

ECEs Supporting Children in Their Classrooms Who Have Exceptionalities

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Abstract

"Providing education to those with special needs has increasingly become an issue of moral necessity over the last few decades" (Karska & Boyle, 2014, p. 228). There has been an increase in the number of children requiring additional support within classroom settings. Educators are often exposed to children with various sets of needs within their classrooms. Therefore, educators need to have a certain level of knowledge and understanding with regard to the various types of exceptionalities amongst children. This is a qualitative study that is intended to investigate and analyze concepts surrounding ECEs' supporting children in their classrooms who have exceptionalities. For this study, data was collected through the process of five individual semistructured interviews with ECEs' consisting of a set of ten open-ended questions. Through the data analysis process, three predominant concepts were discussed, thus creating the studies' core themes. Concepts surrounding professional development amongst ECEs, supporting inclusion and challenges ECEs faced working with children who have exceptionalities were evident.

Introduction

The present study explored ECEs' responses to open-ended questions that allowed them to share their current and past experiences working with children who have various needs. The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze the concepts surrounding educators supporting children who have exceptionalities in their classrooms. The research question addressed in this study is how are ECEs supporting children in their classrooms who have exceptionalities?



Literature Review

Children with exceptionalities are defined as children who may struggle because of learning/academic needs, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Those who have clear challenges that require additional school support to function at their maximum potential (Nye, Gardner, Hansford, Edwards, Hayes & Ford 2016).

Classroom Management

- Educators can experience problematic behaviours such as children's failure to form relationships with adults and peers, trouble engaging in learning activities and struggles to regulate emotions (Gebbie, Ceglowski, Taylor & Miels, 2012).
- Educators behaviour and the way they manage their classroom can increase academic engagement and success.

Inclusive Mainstreaming Practices

- Educators provide children who have exceptionalities with modified instructions according to their individual learning styles and programming (Daley & Birchwood, 2010).
- ATDs are used to support children who have special needs. It allows them to adapt, be independent and it increases their confidence (Tamakole & Agbenyega, 2017).

Professional Development

- Quality of support for children with exceptionalities has a direct relationship with the quality of their educators.
- Classroom management requires training opportunities and guidance based on the individual needs of children who have exceptionalities (Nye, et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze the concepts surrounding educators supporting children who have exceptionalities in their classrooms. The research question addressed in this study is how are ECEs supporting children in their classrooms who have exceptionalities? Furthermore, what inclusive/mainstreaming practices are ECEs implementing to support children in their classroom with exceptionalities?

Methodology

Research Design

The selected methodology for this research study is a qualitative approach.

Instrument

Individual semistructured interviews consisted of a set of 10 open-ended questions. Each interview was about 30 to 40 minutes. Interviews explored the perspectives and practices of educators supporting children in their classroom who have exceptionalities.

Procedure

- Sheridan's REB approval to complete the research and select participants was obtained.
- Participants were selected to complete interviews
- Participants were provided with a letter of invitation and informed consent.
- Participants who provided consent were contacted via phone call to schedule time and location for the interview.
- Meetings were conducted at Sheridan college in the private study rooms.
- Scheduling, arranging and completing each interview took approximately a week and a half to complete.
- It took a week to transcribe and analyze data.
- Trustworthiness was taken into consideration. The studies credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were reviewed.
- Participants were contacted and completed "member check"
- Data triangulation and researcher triangulation was completed.

Participants

- Five female RECEs (one participant was also a behavioural teaching assistant).
- Participants had prior and current experiences working with children who have exceptionalities.
- Participants Included Sheridan College students who work in various child care settings. From early childhood education centres to local school boards and community organizations.



Results and Discussion

Results:

Figure 1.

Have you done any professional development classes/workshops regarding children with special needs?

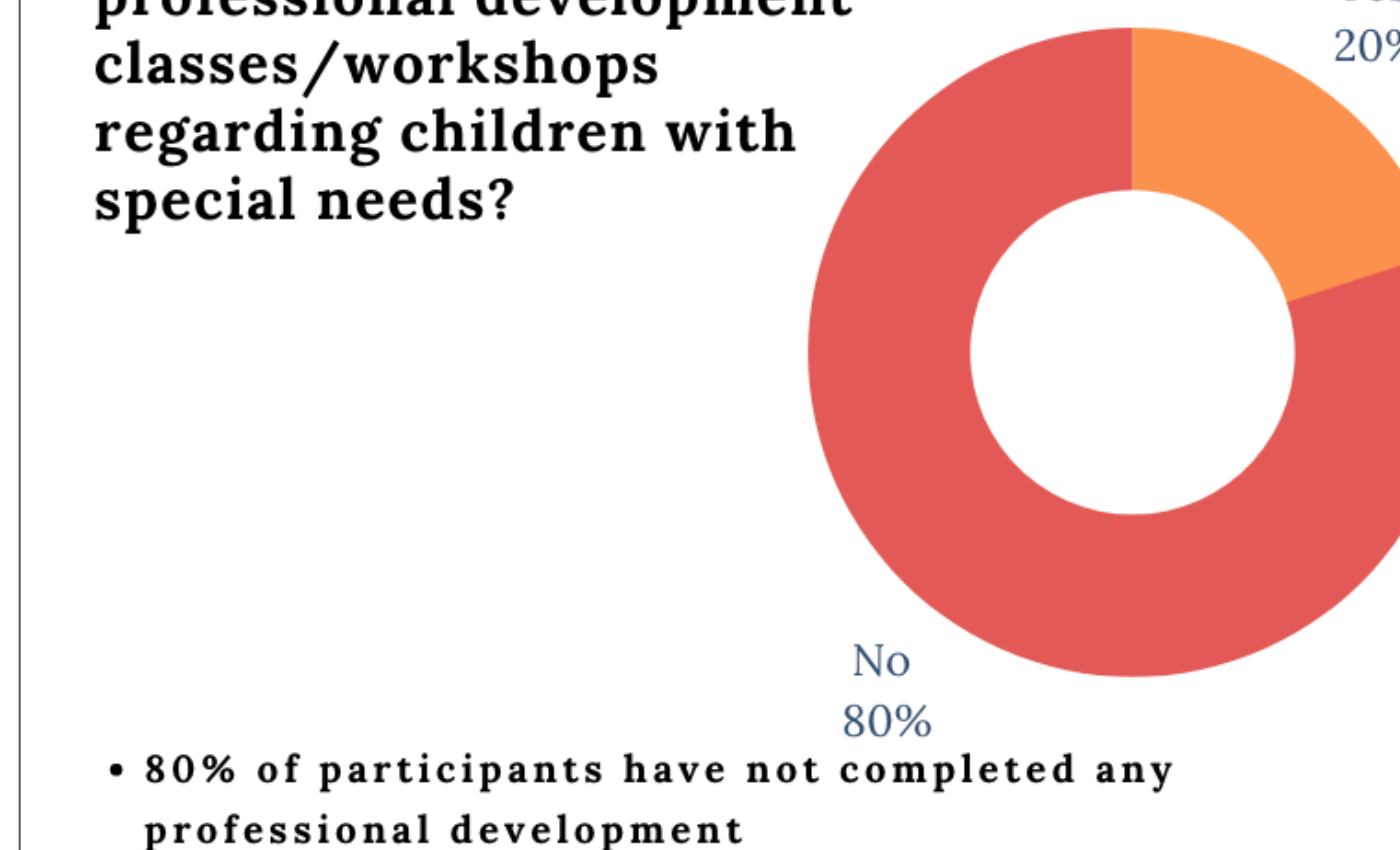


Figure 6.

How confident are you when working with children with exceptionalities?



Figure 3.

Sandra's unique perspective on inclusion (perspective from a RECE/BTA)

Sandra: "My whole perspective on inclusion is, it doesn't mean it's fair. [pause] We use the word inclusion, but it does not mean that we all belong in the same space. It means you respect my need; I respect yours. Just respect that I am different."

Discussion:

Professional Development

As seen in figure 1, Have you done any professional development classes/workshops regarding children with special needs? 80% of participants have not partaken in any form of professional development workshops or training with regards to children with special needs. 20% said they have participated in professional development programming due to the mandate of their current position. "Teacher training and teacher quality are an important part of the education system, therefore there is a need for new training programs for teachers to gain new knowledge and skills and to support their professional development" (Akalin & Sucuoglu, 2015, p. 739).

Supporting Inclusion

From figure 3, Sandra's unique perspective on inclusion (perspective from an RECE/BTA). Sandra brought a new perspective on the term inclusive. She shares a scenario of a child who has autism and is sensitive to touch and sound. If they were in a busy kindergarten classroom with 30 children, the environment would not be inclusive for them considering the noise level in the room. Children with exceptionalities have integrated into an inclusive education system, rather than having to attend specific institutions to accommodate their needs (Kraska & Boyle, 2014). Can children of that specific scenario reach their full potential in a classroom?

Challenges ECEs Face

100% of participants in this study have experienced challenges supporting children who have exceptionalities in their classrooms. Educators experience children's failure to form relationships with adults and/or their peers, their trouble engaging in learning activities and their struggles to regulate emotions (Gebbie, et al., 2012). Educators have a hard time focusing on the needs of one child while providing the rest of the class with the necessary attention. Participants mention the lack of resources to accommodate children who have special needs due to current cutbacks and lack of professional development. Figure 6, how confident are you when working with children with exceptionalities? 0% said they are confident, while 40% said it depends on the situation. With the challenges the participants face, they are unable to support a child adequately and provide and implement the required inclusive practices.



Recommendation & Implications

- Sandra's perspective on inclusive education can be used to further research on the topic of inclusion.
- Share study with The Ministry of Education "policy makers", School administration, trustees and parents.
 - Further study on mainstreaming practices within the public education system.