

Chapter 5

Educational Support at School for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual, and Developmental Disabilities: The Relationship between Teachers' Priorities, Students' Achievements, and Educational Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This study ($N = 1,072$) is presented with the objectives of (a) exploring dimensions of educational implementation that can be used to support students with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual and developmental disabilities; (b) investigating Special Education Teachers' (SETs) support priorities and their effectiveness; and (c) identifying the relationship between teachers' priorities and students' achievements. The investigation was conducted at 5 private and 33 public special education schools in 2013 and 2014. Factor analysis, correlation, and regression were used for the data analysis. The findings revealed four dimensions of the curriculum for the students using SETs' priorities—Daily Living/Coping Skills, Community/Home Skills, Emotional/Behavioral Difficulties, and Self-Care Skills. The teachers' priorities were in alignment with the emphases placed in their school educational programs. The teachers' top priorities were not aligned with those of the students. Finally, it was revealed that when the teachers held higher priorities, students' learning outcome improved.

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of limitations and deficits, students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), intellectual disability (ID) and developmental disabilities (DDs) need “support service, supervision, or extensive educational services” (Hunt & Marshall, 2006, p. 171) consistent with the severity of their disabilities. In keeping with current educational trends in the United States, a growing number of students with ASD, ID and DDs are expected to access the general curriculum in inclusive classes (Bouck, 2004). However, this is often done without a thorough analysis of what they should learn and be trained to do (Sykes & Plastrik, 1993; Wehmeyer, Lattin, & Agran, 2001), let alone what they are capable of learning and what they are already able to do.

To date, there is limited research on teachers’ priorities in terms of educational programs for students with ASD, ID and DDs. Despite the existence of studies focusing on a single area in life skills curricula or educational programs, there remains a need to collectively examine comprehensive curriculum planning implementing research-based practices and instructional factors (Idol, 2006; Polloway, Patton, Epstein, & Smith, 1989; Polloway, Patton, Smith, & Rodrique, 1991).

Purpose of the Research

Toward the goal of expanding this research base, we present the findings of a quantitative investigation with three aims. First, we explored dimensions of educational implementation offering support to students with ASD, ID, and DDs. Second, we investigated special education teachers’ (SETs) priorities as support for these students and their effect. Third, we identified the relationship between teachers’ priorities and students’ achievements. To pursue these aims, the following three research questions were developed:

1. What are the dimensions of educational implementation offering support to students with ASD, ID, and DDs?
2. What are teachers’ priorities and what is their impact on students’ achievements?
3. What are the relationships between teachers’ priorities and students’ achievements?

BACKGROUND

Students with ASD, ID, and DDs face numerous challenges in their personal lives as well as in the classroom. Autism spectrum disorder refers to neurodevelopmental disabilities with onset in early infancy. Children with ASD are confronted with developmental challenges related to the lack of reciprocal interactions, poor nonverbal and verbal communication skills, restricted interests, and stereotypical behaviors (Mitchell et al., 2006). Intellectual disability refers to significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior (Hunt & Marshall, 2006), including conceptual, social, and practical skills (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities [AAIDD], 2013). Children with an ID face limitations in memory (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2006), generalization (Westling & Floyd, 1990), motivation (Switzky, 2006; Switzky & Schultz, 1988), literacy (Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Spooner, Mims, & Baker, 2009), friendships (Heiman, 2000), and employment (Park & Gaylord-Ross, 1989). What’s more, those with ASD, ID and DDs have been known to demonstrate challenging behavior (Lalli, Browder, Mace, & Brown, 1993) as well as show signs of depression (Margalit & Ronen, 1993).

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