

Assessment Strategies of Teachers for Learners with Special Educational Needs in a Regular Classroom: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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Abstract

This qualitative-phenomenological inquiry explored the lived experiences of teachers in the assessment strategies for LSEN in a regular classroom in Tagum District. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of teachers on the assessment strategies for LSEN in a regular classroom and how they face the challenges encountered. Thirteen (13) teachers participated in the in-depth interview and focus group discussion. They were selected using the snowball sampling method. The results revealed the participants' lived experiences, which include the use of differentiated assessments, employing individualized instruction and sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. There are also chief issues emerged in the study namely: difficulty in handling undesirable behaviors, communication problems and lack of training. To address the challenges encountered, they mentioned five ways: collaboration and support, positive attitude and motivation; acceptance, continuous education and modification of assessment. They also cited insights they can share to others: additional proper training for teachers, more assessment tools and materials, background profiling and lessen the number of students in the general education classroom. The result of the study implies that varied assessment strategies should be employed to address the unique needs of LSEN. Assessing and handling both regular, and LSEN is quite challenging for the participants. Hence, the findings suggest using varied assessment to meet the unique needs of the students, send teachers to trainings specifically in assessing LSEN..

Index Terms—Classroom assessment, education, Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN), teachers.

Background

As an educator, it can be difficult to assess students with special educational needs. There are some students who have difficulty finishing the given task especially if it requires much concentration and efforts like children who have difficulty in focusing (ADHD) and ASD. However, in order to give the students the chance to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding, we need to conduct an assessments. A study conducted in Lebanon revealed that almost half of the teachers and administrators expressed being ill-prepared in assessing student performance even though Special education teachers believed that alternative assessments were important, some of their assessment practices were still guided by traditional methods (Elhage andamp; Sawilowsky, 2016). In Turkey, it was found out that teachers encounter some difficulties such as crowded classroom (Muthusamy, 2015), insufficient time for assessment, insufficient learning environment and technological opportunity and attainment of assessment's objective (Metin, 2013). There was also a study conducted in Tanzania showed that teachers lack of teaching materials and lack of collaboration between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher (Udoba, 2014). In fact, in Tagum City,

everyday practice of assessment in the classroom of learners with special educational needs is beset with problems and shortcomings. It was observed that most of the teachers are facing problems such as lack of teacher's training on the assessment of Learners with Special Educational Needs, suitability of the assessment to the student's needs, production and use of instructional materials and time constraints due to slow pacing of student's learning. Given these scenarios, the researcher finds it necessary to conduct the study to find out the assessment strategies done by the teachers of Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) in the regular classroom and highlight what could be best done to help improve and enhance the assessment strategies suited for LSEN in the regular classroom and eventually become independent and productive member of the . This study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of teachers on the assessment strategies for Learners with Special Educational Needs in a regular classroom. .

Methods

This research is qualitative in nature, the researcher used phenomenology as the group selected was the group of people who personally experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Using snowball sampling, The researcher interviewed seven (7) general education teachers who handled learners with special educational needs for in-depth interview from public school in Tagum City Division and six (6) general education teachers for FGD on the same division by the virtue of referral of the principal of the said school. She gave me a list of prospect participants and in turn referred me to the SPED coordinator of the said school. All teachers have had experienced various problems with regard to the assessment strategies used for LSEN in the regular classroom.

Results, Discussions and Cocnlusions

Results

The aim of this phenomenological study was to generate results on lived experiences related to the assessment strategies of teachers of LSEN in the regular classroom through in-depth interview and focus group discussion. Six main themes emerged from the data collected on participants' experiences: 1. use of differentiated assessment; 2. Sense of fulfillment and satisfaction; 3. Difficulty in handling undesirable behaviors; 4. Communication problems; 5. Individualized instruction; and 6. Lack of training and knowledge. There were five themes emerged out of the analysis of data of the coping mechanisms of teachers in the assessment strategies of LSEN in the regular classroom. The coping mechanisms cited by the participants are as follows: 1. Collaboration and support; 2. Positive attitude and motivation; 3. Continuous education; 4. Acceptance; and 5. Modification of assessment. The following are insights of teachers on the assessment strategies of OLSSEN in the regular classroom, namely: 1) proper training; 2) provide assessment tools and materials; 3) background profiling; and 4) lessen the number of students.

Discussions

Use of Differentiated Assessments

Most study participants insisted on using differentiated assessment to adequately meet student needs. Participants used differentiated assessments to satisfy these students with special educational needs that cannot cope with normal class change. The use of differentiated assessment activities was supported by Stears & Gopal (2010) who stated there will be a stimulating learning environment with differentiated assessment in use. Numerous studies

show that the use of such alternative activities is not the only one for measurement purposes, but also make a great contribution to student learning and concepts in a permanent and conceptually meaningful way. Use of differentiated and alternative activities that take into account the individual differences of children (Cepni & Coruhlu, 2010).

Sense of Fulfillment and Satisfaction

Another major theme found in this study is the sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Teachers who have successfully worked with learners with special educational needs often describe the satisfaction they feel when the lessons are finally understood. Successes in assessing with these children are measured in inches not feet. Even the smallest achievement has likely been longer and rougher than for those learners without disabilities (Boll, 2014). In addition, the study of Sergiovanni (1967) revealed that achievement, recognition and responsibility were factors contributed predominantly to teacher job satisfaction. This was also in support with the results of the study.

Students' Undesirable Behavior

The way students behave in a classroom affects the quality and quality of their learning. Participants found it difficult to assess student learning due to many distractions, especially the different types of student behavior. Many types of behavior distract teachers from using assessments in the classroom. These include speaking inappropriately, standing out of a chair without permission, not paying attention, and disturbing other students by making noise or touching them. Undesirable student behavior is one of the most important problems for teachers in the classroom (Teyfur, 2015). This was supported by Sun & Shek (2013) that student misbehaviors such as disruptive talking, chronic avoidance of work, antics, interference with teaching activities, harassment of classmates, verbal abuse, rudeness to the teacher, provocation, and hostility, ranging from infrequent to frequent, mild to severe, are a thorny issue in everyday classroom. Teachers have generally reported that these classroom disruptive behaviors are intolerable and stimulating stress, and they had to devote a lot of time and energy to leading the class. Obviously, student misbehaviors retard the smoothness and effectiveness of employing assessment strategies and impede the learning of the student and his/her classmates. Moreover, research findings have shown that school misbehavior not only escalated with time but also lowered academic achievement and increased delinquent behavior.

Communication Problems

Barriers to classroom communication certainly make it difficult for teachers and students to cope with and use desired assessment strategies. Participants expressed their difficulty in communicating with students or vice versa or students to students. According to Aparajeya (2016) who pointed out that effective communication between teachers and students has the potential to prove the learning experience and can possibly do the tasks given. Students often have unresolved learning or speech difficulties and have difficulty communicating in class. In addition, communication is an important part of the assessment, as students must be able to understand the message that the teacher is trying to convey. Students must also be able to communicate effectively with each other. If the teacher and the student do not speak the same language or use the same mode of communication, then there may be a large communication barrier (Ashikuzzaman, 2014).

Individualized Instruction

In a large classroom, even the brightest students can feel lost, left behind, or disengaged. Due to the needs of different students, participants generally use personalized instructions and not just for coping but also in order for the students to understand easily the given tasks. It is believed that the most effective learning occurs when a student receives individual attention and

personalized tutoring experience adapted to their unique needs. Individualized education refers to the use of strategies, resources and assessments to meet the needs of the particular student. Ensuring that students receive adequate guidance, flexibility and learning support to expand opportunities for academic growth (King, 2018). In addition, Heathers (1977) argued that individualized education is an important way for teachers to contribute to their students' self-image takes advantage of opportunities to give each student attention, encouragement and praise.

Lack of Training

Evaluating student performance is one of the most critical responsibilities of classroom teachers; however, many teachers do not feel sufficiently prepared for this task. Teachers often feel that they need remedies or help in applying assessment concepts and techniques, as well as in making assessment decisions. The need for teachers who have both the knowledge and the ability to teach and assess students with special educational needs is now more critical than ever. A nationwide push to get LSEN out of isolation means they will be spending most of their time in the general education classroom. This means that general education teachers teach LSEN more, but training programs do little to prepare teachers. Additionally, a study by Cherishe (2012) found that most traditional teachers were not equipped with the appropriate skills and languages to use.

Collaboration and Support

Students in the classroom often provide valuable support to teachers supervising the classroom. Based on the results of the study, many teachers learned that when using students without disabilities in their classrooms, they are better able to work individually with students with special needs of their age. This not only reduces stress, but also allows the teacher to devote more time to individual work with other struggling students (Education corner, 2019). Additionally, the special education teacher works alongside the general education teacher to help meet the needs of students (Zeiger, 2018). They work together to design the lesson plans to adapt to the needs of all students, with the special education teacher who focuses on the needs of students with special educational needs. Therefore, continuous communication is essential to locate individuals as parents, special education professor, services and materials to have better support all students.

Positive Attitude and Motivation

The positive attitude and positive motivation helped participants overcome some of the challenges they met. The positive attitude and motivation of the participants leads to the creation of strategies that are more appropriate and adapted to children with special educational needs. From this point of view, if the motivation is mastered, the failures and challenges encountered can find and create a way to always search for solutions and growth (Han, 2016). In addition, a positive attitude is very important as a teacher. This affects students in many ways and can shape their learning experience and dictate what they have learned (Netherlands, 2016).

Acceptance

Considering the different students in a normal classroom, acceptance is one of the coping mechanisms mentioned by participants. As stated by Kohl (2013) that acceptance is a strategy that is expected to increase pain tolerance. The participants accept the nature of the learners. LSEN's ability and inability to do something is reflected when the teacher accepts the condition of children who would lead teachers to develop assessment strategies adapted to the children's needs. A study conducted by Pulschen (2015) stressed that acceptance is an appropriate medium to help prevent more possible problem in the future in handling and assessing children with special educational needs. Most of the participants mentioned that they did not take the problems and challenges seriously.

Continuous Education

Continuous professional development is one of the coping mechanisms of teachers in solving problems and challenges in handling and assessing learners with special educational needs. Professional development is important because education is a constantly changing and evolving field. This means that teachers must learn throughout their lives to teach new groups of students (Teacher Org., 2019). As mentioned also by the participant that every year they have a new different learner with special educational needs.

Modification of Assessment

Modification means a change in what is taught or expected by the student. The responses of the participants showed that most of them modified the assessment given to the learners with special educational needs in order to suit to the students' ability and capacity to do the tasks given. Hence, making an assessment easier so the student is not doing the same work as the other student. In modifying, teachers may make a range of adjustment from modifying instructional materials to using alternative behaviors to complete the task given. Teachers may consider different methods of assessments, including the use of portfolios and non-letter grading as alternative authentic assessments (Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

Proper Training

Most of the participants mentioned training as their insights on the assessment strategies of LSEN. Training course in particular for teachers who have handled hearing-impaired students. Participants admitted that they really need to update their knowledge not just by handling students with particular educational needs but also for assessments, which are appropriate and adapted to them. Indeed, the study conducted by Stiggins (2016) found that teachers have poor knowledge of assessment and inadequate preparation for assessment. Moreover, the teachers are very critical in the delivery of quality education. Teacher training is a starting point. The solution to improve the teacher quality is to do training. Most of the numbers of teachers require strengthening of their skills and ability, this need to be specific and targeted workshops addressing specific and individual teachers based on their strengths and weaknesses as given in teacher's individual performance reports. In line with this, Halim (2002) stressed that inappropriate teaching and assessment methods lead to more misconceptions.

Assessment Tools and Materials

Assessments inform teachers and parents about their children's academic progress. Typically, assessments provide data that educators need as an indicator of their students' progress. These are necessary tools used in most elementary schools. However, most of the participants suggested providing them with assessment tools and learning materials adapted to LSEN. Instructional effectiveness is crucial in teaching LSEN thus selecting appropriate assessment tools and instructional materials that support their learning is very much needed. In fact, Campbell (1999) asserted that instructional materials enhance the teaching and learning process by exhibiting information necessary to acquire knowledge and skills. It can be printed form of instructional materials and assessment tools that provide detailed information, which includes performance aids, instructional sheets and modules. Moreover, Melton (2014) emphasized the importance of instructional materials because they can significantly increase student achievement by supporting student learning. In addition to supporting learning materials can assist teachers in an important professional duty: the differentiation of instruction. Educational differentiation is the adaptation of lessons and instruction to the different learning styles and skills within the classroom.

Background Profiling

In order to successfully modify and create differentiated instruction and differentiated assessment the teacher must have an ample understanding of each student and their backgrounds. In order to obtain a better understanding of each student's background, the participants believe that they must have support from administration and parents. Support from parents / guardians, staff and administrators allows the teacher to fully understand each student's journey (Bender, 2008). As we develop a better understanding of the learning styles, backgrounds and interests of our students, the teacher can create assessments and instructions accordingly. Christensen (2018) added that instructors who know their students well are better able to create a truly student-centered learning experience. Familiarity with the backgrounds of students, especially those with skills or experience relevant to a particular class session can lead to richer discussions with a higher degree of personal relevance.

Lessen the Number of Students

One of the biggest issues facing schools and teachers today is overcrowding that is why participants believed that with the small number of students in the regular classroom, they could focus with all kinds of children regardless of their educational needs. Indeed, Meador (2018) argued that overcrowding classrooms has unfortunately become the new normal. A combination of an increasing population and a decrease in funding has caused class sizes to soar. In an ideal world, class sizes would be limited to 15 to 20 students. It is not uncommon for the participants to have more than 50 learners in a single class. As Spring (2017) suggested that lower ratios between students and teachers improve test scores. As the student-to-teacher ratio increases, which means less individual instruction and less attention and supervision, students' academic performance suffers.

Conclusion

Assessment played a vital role in finding out the progress and development of the children. Teachers are one of the most important figures in the assessment process. They must be equipped with different assessment strategies that are suited to the unique needs of learners with special educational needs. As a result, a teacher is not just a distributor of knowledge and measuring knowledge and skills of the learner but also teaching them life skills, which are said to be a lifelong learning. The assessment of teacher inside the classroom does not end on paper and pen only, does not end in the four corners of the classroom but it is a lifelong learning. Teach students with special educational needs to be independent and live on their own. Therefore, the Department of Education and administrators should provide resources, such as assessment tools and materials to be used by the teachers in order to give learners what are due to them. Sufficient resources and support for the holistic development of students with or without special educational needs is a must.

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