

Inclusivity among Special Education Learners: The Pros and Cons

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ABSTRACT

This research emphasizes that understanding the pros and cons of including special education learners in general education classrooms is an important factor today. The role and competencies of teachers are also highlighted, as well as their effective use of inclusivity in the formation of equity in education.

KEYWORDS: *inclusion, inclusivity, special education, competence, teacher, education*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the birth of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001, people, especially professionals inclined in the field of special education, have been debating on the effects of this law to students with disabilities. People clamored because of misinformation on the NCLB requirements for such students. In connection to this, the National Association of Protection and Advocacy (NAPAS) has clarified the issues and concerns to establish concrete rules governing this law.

Turnbull states that inclusion is about placing learning-impaired or disabled students in general education classrooms so that they will have learning experiences equal to those in general education classes.^[1] The author also emphasizes the four main components of inclusion: 1) placement is based on the concept of natural proportions; 2) placements are grade and age-appropriate; 3) all students receive their education in their home school; and 4) there is learning-teaching restructuring so that supports are created for special education in the general education setting. However, it is important to note that there is a difference between inclusion and full inclusion. In inclusion, SPED students spend two-thirds of their day in general education classrooms. In full inclusion,

on the other hand, SPED students spend all their time in general education classrooms. In inclusive classrooms, the skills of the students are also given emphasis other than their academic competence.

The establishment of NCLB is based on its goal of ensuring that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. However, there remains a recurring problem in mainstreaming, Students with disabilities who are merged with regular students must take the same assessments. According to critics, this is unfair and unrealistic to students with special education needs. Most of the students with disabilities are not that academically competent. Because of this, there is a higher chance that they will develop a lower self-esteem, which will make them think of dropping out of school or not continuing their studies at all.

However, this was negated in a study conducted by Smith when he found out that majority of disabled students in his class were able to keep up with the regular students in their grade level.^[2] Standardized assessments were given to all of them, and they were not lagging behind.^[2] In this study, it was also found out that students with disabilities vary in terms of

help and monitoring needed. While some of them need special accommodations to perform tasks successfully, some of them need minimal supervision only. This was supported by a study conducted by the US Department of Education when the findings showed that a high percentage of students with disabilities are intellectually and cognitively competent.^[3]

It is in this light that this study is conducted. This research will attempt to find out the pros and cons of inclusion of the Grade 10 special education students of Jefferson High School among regular students.

Theoretical Background

Inclusion has been a growing issue in education today. This issue affects administrators, parents, teachers, and most significantly, students. Because of the myriad inclusivity programs around the world, many schools have also integrated the curriculum of special education students to those of regular students. Both viewpoints present both positives and negatives.

Inclusion in SPED schools in USA has aroused the interest of educators and educational policymakers in the present time, as well as the programs and projects developed to maximize the skills and talents of SPED students. These programs are being pushed through to introduce avant-garde directions, to develop modern pedagogical strategies and methods, to create new periods of content, to discover students' specialties and knacks, and to expand tools and resources used in teaching in inclusive classes.

Analysis of local literature on the issue of inclusion showed that since the 1970s, federal law in USA has required public elementary and secondary schools to provide special education services to students with disabilities. Commonly, teachers or parents are the first ones to identify if a student might acquire benefits from special education services. In USA, students are referred to school district specialists who assess whether the student has a disability that hinders his or her ability to learn. If the student is identified to have one or more disabilities, the student will receive an individualized education program (IEP) that outlines the additional services schools will provide.

Literature Review

Over the past two decades, the number of students with disabilities who experience difficulties in education has notable increased. Since 2007, there has also been an increase in the expenditures or budget allotted for special education in California. However, this spending does not equate to the outcomes of students with disabilities.^[4] Despite the initiatives of the government to secure fundings for

this sector, the problem of inclusion remains. In year 2022, pros and cons of inclusion of SPED students among regular students were reported and found out in research.

In the same paper, it was found out that when inclusion is employed appropriately in classrooms, it promotes academic achievement and social development for both students with disability and regular students.^[4] It was also stated that inclusive environments should be created if it is in the best interest of the students. Students should be the focus when making this important decision. Parents have a strong voice in this matter and must consider what is best for their children, even if it may not coincide with their own feelings. Other factors are also crucial to the success of students with special needs which include attitudes, teacher support, and willingness to collaborate.

Mainstreaming in special education has pros and cons. In 2004, the US Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), where a "least restrictive environment" was encouraged in schools, which means that there must be full inclusion of SPED students and regular students. A study conducted by Grieco showed that when SPED students are placed in traditional classes with regular students, their academic success improves.^[5] A study published by the *International Journal of Special Education* found out that autistic students perform better in inclusive classrooms than in SPED classrooms. It was also concluded by the authors of this study that students with autism must be provided with more challenging activities to encourage higher academic learning than basing their intelligence only in their developing functional skills.

In an article published by Grieco, she mentioned that some parents and teachers do not exactly know how mainstreaming works in instruction.^[5] Based on her study, some perceive that inclusion happens when SPED learners are merely included into general education classes without tools or materials that support their learning. Some even think that the only role of teachers is to clean up the mess after the class period. The author mentioned that this is a poor perception of inclusion, although some schools have poor inclusion strategies.

Defina believes that inclusion works best when teachers work together, get the necessary resources they need, and believe that every student is worthy of attention and recognition.^[6] The researcher also found out in her study that SPED schools in California must reevaluate their system and address all problems, especially in terms of training and staffing so that all students will get the kind of education they deserve.

In a study conducted by Hyunjeong, teachers in the United States and South Korea were interviewed on their stand and feeling about inclusion in their classrooms.^[7] “Inclusion classrooms” can be defined in several ways. Particularly, in this study, it means “a policy where students with disabilities are supported in general education classes in their neighborhood schools and receive specialized instruction in a separate classroom”.

In USA and South Korea, inclusion is already a primary part of their education system. In these countries, it is in the law that students with disabilities must be included in general education classrooms. These countries have specific laws in promoting a diverse learning environment for all learners with multiple disabilities.^[7] While this system has been implemented in both countries, they still continuously identify the best methods in supporting learners with disabilities, and that it is equally important that laws must also be promulgated in other countries and cultures. Teachers must be heard, and studies must be undertaken to determine what teachers really feel in integrating special education in general classes.^[7]

The study was conducted because of three reasons. First, the study sought to evaluate and consider the perceptions of teachers about inclusive education in USA and South Korea. Second, it assessed the teachers’ ability to utilize strategies in inclusive classrooms. Finally, the study identified the practices that are effective in inclusive classrooms and understood the barriers regarding the matter.

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that both USA and South Korea hold inclusive education with high regard, and it is considered an important part of today’s education system. However, there is still a need to heighten the competence of teachers in handling such classes. It was also found out that collaboration and sharing of research linked with effective practices is significant.

In another study conducted by Connolly, teachers were observed on how they changed their classroom structure to better accommodate learners with special needs.^[8] Differentiation was the key emphasis of the study where one middle school mathematics teacher and one inclusion teacher were evaluated. The results present that the students improved in their performance, but they must be in separate classrooms. Small class sizes helped the teachers differentiate their instruction effectively. Therefore, it was found out that differentiation promotes increased learning, but inclusion is still a challenge.

Similarly, Mackey explored how middle school teachers used inclusive strategies in their daily

classes.^[9] This assessed three different seasoned middle school teachers to find out how they include learners in general education classrooms. The first participant is a sixth grade science teacher, the second is a seventh grade social science teacher, and the third is an eighth grade math teacher. All the participants manifested positive practices in integrating inclusion in their general education classes.

Based on the analysis in understanding the pros and cons of integrating special education learners in general education classrooms, it can be noted that it is multi-aspect and it is necessary to continue its research. The mechanism of development of programs and laws governing inclusion ensures the high educational, scientific research, and timely updating of professional training among SPED teachers.

Data Analysis

Observations and interviews were used to achieve the objectives of the study. For a whole quarter, 10 teachers in Jefferson High School were observed based on how they include special education in general education classes. There was an emphasis in the strategies they used. During the post conference, the participants of the study were interviewed on the pros and cons if such.

Conclusions

The results of the study show that establishing a similar classroom structure every day encouraged learning among learners with special needs. This strategy gave them a sense of predictability. One of the participants of the study posted the schedule of activities on the board each day, and the learners were conditioned to follow it throughout the week. This was considered as a scaffold for them to actively participate because they know what to expect and anticipate.

Another important finding in the study is that the teachers’ ability to work one-on-one with learners is outstanding. However, the class size must be manageable to make this strategy effective. While it is taxing for the teachers to craft individual plans based on the needs of their learners, they still did everything to gear them up for success. They spent a rigorous time in analyzing what each individual learner needed so that they could cater to these learners.

Moreover, it was also found out that collaboration among teachers is important in achieving the goals of inclusion. When they share ideas and strategies in meeting the specific needs of learners, they come up with more effective methods.

The following are the identified pros and cons of including special education learners in general education classes. The advantages are: (1) Friendships are formed among different kinds of learners; (2) Students in the inclusion classrooms meet their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals better; (3) High expectations are established because learners are challenged with new, innovative opportunities; (4) Such practice promotes teaching staff collaboration; and (5) Parents are more encouraged to participate in their children's learning. The disadvantages, on the other hand, are: (1) There is insufficient funds in buying resources for inclusive classrooms; (2) Other SPED students' learning is disrupted because they learn in ways similar to those in regular classes; (3) Some disabilities require special classroom configuration, which is not possible in inclusive classrooms; (4) The process of integrating SPED in regular classes requires a long period of time for it to show effectiveness; and (5) There may be cases of bullying if SPED students will be mixed with regular students.

At present, countries are working on their specialized laws for learners with disabilities to address the issues on equality and equity. This research will provide possible solutions to problems at hand related to the matter.

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