

The Effects of Children With ALN Being in Mainstream Classrooms: A Research Study

Abstract

This present research study will experimentally inquire into the effect of individuals with additional learning needs in mainstream classrooms and whether the utilisation of a specified moderate learning difficulties unit, which is comprised of 10 individuals, benefits the holistic and academic development of the participants. Using a convenience sample, and utilising a qualitative methodological approach, one individual taken from each key stage within primary education; the foundation phase, key stage one, and key stage two, will be observed in their natural manner in both their mainstream classroom setting alongside individuals that are not considered to possess additional learning needs, and in the environment of the specialised moderate learning difficulties unit, where individuals present with additional learning needs.

Additionally, the research study will utilise interviews, a further qualitative methodological approach, including standardised open-ended interviews and collect information from the practitioners of the mainstream classrooms of all three individuals and the head practitioner within the moderate learning difficulties unit, using semi-structured and closed questions, as a means of retrieving quantitative data. The interviews will focus primarily on the development of the child in question in regards to academic, physical, emotional, and communicative development. As a result of conducting interviews with practitioners from disparate educational environments that assist and support the individuals

participating, the researcher will have the ability to comprise and assemble the data and information collected and compare what was stated by both practitioners of each individual, and as a result conclude the educational environment most suited for meeting the requirements of children with additional learning needs.

With the aim of acquiring participants for the research study, the researcher must consider the ethical requirements when conducting a research study with children under the age of 18. The researcher must ensure appropriate consent is received from parents and guardians of the participants, notwithstanding the assent of the individuals participating in the study. Thus, the researcher must produce and provide parents and guardians with a consent letter stating the details of the rationale of the study, the activities that will occur, and describe the means by which the information gathered will be analysed. Additionally, the researcher must ensure to communicate participants' right to withdraw at any time during the study, to ensure not to infringe on the UNCRC children's rights and avoid deception by being open and honest with all individuals involved with the research study. Avoiding incentives during the course of the study will ensure that bias by means of information output or actions will be discouraged entirely.

Literature

Simmons and Kameenui (1998) and Whitehurst (2006) insist that Additional Learning Needs which is also recognised as Additional Educational Needs is a learning difficulty or disability which would require subsidiary learning and academic provision. Whitehurst (2006) continues by stating that learning difficulties and disabilities may arise from medical conditions or otherwise. Subsequently the research study by van der Veen, Smeets, and Derricks (2010) where the objectives were to assess the quantity of Dutch students in primary educational settings with special educational needs, their attainment of literacy, language, and numerical abilities, the probability of referral to specialised educational settings, and the ramifications of practitioners' perspectives towards inclusion. Van der Veen, Smeets, and Derricks (2010) conducted the study in view of the fact that there is a multitude of obstacles that are inhibiting sufficient education for children with additional learning needs in mainstream primary settings. Furthermore, the consequences of dissimilar needs on children's school careers have infrequently been addressed in previous research studies. The research established that cognitive difficulties and

disabilities had sufficient repercussions on children's school careers in comparison to social-emotional difficulties and physical disabilities. Moreover, teachers with positive perspectives in regards to the inclusion of children with additional learning needs and a vital understanding of the cruciality of communication, referred fewer children to specialised educational settings, as opposed to teachers with a dismissive perspective toward inclusion.

Rix, *et al.* (2009) maintain the consequences of practitioners' nature and positive perspectives on inclusion in the academic development and social inclusion of children with additional learning needs in mainstream classrooms. Similarly to the research study conducted by van der Veen, Smeets, and Derricks (2010), Rix, *et al.* (2009) reinforce the cruciality of a positive perspective in the inclusion of children with additional learning needs within mainstream educational settings by practitioners. This specific series of reviews emphasises that a practitioner's efficacy is heavily influenced by their awareness of responsibility for all children in their classroom, and the cruciality of communication to learning and development. As a result of the expanding demand for the inclusion of individuals with additional learning needs within mainstream schools (Knight, 2022), practitioners are compelled to take responsibility for the individual learning needs of all children within their settings. Rix, *et al.* (2009) conducted this literature review on past research studies as the belief in the requirement of special pedagogical approaches for children with additional learning needs has been widely critiqued, however, educational settings in England and Wales argue that there is insufficient experience and resources to therefore provide advantageously to individuals with additional learning needs (OFSTED, 2004). Similarly, van der Veen, Smeets, and Derricks (2010) argue that an equally important aspect to consider is the practitioner's inexperience with individuals with additional learning needs can result in the specific needs of children being unrecognised. Consequently, children's individual learning needs will not be sufficiently provided or supported. Palincsar, *et al.* (2001) reiterate the fundamental basis of this review, which is that all-encompassing pedagogy approaches and teachings for children with additional learning needs do not reflect the individual requirements of learning and are not recognised as developing the learning of the individuals.

Accordingly, following the above research study and literature review of the inclusion of individuals with additional learning needs within mainstream educational environments, which was notably suggested by van der Veen, Smeets, and Derricks (2010) and Rix (2009) has not advanced the academic abilities or cognitive development of those with learning difficulties. This suggests that there is inadequate knowledge of whether a specialised learning environment and experienced practitioners may be advantageous to children with additional learning needs as opposed to a mainstream educational

setting. Therefore, by conducting this research study and observing the presentation of the development and behaviour of individuals with additional learning needs within a mainstream setting and additionally comparing how individuals present within a specialised educational environment, an analysis can be constructed as to which environment will be more advantageous to individuals with additional learning needs. Moreover, no significant research study on children with additional learning needs in educational environments has been conducted in recent years, therefore, this research study will provide an exploration into education by observing and comparing how the specific needs of individuals with additional learning needs are met within mainstream settings and specialised educational environments with supplementary support of additional practitioners.

Methodological

Emerson (2015) states that convenience sampling is an approach of non-probability sampling, resulting in individuals being sampled purely in view of the fact that they are simple sources of data for the researcher. Consequently, using a convenience sample within the setting where the researcher is at present would benefit the research study (Emerson, 2021), as the researcher will thus far have knowledge of individuals that have additional learning and special educational needs, in addition to the facilities and environments provided by the setting. Therefore, specialist judgment is not used to select an indicative sample of individuals, and consequently, the researcher is utilising individuals as a result of availability and accessibility (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2015). The research study will take place at a local Welsh-medium primary school where in particular to this research study, a moderate learning difficulty unit is situated within the educational setting. The case study will observe the development of three individuals with additional learning needs, one from each key stage that are situated within a mainstream classroom whilst concurrently attending the MLD unit part-time.

A qualitative methodological approach generates literacy data by using techniques such as; interviews and observations (Aspers and Corte, 2019). The researcher will interview the lead practitioners of both classroom settings in which the children attend during their time at school. The interviews conducted will enable the researcher to synthesise information (Lorenc, *et al.*, 2016) on the development of the individuals and therefore compare and analyse where the needs of the individuals are being best fulfilled. Interviews provide a generous amount of in-depth information in an interpretation-based and

descriptive manner whilst also encouraging honest and distinctive remarks from participants according to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017).

During interviews, the researcher will intend to make notes on themes and details on the individuals that are discussed as a mode of recording the interview, as they will be useful when analysing the data subsequent to interviews and observation setting, as discussed by Langley and Meziani (2020). As a result of the researcher preparing semi-structured questions, the practitioners will be in a position to expand on previous answers if the researcher were to prompt further (Olatunde and Olenik, 2021).

Limitations arise when considering the moral dilemmas of the use of recordings such as note-taking.

Consent from the participants of the interviews to record has utmost importance as well as confidentiality of the information discussed. Consequently to there being exclusively four interviews in total, on account of there being three head mainstream classroom teachers and one moderate learning difficulties practitioner, the researcher alone will have access to the information and data collected.

Furthermore, the participants may perceive a question as triggering and feel pressured, therefore, as maintained by Thorpe (2014) and Bolderston (2012) it is vital the researcher advise the participants of their right to withdraw from the interviews.

Dissimilarly, the interviews conducted in this research study will not contain informal conversational questions, thus emerging from the immediate context where there is no predomination of topics and themes. Manion, Cohen, and Morrison (2017) suggest that by utilising this strategy the researcher will become overwhelmed with multitudes of unlike answers and information from participants as a result of the dissimilar questions being asked. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017) continue by arguing that data organisation can be difficult when attempting to analyse the large proportion of information gathered during the interviews. Although interviews generate mainly qualitative data, Oppenheimer (2000) argues that closed questions asked during interviews produce responses compliant with statistical investigation and analysis. Bailey and Tilley (2002) maintain this by stating that closed questions are deliberately attentive whilst assisting participants to answer as response categories are specified.

Accompanied by interviews, the researcher will also conduct observations of both environments; the mainstream classroom and the Moderate Learning Difficulty unit within the school where the individuals attend. Implementing observation will enable the researcher to survey the individual in their natural state and environment (Pellegrini, Symons, and Hoch, 2012). According to Gischlar (2020) this will allow the researcher to distinguish external factors of specific observed behaviours and the environmental impact of both settings on the individuals' holistic development and happiness.

Limitations as a result do arise concerning observation for example, if the researcher were to intervene with the children's free play as a result this would change conceivable outcomes and behaviours from emerging (Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot, 2011). Additionally, observation can be intrusive and the researcher must consider the impact of having an additional adult in the setting which may result in the individuals presenting unlike their usual selves (Willan, 2010). The Hawthorne Effect may present in individuals during observation periods with behaviours and attitudes altering as maintained by McCambridge, Witton, and Elbourne (2014). Payne and Payne (2004) support this by arguing that individuals may disguise actions and behaviours as a result of their awareness of the presence of an additional adult, and become introverted and reserved. In view of the fact that the researcher is thus far present in the educational setting where the research study will take place and is familiar with the individuals being observed, therefore the likeliness that the behaviour and actions of said individuals being disparate from their natural state is improbable as maintained by Sabol and Pianta (2012).

During the course of the research study, the researcher must consider participatory research with children by possessing an enabling view of children, as individuals who can contribute (Hultgren and Johansson, 2019). This relates to Article 12 of the UNCRC; where a child has the right to express views in all matters concerning the child and where these views are respected and are in conformity with the individual's age and maturity (UNICEF, no date). Article 13 of the UNCRC also sustains the importance of the involvement of the perspective of the individual child, by stating the child's right to freedom of expression (UNICEF, no date).

Hart's ladder of participation is a metaphorical typology of participation where each ascending 'rung' of the ladder constitutes an increase in child agency and control. The ladder is a continuum of jurisdiction ascending from nonparticipation to degrees of participation (Hart, 2008). During this research study, the researcher will follow the fourth 'rung' of Hart's ladder or participation; assigned but informed.

Participation of individuals which is assigned but informed transpires when the children that are part of the observation taking place understand the purposes of the observation, are aware of why the researcher has intended to involve them, and recognise their importance during the research study.

Assigned but informed participation occurs when the individuals volunteer and consent to the observation following an explanation of the research study (Hart, 2008). Informed consent emphasises the respect for children's capacity and competence to express their views and their right to be listened to and understood in all matters concerning themselves (Gallagher, *et al.*, 2009 and UNICEF, no date).

As a result of the researcher using closed questions during interviews, where Oppenheimer (2000) asserts that statistical investigation and analysis are possible, thus triangulation is present in this

research study, as recent research and reviews within the last decade claim that triangulation elevates the validity and credibility of information and findings as opposed to research presented during the eighties and ninety's. However, Fielding and Fielding (1986) claim that utilising a mixed methodological approach; where a researcher would obtain information and knowledge from both qualitative and quantitative data, for instance; incorporating closed questions in interviews, does not undoubtedly increase the validity, diminish the bias or produce impartiality to the information and data gathered during the research study. Notwithstanding the argument by Blaikie (1991) where he insists that the notion is simply positivistic,

Patton (1980) on the contrary suggests that multiple sources of information chiefly obtained utilising qualitative research do not ensure consistency. Noble and Heale (2019) concur with this by maintaining that multiple sources of information and data are noticeably superior to a single source and that triangulation is a procedure that enables the validation of information, which can be used in qualitative and quantitative studies. Noble and Heale (2019) propose that triangulation is used as a technique to intensify the credibility and validity of research findings, and the extent to which the research accurately reviews the concepts being inquired. By combining methodological approaches during a research study, the researcher is ensuring that rudimentary biases appearing from the use of a single method are subdued in the attempt to explore and evaluate complex human behaviour, using a variety of methodological approaches that offer a balanced conclusion (Noble and Heale, 2019).

Ethical

The University of Wales Trinity Saint David's has legal obligations to protect information and data gathered by the researcher from the research study conducted (UWTSD, no date). The policy states that a lawful basis must always be referred to when analysing information and data of the participants of the research study whilst also considering fairness and transparency with information processing of the individuals. The policy also maintains the University's responsibility to integrity and confidentiality, where information and data gathered by the researcher are processed through means of ensuring the relevant security and protection of the personal information of the participants. This includes safeguarding averse to unauthorised processing and analysis and the use of applicable technical and legislative measures where information and data are utilised for specified and legitimate purposes of the research study and not further analysed or processed in a means that opposes the purposes of the study (UWTSD, no date).

Nunner-Winkler (2016) maintains that researchers ought to consider ethics when conducting a research study as a responsibility to the participants involved. Nunner-Winkler (2016) continues by stating that during the course of the research study, it is vital the researcher invariably consider children's rights throughout, to ensure one does no harm to the individuals participating, including children and notwithstanding the practitioners, in the absence of vigorous ethical policies and guidelines, researches may cause harm as a result. A precedent of this includes the 'Little Albert' experiment by John Watson, which claims that classical fear conditioning in human individuals is possible, as a result of the 11-month-old participant of the experiment who initially exhibited curiosity, acquiring a fear of rodents after associating a neutral stimuli, the white rat, with a fearful stimuli, a loud bang (Kim and Jung, 2006). Hooker (2005) concurs this by mentioning the vital responsibility that the researcher possesses during a research study and the drawbacks and complications that may arise through disregarding ethical considerations. For instance, if the researcher withheld from acquiring imperative consent from the individuals participating in the research study, the individual may become distressed and overwhelmed by the researcher being present in the setting (Godwin and Meek, 2015), in addition to the best interests and supplementary requirements of the individual not being met, as a result of the Hawthorne effect; where the child may become abstracted on the presence of the researcher in the setting and not behaving in their natural manner (Sedgwick and Greenwood, 2015). The BERA Guidelines (2018) argue that participants of a research study must be treated justly and sensitively with modesty within ethical respects along with a liberation from prejudice concerning age, gender, race, faith, disability, and nationality.

In view of the fact that the consent of the parents or guardians of the children participating in the research study must be considered (Iltis, 2013), the researcher will produce and format a consent letter stating the grounds and rationale of the research study and the activities that will occur throughout. The letter will describe through what means the children will be involved, and how the information and data gathered will be utilised in a conclusion for the research study. It is crucial that the parents and guardians of the individual have a right to withdraw their consent at any time during the course of the study (Roth-Cline and Nelson, 2013) thus, the letter will encompass the strategy of withdrawing the individual and the guarantee that the information congregated from observing the individual will be eradicated from the final processing analysis of the data. Finally, the consent letter will contain the contact details of the researcher in order for parents to access the researcher to communicate any further questions and queries about the activities taking place during the research study and the means in which the information collected will be used.

It is crucial that the information and data acquired from the research study conducted by the University of the researcher must be obtained in accordance with the University's responsibility as a data controller where research data processing required for the rationale of the research study carried out in, and by the University should be managed in accord with University's obligations as a Data Controller under accordance of the legislations; such as the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 (UK Research and Innovation, 2018) which maintains the responsibility of the University to certify that appropriate institutional and technological initiatives are established in order to protect personal information and data of the individuals participating in the research study.

According to Dekking, *et al.* (2016), voluntary informed consent refers to the obtaining of discretionary consent, or assent for participants under the age of 18, from participants of a research study . Dekking, *et al.* (2019) maintain this by stating that individuals ought not to feel pressured to give consent to participate in the study and that understanding the details and rationale of the study is of utmost importance. In order for the researcher to acquire consent from the children taking part in the research study it is crucial that the individuals acknowledge and have the competence to understand what they are giving consent for (Alderson, *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, for the participant in the Foundation Phase, the researcher will visit the setting beforehand, converse with the child and simply describe the study and what the researcher and individual will be doing throughout the course of the study. Moreover, the researcher will describe how the information and data collected from the conducted study will contribute to the conclusion of the research. The researcher must emphasise the importance of children's rights and their entitlement to decline their consent at any time throughout the course of the study (Nunner-Winkler, 2016). As for the participants in Key Stage One and Key Stage Two, the researcher will explain the activities that will occur during the study in a more thorough manner, and the process of information and data analysis, whilst again highlighting the importance of children's rights and that they possess the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. This correlates with Article 12 of the UNCRC which claims that children who have the capacity to form views must be granted the right to express their perspectives freely in all matters affecting them (UNCRC, no date).

Disclosure and openness are essential attributes to consider during a research study (Tait, *et al.*, 2002). The researcher must ensure to avoid deception by abstaining from informing the participants of the study and also the parents and guardians of the individuals, for instance, pretending to be a new teacher in the setting and not informing the children that they are being observed and furthermore,

collecting personal information (Guttmann, Shouldice, and Levin, 2018). The researcher must ensure no harm occurs to the individuals participating in the study, while Jackson-Hollis (2019) insists that it is the responsibility of the research to refer causes for concern and possible safeguarding issues to the attention of the head practitioner or the safeguarding officer of the educational setting and cease any continuation of observations for the particular individual. This also corresponds with the researcher witnessing potential illegal activity or harmful behaviour, where it would be necessary to breach the confidentiality and anonymity of the participant (Hirisciau, *et al.*, 2014). This correlates with Article 3 of the UNCRC which states that the best interest of the child must always be the primary consideration in all actions concerning the individual (UNICEF, no date).

BERA (2018) states that fair research occurs when participants are provided with a full, honest, and amenable justification for approaches utilised within a methodological and philosophical context of research. The researcher therefore, must ensure to communicate the extent to which the processing and analysis of information and data collected from the conducted study are valid and reliable.

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