalogs for any ball that would meet the criteria of fostering independent ball skills, it was time to become creative. Designing Developmental Ball began in rural Hope, Alaska, in the fall of 2009. Over 100 Developmental Balls were created in my husband's workshop. Developmental Ball (now Slow Motion Soccer Balls) became a huge success in the K-12 physical education programs in the Anchorage School District. The idea of slowing an inflatable ball which would enable students with disabilities, coordination issues, and those on the autism spectrum to easily track were the criteria. Inserting 3, 5, 6 , 8, and 10 ounces of sand into inflatable 8 inch balls, then inflating the balls created a unique feature which allowed the balls to move slower and remain in play.

There is not a "one size fits all" with modifying equipment for students with disabilities. Slow Motion Soccer balls create opportunities for independent ball skill development for students with disabilities. Slow Motion Soccer balls need to be modified for students with disabilities who need a larger inflatable ball because of their "line of sight" for example. One of the students working with an inflatable ball with 8 ounces of sand could not see the ball as she was using her walker because of her posture and disability. The ball used for this student's success was a 20 inch inflatable ball with 8 ounces of sand inserted. This larger ball gave this student the opportunity to work independently.

Results

Experimenting with various weights over a two-month time period, three weights proved to be successful. Repeated trials with the 6, 8, and 10 ounce balls demonstrated these were the correct weights:

- 6 ounces for pre-K through second grade;
- 8 ounces for third through sixth grades;
- 10 ounces for seventh through 12th grades;
- Regular soccer balls with 10 ounces of sand for seventh through 12th grades, which gives the appearance of the same ball utilized in general physical education.

Slow Motion Soccer balls provided a unique strategy for teaching soccer-style dribbling, kicking, tossing, and catching. The ball easily remained in play. The proprioceptive feedback was positive, as correct repetitive opportunities are allowed. Other observed benefits include:

- There is no more chasing balls across the gymnasium floor or on the field.
- Slow Motion balls are excellent for students requiring sensory integration strategies.
- Slow Motion balls benefit students with coordination issues and/or who are unable to keep up with peers.
- Research conducted by David Ratsakatika (Ratsakatika, 2013) demonstrated substantial increase in dribbling skills by students with autism.

It is wonderful to observe students with special needs work alongside their peers, not having to constantly chase balls while staying on task for longer periods.

Slow Motion Soccer balls address standards for both National Association for Secondary Physical Education (NASPE) and National Consortium for PE for Individuals With Disabilities. (NCPEID). The NASPE standards that are addressed include: Standard #1– demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities and Standard #2 – demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as they apply to learning and performance of physical activities. NCPEID standards that are addressed include: Standard #2 – Motor Behavior; Standard #6 – Unique Attributes of Learners, and Standard #9 – Instructional Design and Planning (National Consortium for PE for Individuals With Disabilities, 2006). By using the ball and providing a developmentally appropriate instructional strategy, adapted physical education teachers may apply their knowledge of the unique attributes of learners, thereby demonstrating competency of these standards.

Recommendations

Children with disabilities feel included in physical education and sports programs depending on the action of their peers. (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010). Modified equipment with peer participation would be excellent to research the effective outcomes of peer engagement with Slow Motion Soccer balls. It would be interesting to see the data on students without disabilities engaging in activities with their peers with disabilities with Slow Motion Soccer Balls. Students with coordination issues who may gravitate to the Slow Motion Soccer Balls could benefit, improving their ball skills.

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Biographical Information

Pamela Skogstad

Pamela Skogstad is an education consultant focusing on inclusive sports and physical education programs in the United states and internationally. She has developed federal and Alaska state grants implementing staff training for inclusive programs. She has created the Slow Motion Soccer balls.

David Ratsakatika

David Ratsakatika conducted extensive research on Slow Motion Soccer balls at Chichester University, United Kingdom, during 2012–2013. David is the head of PE at United World College East Africa. David has a passion for working with students/athletes with disabilities. David is a coach for rugby and football, excelling in his profession and academics.

61. PARENTS' CHOICE OF EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Nu-Tam-An Nguyen[1], Thi-Thu-Thuy Dao[2], and Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen[1]

[1]Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi, Vietnam

[2]Hanoi Metropolitan University, Hanoi, Vietnam

Nu-Tam-An Nguyen email: nguyennutaman@gmail.com

Thi-Thu-Thuy Dao email: daothuthuytk@gmail.com

Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen email: nch19381@hnue.edu.vn

We have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Nu-Tam-An Nguyen

Faculty of Special Education, Hanoi National University of Education

136 Xuan Thuy Street, Cau Giay District

Hanoi, Vietnam

Conceptual Framework and Background

According to the Vietnam National Assembly, Education Law (2019), Vietnam's education system starts with preschool for children as young as 3 months old (Article 23), and meets the needs of lifelong learning (Article 41). The Law on Children (2016) states every child has the right to fully participate in national educational programs (Article 16), and parents have the responsibility to ensure their child's right to education (Article 99). The Law on Persons with Disabilities (2010) stipulates "families are responsible for ensuring all rights of persons with disabilities" (Article 9). Those affirm that parents have an important role in education across the lifespan of children with developmental disabilities.

Education for children with disabilities in Vietnam includes inclusion, semi-inclusion and specialization. Article 28 of the Law on Persons with Disabilities (2010) implemented inclusive schools, specialized schools, supporting centers, and supporting classes. Because both educational needs of those children and lifelong education models are diverse, parents play an important role in choosing the education model for their children across each child's lifespan.

To understand parents' choices of education across the lifespan, we analyze parents' choices in two case studies of individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), considered the first generation of children with developmental disorders in Vietnam, and then the connection of those choices to the change of education for children with developmental disabilities.

Methods and Objects

A longitudinal study was conducted on students' and parents' records of two case studies: Case 1, Student T (male) born 2005 in a family with two boys, both parents public employees. Parents learned T had autism when he was 3. T has completed the specialized education program and works at a vocational education facility, pursuing a career in drawing and baking. Case 2, Student S (male) born 2005 in a family with 1 child, both parents public employees. Parents confirmed his autism when he was 4.5 years old. Currently, S has completed inclusive high school and works freely at home.

Results Case 1

T's parents let T learn in a specialized center (K. Center) for early intervention (age 3–5 years), to develop communication and adaptive behaviors, as there was no inclusive education for children with autism at that time (year 2008). T made major progress in speech and cognition. He was quite ready to go to first grade.

From 6–15 years old, T attended first grade and continued to receive support for communication skills, developing his interests in learning piano, performing and drawing. T's parents continued to choose a specialized center in 2012, still worried about T's ability to adapt, especially fearing T would get lost in inclusive school. T learned math and language equivalent to Grades 2–3. They found music and drawing teachers so he could play piano, draw, and cook.

From 15–17 years old, T needed to develop pre-vocational skills and the ability to independently participate in community activities. He had outstanding abilities such as drawing and baking to be considered. In 2019, his parents began to ask teachers for an institute that could address these interests. They choose vocational training at the S Center. T drew pictures and sold them, and learned some steps of baking at the S Center.

From 18 years old, T has needed to develop his drawing talent and a stable career to have income for himself. His parents continue to choose S Center where he practices life skills and teamwork to develop his full potential. T integrates very well and can follow instructions with a supporting teacher. However, in the inclusive environment, he shows lack of confidence.

Results Case 2

From 4–5 years old S needed to develop adaptive behaviors. His parents needed more time to accept his characteristics. He attended a specialized center (K Center) for early intervention in 2008. He improved in all aspects; his crying behavior decreased. He was ready for first grade.

From 6–10 years S attended first grade, continuing behavior support. In 2012, S went to an inclusive primary school for half-day and specialized early intervention center for half-day (Grades 1–3). He had supporting lessons after school from grade 4 and achieved a fairly average level.

From 11–15 years old S needed to improve learning and communication to meet the junior high school learning requirements. His parents continued to choose private school inclusion education in 2016, taught him in the evening and sent him to the specialized center in the summer and on weekends. S achieved at a fairly average level, went to school by bus independently but got trouble in communication with friends.

From 16–18 years S participated in a small part of high school and was independent at school and home. He continued inclusion education in a private high school in 2020, independent in most activities, graduated and did housework at home with no career orientation.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

Parents are the ones who choose the educational model throughout their child's life. Parents' choices influence their children's participation, inclusion and independent living.

Initially, there were not many educational models. The early intervention model for children with autism at the National Children's Hospital and some private centers in 2008, was the only option for parents. New models have appeared, giving parents more options. For example:

1. In 2012, S was in a primary school for inclusion and his parents asked the special education teacher to provide supplementary intervention after school hours, creating a

model coordination between specialized education and inclusive primary education.

2. In 2019, the career guidance model for adolescents with ASD (S Center) was established so T and peers could learn simple works suitable to their abilities. Parents' need for choice has driven the emergence of new models. Only after 20 years has the life cycle of education and career guidance for children with developmental disorder been completed.

Parent choices rarely involve advice from experts due to a lack of coordinators available to orient parents in making choices. Choices are based on endogenous family factors including parents' awareness, expectations, economic conditions, and number of children in the family. (S's education is more invested than T's one because S is an only child). Choice is also based on exogenous factors, current educational models available, and information from other families (seen in both cases). Endogenous factors seem to have the stronger influence on parents' choices. Specifically in the case T, when there was no model for developing talent for children with disabilities, T's parents still contacted artists and paid to develop their child's drawing ability.

In the future, the challenge for parents when making choices across their child's lifespan, the factors of emotional support and the development of educational models according to the child's lifespan needs should be considered more.

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Biographical Information

Nu-Tam-An Nguyen

Nu-Tam-An Nguyen, PhD, is working in the Faculty of Special Education, Hanoi National University of Education. Her professional area and publications focus on special education of children with autism spectrum disorders. She is a founder of Khanh Tam Special Education Research and Consultation Center.

Thi-Thu-Thuy Dao

Thi-Thu-Thuy Dao, PhD, was a researcher at The Viet Nam National Institute of Educational Sciences from 2001-2017, from 2017-present has been faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Hanoi Metropolitan University, and is the founder of the Seed Center for Life Skills and Career for Youth with autism spectrum disorders and intellectual disability.

Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen

Thi-Cam-Huong Nguyen, who holds a PhD in Education, works in the Faculty of Special Education, Hanoi National University of Education and is the head of the Section of Education for Children with Visual Impairment and Education for Learning Disabilities. Her professional area and publications focus on education of children with learning disabilities and developmental disorders.

62. OUTPATIENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN MASSACHUSETTS: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Stacy-Ann N. Hylton

Outpatient Clinician of Behavioral Health, Norwood

Stacy-Ann N. Hylton email: Stacyhyl@gmail.com

Acknowledgement:

Special thanks to Lauren Demake, LICSW, for her expertise and insight into the specialized outpatient services for adults with IDD and mental health diagnoses and to the Norwood Outpatient Clinic for their support.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Stacy-Ann N. Hylton
190 Lenox Street
Norwood, MA 02062, USA

Overview

In this presentation, I offer insight into an outpatient behavioral health service designed specifically for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and co-occurring mental health diagnoses, with a particular focus on practices observed in a specialized contracted organization in Massachusetts, United States. The significance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to providing access to care through mobile service delivery for comprehensive outpatient behavioral health services, utilizing both direct clinical experience and secondary data sources were highlighted. I provide valuable insights into a specialized outpatient program by exploring the program model, service delivery model, and specialized clinical expertise.

Background

In Massachusetts, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) (2024) is responsible for administering programs and services aimed at addressing the diverse needs of individuals with I/DD, older adults, individuals with visual or auditory impairments, and those grappling with substance use disorders, mental illness, or concurrent conditions in the state. Individuals aged 22 and older with I/DD residing in Massachusetts are eligible for assistance provided by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), a department within the EOHHS that contracts specialized outpatient behavioral health services for adults with I/DD and concurrent mental health and complex issues to provide specialty clinical services, including comprehensive assessments and psychotherapy, behavioral analysis, and psychiatric services. It is an interdisciplinary approach to clinical intervention, emphasizing service delivery through clinical assessment, case management, therapeutic intervention, behavior intervention, and psychiatric support to effectively manage symptoms and ultimately mitigate the need for hospitalization by addressing stressors that may exacerbate psychiatric disorders and behavioral problems among individuals with I/DD.

Methodology

I employed direct observation and review of primary and secondary data for this study. Direct clinical expertise and one-on-one discussions with stakeholders, clinicians, and individuals with I/DD, complemented by data from DDS and the contracted organization, form the basis of analysis. Primary data sources included clinical assessments, and secondary data is from program evaluations, policy documents, and service utilization records.

Findings

Findings from direct clinical experience and data analysis are synthesized within existing theoretical frameworks to provide a comprehensive view of outpatient behavioral health services for adults with I/DD in Massachusetts. Emphasis is placed on the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and mobile service delivery in meeting the complex needs of this population.

Program Model

The outpatient behavioral health service prioritizes a community-centric approach, providing assessment and intervention in various settings conducive to therapy. This closed referral program ensures timely access to support, with services delivered by an interdisciplinary team including licensed social workers, behavior analysts, psychiatrists, and psychiatric nurse practitioners. Adaptations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the incorporation of telehealth options, demonstrate responsiveness to evolving needs.

Service Delivery

A multidisciplinary approach was used to encompass therapy, behavioral consultation, and psychiatric treatment, which were delivered primarily in natural environments. The frequency of services was tailored to individual needs, focusing on stabilization and community reintegration. Challenges in service delivery included funding constraints and turnover among staff, impacting the ability to provide consistent care.

Specialized Clinical Expertise and Approach

The interdisciplinary team of master's level licensed social workers, licensed psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners, board-certified behavior analysts, and program support specialists, possesses expertise in addressing various conditions, ensuring individualized care through therapy, behavioral analysis, psychiatric intervention, and administrative support. Continuous collaboration among team members and stakeholders ensures seamless care delivery, focusing on addressing the unique needs of each client.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite distinctive attributes and strengths, I, the author of this program, faced challenges related to funding constraints that impact the provision of service and quality of care. Addressing these challenges required continued financial support to provide needed services and investment in workforce development, maintaining consistent and enduring collaboration in providing services to persons with I/DD and co-occurring mental health conditions.

Results

This review underscores the importance of specialized outpatient behavioral health services for adults with I/DD and co-occurring mental health conditions in Massachusetts. By emphasizing interdisciplinary collaboration and mobile service delivery, the complex needs of this population were addressed. Continued support and investment are essential to ensure high-quality care for this vulnerable population.

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Biographical Information

Stacy-Ann Hylton

Stacy-Ann Hylton is a clinical behavior therapist, specializing in individual and group therapy for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). She holds both a Master of Science and Bachelor of Science in Social Work. For over 19 years, she has worked directly with persons with I/DD, their families, and caregivers.

63. PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND SPORTS AS A MEANS OF LIFE SPAN INCLUSION

Hana Válková

Faculty of Sport Studies, Masaryk University

Hana Válková email: valkovah43@seznam.cz

I have no known conflict to disclose.

Correspondence for this article should be addressed to:

Hana Válková

Faculty of Sport Sciences, Masaryk University

Kamenice 753/5, 625 00, Brno - Bohunice

Czechia

Background

Education of pupils with intellectual disabilities (ID) has been a frequent topic in the school context in the current Czech Republic since the introduction of school attendance in the 19th century. The historical publication Pedagogika (Šauer, 1897) draws attention to the education of “idiots.” In this sense, the textbook is in line with the progressive doctors and pedagogues of the time, who are considered to be the composers and creators of special education, e.g. Amerling, Jedlička, Herfort, Jedlička, Šauer (Valenta & Muller, 2003, pp. 29-35).

Certain forms of special education date back to World War II, to the time of the Bohmen und Mahren protectorate. Education during this period was generally devastating and unacceptable for people with disabilities. Only after World War II did the effort to make education accessible to all truly begin. It was necessary to restore and complete the education system, which was the reason for spontaneous inclusion. In the following summers, the education of pupils with specific needs was consolidated. The system was based on a strict categorization of schools for pupils with disabilities for degrees of mental, visual, auditory, etc. disabilities (School Law, 2004). From the point of view of the then post-war period, it is possible to consider this system as progressive: concentration of educators with very good specific education, concentrations of funds to build specific schools, classrooms, equipment. But it has been forgotten that there is social and attitudinal separation.

Since the 1990s, development has moved towards an inclusive concept. The Minister of Education has made new adjustments, innovations, and titles. Since the establishment of the independent Czech Republic in 1993 to 2024, there have been a total of 22 Ministers of Education (men and women) (Ministr školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, n.d.). For students with intellectual/mental disabilities, these schools have been special, auxiliary, supportive, and now practical. In academic education, students with ID will not be able to compete or be completely happy; inclusion can be more easily and successfully achieved in leisure activities (Titzl, 2016).

The paradox of inclusion can be seen in ordinary schools where the emphasis is on cognitive education. Physical education (PE) is getting out of attention. In regular schools, the curriculum includes 2 hours per week. There is still a lack of special education teachers for supplementary classes, insufficient preparation, and a lack of teachers for conducting inclusive forms of PE. In special schools there is the possibility of including up to 5 hours of PE per week, a possible focus on sports leisure groups (Válková, 2022).

Virtus (a world sports organization for people with intellectual impairment) is the brand name of the International Sports Federation for athletes with intellectual impairment and is a founding member of the International Paralympic Committee (Virtus, n.d.). It is based on the principle of normality, on the principle of limits, advancement to higher competitions according to placement, awarding medals only to the top three competitors. The formation and activity dates back to 1992, with a break. The Sports Union for Down Syndrome (SUDS), founded in 2012, is also based on the Paralympic concept of normality (Sports Union for Down Syndrome, n.d.). The principle of normality limits inclusion, even if these federations claim the opposite (Van Biesen, 2012). Performance focus must copy intensive training as in regular sports, which is problematic for athletes who do not have personal responsibility for decision-making. It can become a tool of parental ambition.

The Special Olympics International (SOI), established in 1968, has been developing in the Czech Republic since 1990 (České hnutí Speciálních Olympiád, n.d.). Registered participants can be anyone 8 years and older, whose basic diagnosis is an intellectual deficit. The principle of relativity means that after the day of qualifying competitions, everyone advances to the final according to the current relative results; all honestly competing final groups have the right to the awarding ceremony. Experience shows that a different composition of parents chooses to register in Virtus than those who choose SOI (Francová, 2023). There are attractive complementary programs in SOI that each national association must develop.

In the Czech Republic, attention is mainly paid to inclusive school (Válková, 2022) and inclusive health (Válková, 2016; Válková et al., 2014). The elements of inclusion relate to the context of sport during travel, use of public accommodation and catering facilities, communication with volunteers and referees, and compliance with the given sport's rules. (The sports competition must be managed by the athlete alone, at most accompanied by a designated volunteer.) A typical inclusive program is the so-called unified sports format, implemented in dyadic sports (table tennis, bocce, figure skating) or team sports. In this concept, athletes and partners without ID train and compete together (Válková, 2020).

Conclusion

Two world federations deal with adult and children sports training of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Virtus, operating since 1992, is based on the principle of normality, and Special Olympics International (SOI), operating since 1968, and in the Czech Republic since 1990, is based on the principle of relativity. Additional programs are an essential component, which form a strong inclusive basis. Because the cognitive functions of these athletes are limited, parents or their representatives need to decide on the choice of one or the other direction. In practice, it is possible to trace that the choice of direction is determined by the performance or educational (inclusive) motivation of the parents which can be an ethical problem.

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Biographical Information

Hana Válková

Hana Válková is a Professor in the Faculty of Sport Sciences, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic and founder of APA in the Czech Republic with influence on the Central and Eastern European area. She is the former president of the Czech Special Olympics. Her research interest is fitness, healthy lifestyle and inclusion of persons with intellectual disability.