

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This legislation, passed in 2004, guarantees that special needs students (students with disabilities) receive a Free, Appropriate, Public Education (FAPE) tailored to respond to their specific needs through accommodations and modifications during an Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting involving stakeholders, and prescribed by the IEP document.

Individual Education Plan (IEP). A plan developed to comply with IDEA, designed to fit educational requirements of special needs students, including accommodations and modifications to mainstream classroom instruction. IEPs may mandate more restrictive environments, such as self-contained classrooms, pullout classes, more time for work, assistance including reading of instructions or content, and many other methods to help the students succeed.

Innovative Reading Programs and Interventions. Any example of many programs in existence designed to assist students in learning to read more effectively, beyond normal classroom instruction, including the following: (Programs) - Reading Recovery, Literacy Collaborative, The Kennewick Reading Program, the Elgin Reading Initiative; (Interventions) - Reading Mastery, Fountus and Pinnell Level Literacy Intervention System, Wilson Reading System, Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies. The type of program that was developed, implemented and analyzed in this study (for special needs students).

Intervention. An action or program taken or implemented to improve a condition or situation, which can be applied in many contexts, including emergency or long-term remedies.

No Child Left Behind. Passed in 2001, this legislation reiterates the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to support federal spending for elementary and

secondary schooling. It imposed reading requirements and testing deadlines as a result of concern over literacy in the United States.

Pillars of Reading Instruction. Five essential components of reading instruction. They include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Qualitative Research. This is a research methodology based on objective criteria that are often quantifiable numerically or statistically. Although considered less biased in general than quantitative research, there is expectation of results when a hypothesis is presented and data is collected to prove or disprove it. Qualitative research utilizes certain techniques and tools, such as questionnaires, interviews, and surveys (one of the major methods used in this study).

Self-Contained Classroom. A classroom in which children are taught all subjects by Special Education teachers and paraeducators. It is considered a highly restrictive environment, as opposed to a mainstream classroom where students of all needs and skill groups learn together.

Sociocognitive. A learning theory based on use of intellectual ordering through observation and modeling the actions and processes of others. This theory is considered less proactive on the part of the instructor and involves almost passive absorption or educational osmosis on the part of the student, but requires cognitive engagement.

Special Needs. The requirements necessary to educate students who exhibit any of a large variety of challenges, including physical disabilities such as deafness, blindness, loss of limbs or use thereof, medical issues, intellectual or emotional difficulties, dyslexia, delayed learning or other developmental issues, diagnosed conditions such as schizophrenia,

bipolar disorder, borderline personality, mood swings, autism spectrum disorders including Asperger's syndrome, RETT syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder and/or behavior problems, including Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Oppositional Defiance Disorder. Special needs students may often be referred to as at-risk or struggling readers.

Stakeholders. The term 'stakeholder' refers to persons with a direct interest in or who may be impacted by the study. For this study, the most obvious stakeholders are special needs students. In addition, educators who serve such populations, as well as their therapists, support groups, friends and families, also qualify as stakeholders.

Transactional. A learning theory that involves an interaction or exchange between the instructor and the student.

Assumptions

Several assumptions contributed to the foundation of this descriptive qualitative study.

The first assumption was that participants would be willing to respond to the survey questions honestly. Participants were aware that they had the option to decline or participate voluntarily in this study, and consented to take part.

The second assumption was that the study sample of 10-12 special needs children, drawn from a self-contained classroom in a District of Columbia school of 425 students, would be representative of the general population of special needs students, so that this intervention may be successfully replicated or used in order to develop intervention tools elsewhere.

The third assumption was that participants in the study engaged in sufficient or adequate contact with the

students such that they had the ability to recall information and describe their experience in adequate detail.

Delimitations

The delimitations, or the inherently built-in components of the study that affect and have an impact on its application, include the following:

First, the participants included persons associated with only 10-12 special needs students, which means that the viewpoints of the participants were the only information used to represent those of any teachers, parents or students, as well as others who deal with such children in similar circumstances;

Second, to facilitate the best representation possible, the researcher was able to ask participants follow-up questions to the surveys, to allow participants to clarify their answers and provide complete information from that available.

Limitations

What are the limitations of the study? First, the implementation of the study's findings and its transferability were limited to special needs students that have similar characteristics to the ones examined in this study. Second, the participants did not know the researcher prior to this study, which can lead to incomplete information-gathering due to lack of familiarity. The researcher was careful to have principals arrange individual meetings with each participant in order to discuss the purpose and nature of the study before conducting the surveys. Also, the researcher was able to ask follow-up questions so as to give participants an opportunity to elaborate on and engage in further discussions. Participants were urged to provide as much information as possible in their responses. Since the choice of samples in qualitative studies is usually purposeful (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006), knowing the

participants might have made the study's findings more reliable than those from a qualitative study that uses random sampling. Third, the researcher had access to previous grades and to test results for pre- and postintervention comparisons.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remainder of the study followed typical dissertation format. Chapter 2 contains the literature review: introduction, theoretical framework, review of research literature and methodological literature, research regarding interventions for special needs children in reading, a review of methodological issues, synthesis of research findings, critique of previous research, and summary. Chapter 3 is methodology, including the purpose of the study, research questions and hypothesis, research design (target population, sampling method and size, setting, and recruitment), instrumentation, data collection, field test, pilot test, operation of variables, data analysis, limitations of research design, internal and external validity, expected findings, ethical issues and summary. Included in Chapter 4 are the data analysis and results: introduction, description of the sample, summary of the results, detailed analysis, and summary. Finally, Chapter 5 reveals conclusions and discussion: introduction, summary of results, discussion of results, discussion of results in relation to the literature, limitations, implications of the results for practice, recommendations for further research and conclusions.