

**THE PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE AIDES REGARDING
THE ROLES THEY FULFILL WHILE WORKING IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS IN
DISTRICT X**

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Abstract

Special Education Resource Aides (SERAs) play an important part in the successful inclusion of students with special needs in regular primary school settings. However, in Trinidad and Tobago, the SERA's role is not fully understood. In an effort to better understand the role of the SERA and bridge the gap in local research on the topic, this paper presents the perceptions of SERAs regarding the roles they fulfill in the inclusive setting. Making use of the qualitative approach, purposive sampling was used to select four aides with one year or more experience. They were interviewed to find out how they perceived their roles while working in inclusive settings in District X. Five main themes emerged that included: (1) a range of roles; (2) the need for partnership between the SERA and school; (3) the reality of inappropriate inclusive environments; (4) SERAs being treated as outsider Student Support Services Division staff members and (5) concerns regarding compensation. A discussion of the findings and recommendations linked to each were offered.

Keywords: roles, inclusion, inclusive setting, SERA, aide, paraprofessional, support services, special education

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

An evaluation of the history of education throughout the world points to the fact that support services through general education have morphed since their early beginnings. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, people perceived as having a disability- regardless of the form or extent - were categorized as idiots, looked down on as being inferior and deprived of civil liberties and human rights of schooling through general education (Winzer, 2007). Regular primary school classes were viewed as having rigorous curriculum standards which students considered disabled could never meet. Besides, since there was only one class teacher to deal with everyone, such an environment was deemed unsuitable as no attention could be given to special needs (Crossley, 2000).

By the close of the eighteenth century there was an expectation and acceptance that children with disabilities would go to a special school where they would obtain special instruction in a small group setting. From about 1910 to 1930, a huge spurt took place in the enrollment in special education classes worldwide. Later on, the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) in the United States of America, now renewed as the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was the genesis of widespread public school reform that began to force the integration of special education and general education programs worldwide (Harris, 2012).

The mandate from IDEA that there must be free, appropriate public education for every child meant that children with disabilities in the general education classes needed support so that regular teachers could be able to manage students and for extra attention to be given to students with special needs (Taylor, 2008). This gave rise to a shift away from old ideas to new attitudes

and concepts about how students with special needs ought to be integrated into regular primary schools and that they should be accommodated through the use of a Special Education Resource Aide (SERA, also called paraprofessional or teacher assistant) who supports the student that might require further help to accomplish specific educational objectives (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997; French & Pickett, 1997; Doyle, 1997). This strategy has taken root in many countries and many more are working toward this goal.

In a study conducted by Wolery, Werts, Caldwell, Snyder and Lisowski (1995), general education teachers indicated as vital to the inclusion of children special needs, the use of extra classroom support such as a SERA- a noncertified adult who assists students under the direction and guidance of trained educators in the educational setting. The current number of paraprofessionals working in regular primary schools today has increased significantly with more than 600,000 paraprofessionals working throughout the United States alone (Hampden-Thompson, Diehl, & Kinukawa, 2007). This is all part of the concept of inclusion.

Further defined, inclusion is the process by which we value all individuals, regardless of special needs, and allow them to receive all of their instruction in the regular primary school classroom with their grade-level peers (Taylor, 2008). Fundamental to excellent inclusive practice are the rights of the child. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), delineates the basic human rights to which children up to the age of eighteen the world over are entitled: the right to the development of their full physical and mental potential; the right to survival; the right to participation in family, cultural and social life; and the right to protection from influences that are harmful to their development. This Convention safeguards these rights by benchmarking minimum standards that governments ought to meet in providing legal and social services, health care and education to children in their countries. To

guarantee inclusive practice, countries are required to develop their philosophy, plans and practices to embrace all students with the intent of meeting their individual needs. The use of the SERA is a growing trend for meeting the standard of the UNCRC intended for the education of students with special needs in inclusive settings. Still, as Giangreco, Edleman and Broer (2001) suggest, the use of the SERA is one of the least studied areas of research (Kearney, 2009). Questions surrounding their roles have often come into view and need to be addressed.

Global Context

Internationally, SERAs are seen as “irreplaceable because of the high quality educational support that they offer and, compared to certified staff, at a comparatively low cost. In the state of Utah alone in the United States of America, an estimated 7,500 to 8,000 aides serve students in public schools” (Forbush & Morgan, 2002). Nationwide statistics estimated that in excess of 500,000 aides are employed in regular schools all over America and approximately half of them work with kids with varying disabilities, often spending the entire day with one child who is registered in a general education setting (Giangreco et al., 1997).

The support of an aide is sanctioned in England to allow schools to manage the concerns of educating special needs students. The National Council for Special Education reported that “Special Needs Assistants play a key role in assisting schools to support students with major care needs and have to a large extent assisted the practice of including students with special educational needs in schools” (NCSE, 2013). Using a semi-structured interview process, a study in England was done by Marks et al. (1999), which investigated the experiences of 20 paraprofessionals who worked with students in inclusive settings. This study revealed that paraprofessionals viewed their roles as having to bear the "primary burden of success" in support of the children they worked with.

In New Zealand, Kearney (2009) reported that teachers viewed aides as the least powerful and qualified staff yet they assigned important tasks to them that extend beyond the support-only role. Powell (2012) noted that the priority for the government as purported by the Education Review Office (ERO) in this country was to increase help for learners with special needs from within the school setting by increasing the number of aides available.

As reported in Bourke (2008), investigators from the United States of America, Canada and Europe all cautioned that fairness concerns for aides, such as adequate compensation and disrespect by general education teachers, need attention so that maximum benefits can be experienced from the use of aides. In every part of the world studied, paraprofessionals all sensed that “they were responsible for the inclusion of students but that they were not valued for what they do” (Patterson, 2006).

Regional Context

While widely recognized in the international arena, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) has proven to be a significant catalyst to inclusive education practice even here in the Caribbean. This statement recognizes the need for and commitment to providing education for all learners within the regular education system and there has been much talk about this in Caribbean schools. Provisions for the disabled at several levels have been enhanced and evidence of some reform has been demonstrated in policy, legislation, and institutions across the region. One such example is the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Charter of Civil Society—the governing paper agreed to by the 15 affiliate countries and dependencies—to deal with the matter of disability.

According to a report compiled by Barrow and Ince for the Bernard van Leer Corporation (2008), “countries across the Caribbean welcomed the notion of inclusive education”. Even though data on inclusion is scarce, there is some evidence to suggest that aides are used as support staff members who work in schools to help students with disabilities, especially physical impairments. In Jamaica, the placement of aides (termed Special Education Resource Teachers) in schools enables the diagnostic prescriptive approach to teaching and learning (Evering, 2007). Also in the Bahamas, teachers suggested that inclusive education was more practical with the provision of aides (Hunter-Johnson & Newton, 2014).

Local Context

In Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), as professed in the Ministry of Education’s Green Paper on the Standards for the Operation of all Schools (2005), “Education must be delivered in an inclusive and collaborative atmosphere”. This is the standard which our nation must attain and support services for students with special needs in inclusive settings have already been put in place. It is stated in the National Report on the Development of Education: Inclusive Education Overview that, “The Ministry is now in the second phase of its three-phase project for full establishment of student support services, with full implementation expected by the year 2015, having commenced in 2005”. During the initial phase, support systems were strengthened through the” provision of on-site School Social Workers, Special Education Teachers, Guidance Officers, Special Education Resource Aides, and Hearing Interpreters, in selected primary schools” (Ministry of Education, 2008).

In T&T, the post of Special Education Resource Aide (SERA) is an established position in the Ministry of Education (MOE) for which persons are hired on a contract basis. There is a vast shortage in the number of SERAs hired as compared to the need for them in inclusive

settings and in 2013 the MOE recognized the need to take action on this issue. While this research was being conducted, the researcher came to know that interviews were being held by the MOE to hire additional staff on contract, inclusive of SERAs, within the Student Support Services Division (SSSD). In an advertisement published on the MOE's website in 2013, the job summary stated that the SERA is responsible for "assisting teachers in providing support for students with special educational needs which are the result of moderate, severe and profound handicapping conditions". The key duties and responsibilities of the SERA were identified as delivering prepared instruction, assisting students with assistive learning devices (Braille machines, computerized programmes, etc), supporting physically challenged students and performing related work as required (SSSD, 2013).

In recent years, most SERAs have been employed through the On-The-Job Training (OJT) Programme. In District X, more than 95% of the SERAs are OJTs. They begin their responsibilities in inclusive settings providing support to children with special physical, emotional and cognitive disabilities with limited training and are often unprepared for the many tasks that they are asked to fulfill. In addition, when they are recruited, they are given a job description which only lists a limited number of tasks and teachers in the primary schools are not even aware of them. From the researcher's personal experience, in most cases the SERA takes primary responsibility for the care and education of the student with special needs throughout the entire school day. Many SERAs also complain about the scant courtesy they receive from general education teachers and principals. Too often, staff members in the inclusive setting make SERAs feel that their roles are insignificant.

Special Education District Context

This research was conducted within the Special Education Unit of District X of the SSSD. SERAs first came on board in this district in March 2008. They currently work in inclusive settings at various schools throughout the area wherever their services are required. SERAs are positioned to assist students who meet the criteria of requiring an aide in primary school due to challenges such as physical impairments, learning disabilities or social/emotional challenges. While they work in the regular primary school and are guided by the principal and general education teacher, they remain accountable to the SSSD and report to the Special Education Teacher II (SET II) at the District Office.

In District X, there are currently 26 aides employed – 6 of them on Ministry of Education contracts and 20 through the On-the-Job Training (OJT) Programme. All are female and range between the ages of 24 to 40 years old. During monthly meetings of SERAs at the District Office, concerns are often vented that quite a lot of work is required of them on a daily basis while they work with their assigned student(s) in the primary school. The aides complain about fulfilling more demanding roles than their job description states and that they are given recognition for. Over the years, this has led many SERAs to leave the job, while others feel overburdened and de-motivated at work.

Statement of the Problem

While their use is widespread and essential, SERAs complain that teachers do not fully understand the role of aides in the classroom. Hence teachers do not value them and do not show them the respect they deserve. Consequently, SERAs feel de-motivated and some even leave the job. There exists a gap in research regarding the exact role of SERAs in the local system. As Pickett (1999) and Akerman (2008) suggested in relation to the need for research in this field, if

principals and teachers are given clarification regarding the SERA's role, this will contribute to SERAs feeling valued and motivated to do their jobs well. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to gain an understanding of the roles that SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting in District X. The roles were defined as the duties and responsibilities placed upon the SERA. Furthermore, it sought to find out the concerns they had about working in inclusive classrooms.

Justification for Doing the Study

Having been previously employed as a SERA at the district under study, the researcher understood the plight of SERAs regarding their duties and responsibilities that often vary from what is officially documented and recognized. As such, it was of personal interest to find out how those who work in the same district as the researcher did, perceive the roles they fulfill. Bracketing was done to ensure participants' perceptions were highlighted.

Research Questions

Main Question

How do Special Education Resource Aides perceive their roles while working in inclusive settings in Educational District X?

Sub-questions

1. What duties and responsibilities do SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting?
2. What concerns do SERAs have regarding their roles?

Expected Outcomes / Significance of the Study

The findings of this study led the researcher, and may lead other general educators, to a better understanding and appreciation of the roles of SERAs. This study also adds to the dearth of regional and local research on the use of SERAs and will hopefully open doors to further study in the field. Other issues may also be highlighted such as improvements to compensation for SERAs, increased workforce strength, and mentorship and training opportunities. Identifying the perceptions of SERAs regarding the roles they fulfill in inclusive settings may also focus attention on strengthening this aspect of inclusive education which benefits students with special needs.

Operational Definition of Key Terms

Following are the definitions of some of the key words used in this study:

- ▶ **Perception** - the way in which something is understood or viewed (Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2007)
- ▶ **Roles**- duties (formal routine tasks carried out) and responsibilities (what one is expected to take care of) (Patterson, 2006)
- ▶ **Inclusive setting** – the general education classroom or regular primary school where students with disabilities are taught along with their non-disabled peers (Janney & Snell, 2000)
- ▶ **Disability** – also referred to as a special need; a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity (Ryndak & Alper, 2003)

The term Special Education Resource Aide (SERA) was used synonymously with the terms paraprofessional and aide in this study.

Research Outline

Following the Introduction in Chapter 1 which defined the topic in context, stated the research questions and the significance of the study, the remaining sections of the research paper are structured in sequential chapters.

Next in Chapter 2, a review of pertinent literature which relates to the field of study is presented. Chapter 3 points out the overall research technique for the study. This includes the research design used for the data collection, research sampling, data collection techniques, data analysis methods and limitations of the chosen method. In Chapter 4, the nature of the analysis procedure is described and the findings are presented in relation to the research questions. Finally in Chapter 5, the findings are discussed and recommendations linked to each finding are made which can provide a path for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study explored the perceptions of Special Education Resource Aides regarding the roles they fulfill in the inclusive setting in District X. As part of this effort, the review of literature focused on themes such as the nomenclatures for Special Education Resource Aide, perspectives on the aides' range of duties and responsibilities, the concerns of aides, the use of SERAs in inclusive settings in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as, the Job Characteristics Model Theory. By the end of this key section it is hoped that the reader will be better informed about these topics and that a clear focus and justification for this research will be seen.

Nomenclatures for Special Education Resource Aide (SERA)

Malian (2011) posited that the use of individuals to support the efforts of both teachers and students with disabilities in general education classrooms is a growing practice. However, as explained by CSLHA (1999), "depending upon their training level or the setting in which they function they may be identified by different titles". The variety of nomenclatures for these individuals include titles such as "paraprofessional, teacher assistant, aide" (Harris, 2012) and the designation of "special education resource aide (SERA)" (Williams, 2007). Pickett (1994) agreed that there was no universally accepted term and that they all refer to the same type of special education support personnel.

According to Riggs (2004), a paraprofessional referred to "an employee who works under the supervision of a teacher or another professional staff member who has the ultimate responsibility for the design, implementation and evaluation of educational programs and related

services”. Similarly, McVittie (2005) described the teacher assistant as “one who supports children with special needs in mainstream primary schools”. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2000) also defined an aide as a “non-professional person who assists in the administration of inclusive classes”. Likewise, Williams (2007) indicated that a SERA was “an individual who provides support in the classroom for students with special needs”. All these definitions for the many names given to the SERA are similar.

Hammeken (2009) summed up well the points of all the researchers examined in this review, contending that, regardless of title, special education support personnel served as an accommodation to meet the needs of students in the inclusive setting. According to Carter, Sisco, and Lane (2011), aides played an important support role in students’ academic and non-academic progress in the inclusive environment. Their importance was highlighted more by Giangreco et al. (2006) who stated that, “The use of paraprofessionals has emerged as the way, rather than a way, to operationalize inclusive education for students with disabilities”. Downing, Ryndak, and Clark (2000) declared that aides bear the responsibility for providing support to students with special needs in general education learning environments that may be unlike special education classrooms.

Even though referred to by different titles, the literature suggested both benefits and drawbacks for schools whose inclusionary efforts focused mainly on the use of SERAs. Among the gains postulated, was more support for the classroom teacher in accommodating all learners and greater achievement levels for special needs students (Giangreco, 2003). Added benefits were reported by Tillery, Werts, Roark, and Harris (2003) such as: help with supervising and monitoring students, having someone with whom to share ideas, and associating socially with a contact during the school day. On the contrary, Archibals (2008) noted power struggles between

the classroom teacher and aide regarding who is really in charge of the student, overwhelming the aide with too many responsibilities, and inadequacy of knowledge and skills, to be some difficulties resulting from the use aides.

Perspectives on Range of Duties and Responsibilities

Quite a few qualitative studies have affirmed the value of the perspective of the subjects and how they view their world (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Golding, 2009; Smith, 2000). While there were only a few studies found regarding aides' perceptions of the roles they fulfilled in inclusive settings, much of the research ascertained focused on general education and special education supervising teachers' understanding of the range of tasks that SERAs completed. From these studies, researchers have determined that paraprofessionals carry out several functions and responsibilities, some of which go unnoticed (Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

In a qualitative study conducted by Patterson (2006) which researched the perceptions of aides regarding the roles they fulfilled while working in a variety of settings with children with disabilities, the aides reported about their own roles which consisted of assisting a student or group of students, completing clerical tasks (copying, running errands, etc), modifying activities, and managing student behavior. This study used a semi-structured interview guide for twenty-two aides to establish their understanding of their roles, and the overall conclusion was that aides assumed heavy responsibility for facilitating the educational and behavioral needs of the students in their care. Malian (2011) found similar results after interviewing 202 paraprofessionals with varying degrees of experience and training. Results indicated that aides directed student behavior, delivered individual instruction to students and taught appropriate social skills; many times without appropriate guidance and supervision.

A mixed methods case study conducted by Lamont and Hill (1991) in surveying 35 pairs of paraprofessionals and their supervising teachers further suggested that there were five types of responsibilities of the paraprofessional: (1) instructional support, (2) diagnostic support, (3) classroom organization, (4) behavior management support, and (5) support provided by a personal care assistant. The study also found that tasks such substituting for the general education teacher when he/she was not present, independently developing learning activities, administering standardized assessments, developing learning centers, and performing routine maintenance tasks were not considered appropriate for paraprofessionals to perform, yet in their daily tasks they were required to do so.

Migyanka et al. (2005) alarmingly identified that general education teachers perceived that aides were there to scrutinize what they were doing in the classroom. It is for this reasons the researchers noted that teachers were uncomfortable having aides around. Other studies also pointed out that general education teachers often felt that aides were the experts in dealing with children with disability and left them totally in charge of the children's academic, behaviour and social needs (Nimante & Tubele 2010; Parasuram 2006). These views often had a considerable negative outcome on the general education teacher's feelings toward aides and the practice of inclusion (Allison, 2011).

When investigating the perspectives of students about the aides' roles, Giangreco and Doyle (2002) found in some cases that paraprofessionals were viewed as a shield between the student and others who mistreated them. What was even more significant was that students expressed that they felt as though schools would allocate educational responsibility for their most 'challenging students' to paraprofessionals more willingly than certified teacher level staff members (Brown et al., 1999; Giangreco et al., 2001). Additionally, Giangreco and Broer (2005)

reported that students perceived “when they were in general education classes, most often, it was the aide, rather than the classroom teacher who worked with them and served as their main teacher”.

Concerns of Aides

Similar to what was shared in the Statement of the Problem for this study, the literature also pointed out that the pressure to provide special services and increased attention to individual needs sometimes resulted in paraprofessionals being asked to overextend their responsibilities (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2012). This causes room for concern. Alexander & Alexander (2001) asserted that laws were seen as important to protect paraprofessionals from being forced to fulfill roles for which they are not trained or that extends outside the scope of their job.

The literature recommended that principals and teachers be given clarification regarding the duties and responsibilities of aides (Pickett, 1999; Akerman, 2008; Chase & Mueller, 1993). Particularly for those educators in the inclusive setting, they were viewed as being unclear of exactly what was the SERA’s role and assumed that it was alright for aides to be given a broad array of tasks for taking care of the educational and behavioral requirements of special education children (Trautman, 2004).

Bourke (2008), in a case study of paraprofessionals, noted that they contended that since the introduction of the job, their duties and responsibilities have increased drastically, yet their training has not always kept pace. Mueller (2002) emphasized the limited availability of training by showing that on-the-job training served as the most common method of training utilized with

paraprofessionals. This was viewed as a concern by Magolda (2004) who said that “lack of training opportunities was the most common distress for aides themselves”.

In studies that focused on paraprofessionals’ roles, the number of reasons for them leaving the job included low pay, limited or nonexistent benefits, life events (i.e. retirement, entering college, etc.), transferring to another job, expectations and pressures of the job, and lack of collaboration between team members. Specifically addressing the issue of retention and turnover, Nemerowicz (2009) reported that inadequate pay was a serious contributor to paraprofessionals leaving the job. Further addressing this sensitive issue of compensation, Strauss (2014) pointed out that it varies depending on the demands of the job. What was significant to note was that aides who remained in their job and were satisfied, reported feeling they were an important part of the team, supported and respected by their colleagues and fairly compensated (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007).

Overall, concerns of SERAs found in the literature indicated a need for a more defined role in their current job description, professional development, better compensation, and collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals (Patterson, 2006).

The Use of SERAs in Inclusive Settings in Trinidad and Tobago

A standard definition advanced by Liston, Nevin and Malian (2009) established an inclusive setting as one “where two or more educators take on the responsibility for teaching students with and without disabilities”. Around the world, after students with disabilities began attending regular school, utilizing paraprofessionals along with the general education teacher in the classroom became a norm (Pickett, 1986; Etscheidt, 2005). The earliest recorded data concerning the utilization of aides worldwide was documented in 1798 (Kearney, 2009).

Sustained concern for students who had hardship or exhibited difficulties in learning allowed for their continued use (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004).

Within the Special Education Unit of 1981 in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) there were no accounts of SERAs being used to support students with special needs. On January 29th 2004, the Ministry of Education (MOE) merged the then Special Education and Central Guidance Units into the establishment of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) (Conrad & Conrad, 2007). One year later was the first mention that the researcher found of the provision of aides for student support in inclusive settings.

As professed in the MOE's Green Paper on the Standards for the Operation of all Schools (2005), "Education must be delivered in an inclusive and collaborative atmosphere". The MOE sought to increase the teacher: student ratio in instances where pupils with special needs are incorporated into the educational setting. Therefore, hiring of a Teacher Aide or Assistant Teacher in such cases was considered". In 2007, Mr. Steve Williams, the then Manager of Student Support Service Division, made first reference to them as SERAs when he reported at the Caribbean Symposium on Inclusive Education that "Special Education Resource Aides ... are being introduced for students with severe special needs" (Williams, 2007). This term became specific to the T&T context and since then, SERAs continued to work in inclusive and special education settings under the supervision of Special Education Teachers.

The need for a SERA to be assigned to a student with disabilities in the regular primary school is determined by the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Team (Harris, 2012). In an advertisement published on the MOE's website in 2013, the job summary stated that the SERA is responsible for assisting teachers in providing in class inclusionary care for students with

disabilities which are the result of moderate, severe and profound handicapping conditions. Qualifications and experience included a minimum of three (3) O' levels including English, certification in caring for children from a recognized institution and prior experience in working with children with special needs. The key duties and responsibilities of the SERA were identified as delivering prepared instruction, assisting students with assistive learning devices (Braille machines, computerized programmes, etc), supporting physically challenged students and performing related work as required (SSSD, 2013).

From the researcher's experience, adequate staffing and retention of SERAs to meet the high demand for their services in inclusive classrooms continue to be ongoing goals. There exists a gap in the literature as to the reason why staffing and retention of SERAs in T&T is a problem. De Lisle, Seecharan and Ayodike (2009) highlighted the difficulty this country has been having stating that while a Student Support Service and Monitoring and Intervention Unit have both been established, in reality discharge of the suitable procedures and practices across school districts have been mixed and incoherent.

Job Characteristics Model Theory

An influential theory that reflects the importance for understanding perception of the roles of SERAs is the Job Characteristics Model (JCM). This theory was formulated by Hackman and Oldham in 1980 and is still relevant today (Lawrence, 2001). Studies maintain the value of the JCM to the line of work of teachers (Chesky, 2001). While critics such as Roberts and Glick (1981) have argued that "perceptions are not truly representative of the attributes of tasks", Griffin (1983) presented persuasive points to indicate that perceptions definitely provide

a realistic representation. As such, SERAs perceptions can be viewed as important to understanding why they feel undervalued de-motivated and eventually leave the job.

Figure 2 presents the JCM Theory which purports the following five constructs:

1. *Task Significance* - the degree to which a job has impact on the lives of people in an organization or society in general;
2. *Task Identity* - the degree to which a job involves completing a whole identifiable outcome;
3. *Skill Variety* - the degree to which a job requires the use of different talents;
4. *Autonomy* - the degree to which a job provides the employee with discretion to choose how the work is done and to set the schedule for completing the work activities; and
5. *Feedback* - the degree to which carrying out the work activities provides the employee with clear information about his or her performance.

Figure 1. The Job Characteristics Model (1976)

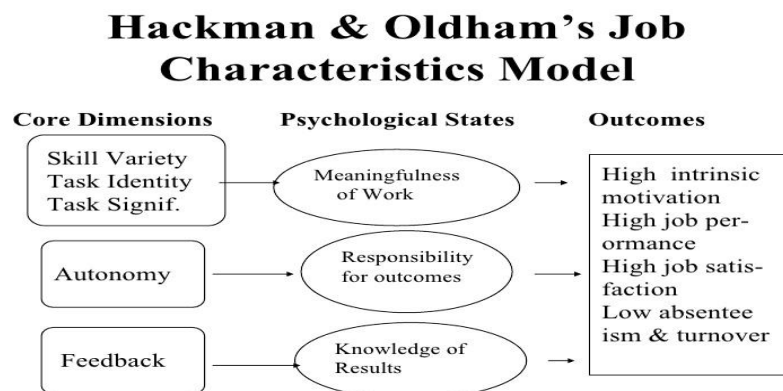


Figure 1. Summary of core dimensions, psychological states and outcomes of the JCM Theory.

Two of the job characteristics, task significance and task identity, are directly related to this present study as “they speak specifically to the nature of the work and the day-to-day tasks that employees do as part of their overall job” (Morris & Venkatesh, 2010). These relate to the meaningfulness of the roles that SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting. Once viewed as meaningful, the theory assumes that it leads to the SERA having high job performance, high motivation, low absenteeism, low turnover rates, and high job satisfaction. It should be noted that ‘Meaningfulness of Roles’ alone is not solely responsible for these outcomes, as ‘Responsibility for Outcomes’ and ‘Knowledge of Results’ also play a part. However it does contribute to a large extent.

In a study of perceptions of participants, The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) predicted that job perceptions led to job satisfaction (Morris & Venkatesh, 2010). Therefore, it can be assumed that how SERAs view the roles they fulfill and how others with whom they work view them can lead to job satisfaction. In the case where team members do not share the same role expectations, there is an increased likelihood that such mismatches will negatively affect outcomes for the worker (Thompson et al., 1997). In order to create a successful inclusionary environment, one researcher purported as essential that all team members (special education teacher, general education teacher, paraprofessional and school administrator) have clearly defined roles of which they are all aware of and each valued for (Schattman, 1992).

Summary

The study of relevant literature on SERAs revealed that their use to support the needs of students with disabilities was heavily documented overseas but a gap existed in regional and local research. To begin with, it was noted that there was no universally accepted term for the

SERA, as names such as paraprofessional, teacher assistant, and aide were used in the literature. SERA, which is the job title specific to the T&T context, was defined as an individual who provides support in the classroom for students with special needs. The range of responsibilities was found to be widespread and SERAs had many concerns about their roles. The Job Characteristics Model was also looked at which guided the understanding of the need to study SERAs' perceptions of their roles.

The next chapter of this research will detail the Research Methodology to be used to capture the empirical data, including details on the research strategy to be adopted, data collection techniques, sample selection and management of the researcher's role.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will describe the research methodology used in the research design for the sampling procedure, data collection and data analysis to answer the research questions.

Qualitative Case Study Design

Parahoo (2006) noted that “the design selected for research should be the one most suited so as to achieve an answer to the proposed research question”. As such a qualitative design was adopted for this research in order to elicit descriptive data from participants who fulfill the duties and responsibilities of SERA in the inclusive setting and what concerns they have regarding their roles.

As stated by Burns and Grove (2009), a qualitative study is a systematic, subjective strategy to depict life experiences and confer meaning to them. In contrast to quantitative studies which deal with numerical data, qualitative research permits researchers to explore perspectives, behaviours, experiences and feelings in intensity, complexity and quality of a state of affairs through a holistic structure (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002). The qualitative design was intended for making the phenomenon clearer to understand from various individual’s perspectives (Creswell, 2009, p. 8) since it was understood that concerning the same experience, those concerned may make sense of it in diverse ways (Crotty, 1998) “but truth is a consensus formed by co-constructors” (Pring, 2000).

Furthermore, this was a case study. Creswell (2009) stated that case study research explores an issue “within a bounded system, over time via thorough, detailed data gathering.”

The bounded system or setting for this inquiry was the one Student Support Services District X and it was confined to the aides who met the selection criteria and were purposefully chosen.

It was the researcher's goal to analyze the data collected from participants in all its richness, as close as possible to the form in which it was transcribed, so as to extract the rich thick data. It is this richness of data which provided a thorough, holistic understanding of the roles of SERAs. The qualitative approach lent itself to the emerging of relevant themes which addressed the central research question.

Sampling Procedure

Target Population. The target population was all the SERAs who are employed with the SSSD. There were approximately 240 SERAs shared among the eight educational districts that the SSSD serves throughout T&T. They comprise those who work through the OJT Programme along with those contracted by the MOE.

The Accessible Population. The accessible population was 26 SERAs who currently work in District X. They all were assigned to inclusive settings within the one educational district. The entire population was female and the SERAs' experiences varied between 2 months to 2 ½ years.

Sample Type. The selection of participants for this study was done through purposive sampling. "It is described as a non-random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest (Guarte & Barrios, 2006; Creswell, 2009)." Patton (1990) defended purposive sampling as "logical and powerful in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study". It was against this background of views from the literature that criteria were set on informant qualifications (Allen 1971).

SERAs with the unique trait of having served initially in the capacity of an OJT and then were contracted as MOE aides, and who have one or more years experience working in the inclusive setting, were desired because it was believed that they would be able to provide the richest data based on their varied experiences. Four SERAs met these criteria and were therefore selected for the study.

District in the Sample

The study was conducted in the SSSD District X. This district consisted of approximately 61 schools and 26 female SERAs who were deployed to various regular primary schools where the SSSD provides support services for students. The 4 SERAs selected for the study worked at four different primary schools within District X. These were 2 board schools and 2 government schools and the schools all allowed for the education of students with disabilities along with their non-disabled peers.

Although the SERAs were deployed at various inclusive settings, the District X's Office was considered the main research site since all aides were based there and are considered staff of the SSSD District X and not the individual school where they work. This site was selected because of the researcher's personal interest in the district and because it was easily accessible to the researcher. The validity, meaningfulness and insights guaranteed from the qualitative inquiry from this research site had more to do with information richness, according to Patton (1990), rather than sample size.

SERAs in the Sample

The research participants were 4 experienced SERAs who worked at different primary schools in the district. They would have initially worked as SERAs in the capacity of an OJT and

then were contracted as MOE SERAs. The researcher felt that this mix of experience would be best since these SERAs would have been exposed to different employers. Additionally, they all had more than one year experience working with children with special needs in the inclusive setting.

Participant 1 was female and worked as a SERA through the OJT programme for 2 years and on contract through the MOE for 5 months. During her experience as an aide she worked in three inclusive settings in District X and aided five students of varying disabilities including autism and learning disabilities. She was 36 years old and her highest level of education was CXC.

Participant 2 was also female and worked as a SERA through the OJT programme for 2 years and on contract through the MOE for 4 months. During her experience as an aide she worked in two inclusive settings in District X and aided three students with learning disabilities. She was 27 years old and her highest level of education was a bachelor's degree.

Having worked as a SERA through the OJT programme for 1 year and on contract through the MOE for 9 months, participant 3 was also female. Her experience as an aide in inclusive settings in District X allowed her the opportunity to support four students with physical/mobility challenges at two schools. She was 30 years old and her highest level of education was an Associate Level Diploma.

Participant 4 was female and worked as a SERA through the OJT programme for 2 years and on contract through the MOE for 4 months. During her experience as an aide she worked in three inclusive settings in District X and aided three students of varying disabilities including medical challenges. She too was 36 years old and her highest level of education was CXC.

Data Collection Instruments

Review of Documents. Before participants were selected for the study, data was gathered via reviewing documents from District X about SERA staffing. These documents provided secondary data about the number of SERAs working, the length of time they had been employed, and any other relevant facts. This was done to aid in ‘painting a picture’ of the accessible population (McKenzie, 2012).

Interviews. Primary data on the perceptions of SERAs about their roles were obtained through face to face, semi-structured interviews in a dialogic, one-on-one approach. The timeframe allotted to the process of interviews extended from the second week of April, 2014 to the first week of May 2014. It was vital to conduct interviews with participants in order to glean rich, thick data in the participants’ own words for analysis. The researcher took into consideration the thoughts of Lichtman (2010) who purported that even though interviews can be challenging, they remained “the most common method of data collection in qualitative research”.

Administration of Interviews

Each participant was interviewed once on an individual basis at a time and place agreed to beforehand by both the researcher and participant. Interviews lasted approximately twenty to thirty-five minutes each. All sessions opened with an explanation of the purpose of the study and the assurance from the researcher of confidentiality and anonymity. Every participant was given an informed consent form to read and sign (see Appendix A) and this activity was followed by a few questions for familiarization and establishing background which preceded the subsequent open-ended interview questions.

Face to face interviews allowed the researcher to observe body language and other facial cues that added meaning or emphasis to statements made. It also allowed both the interviewer and participant to seek any clarification necessary. According to McMillan (2011), “more accurate responses are obtained as the interviewer clarifies questions the subject may have and follows up leads (probing)”. The sessions were audio-taped and stored on the researcher’s computer to facilitate transcribing later on. Notes of main elements in the responses were handwritten. At the end of each interview, appreciation was expressed verbally.

Procedure Used In Instrument Administration

The Interview Guide. As advised by Polit and Beck (2008), an interview guide with questions to be covered with each participant was used during the interviews (see Appendix B). This helped to ensure good use of time, made interviewing multiple subjects more systematic and provided focus for the sessions. The guide consisted of nineteen open ended questions, uniquely developed by the researcher for the sole purpose of this study. The questions were categorized to address each research sub-question; which would in turn answer the overarching research question. Depending on how the conversation went, questions were re-phrased or the order changed. Table 1 gives an overview of the interview guide as mentioned above. Questions 1 to 3 were for the purpose of familiarization with the participant, so it was not included in the table.

Table 1

Overview of Interview Protocol

<u>Themes/Variables</u>	<u>Related Research Question</u>	<u>Interview Guide Questions</u>
Perceptions, range of tasks and responsibilities, aides experiences and views	<i>Main Question</i> How do Special Education Resource Aides perceive their roles while working in inclusive settings in District X?	Questions 4 - 19
Roles	<i>Sub-question 1</i> What duties and responsibilities do SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting?	Questions 7 - 11
Concerns	<i>Sub-question 2</i> What concerns do SERAs have regarding their roles?	Questions 12 - 19

Overview of Data Analysis

Data analysis was a time-consuming and challenging process. Creswell (2007) described data analysis as consisting of “preparing and organizing data for study, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion”. As the core of this study was to develop themes regarding the perceptions of SERAs roles, it was essential to choose the most appropriate method of data analysis to make sure that the data was treated thoroughly and the conclusions drawn could be substantiated. Drawing upon

the Grounded Theory Methodology, the primary method of analysis was a continuous coding process. Coding represented “the operation by which data was broken down, conceptualized and put back together in a new way” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Interview data was transcribed firstly onto a Microsoft Word document with margins down either side for future analysis. Inductive coding techniques were employed, aimed at discovering the codes from within the data itself. The reasoning behind not creating a database of codes prior to analysis was to eliminate as much researcher bias as possible. Since the researcher was previously employed as an aide in the district under study, it can be assumed that some bias and preconceptions could infiltrate the process, so taking precautions were logical.

Analysis began with open coding where the data was examined line by line to define actions or events within the data. Mainly in vivo codes were written at this stage. Codes were recorded in the right hand margin, and memos of questions and speculation about the data and emerging ideas was written in the left. This was done in different colours, so as to aid the visual representation of the data. Next, axial coding was done to make conceptual connections between main categories and their subcategories. Then, concepts and sub-concepts were further defined by selective coding. Here, codes and categories were sorted, compared and contrasted until all the data was accounted for in the core categories and no new codes or categories was able to be produced, i.e. saturation.

Finally, it was possible to begin to draw conclusions in the form of the narrative. These conclusions were verified by looking back at earlier stages of the data analysis, including the raw data, and confirming the significance of the suppositions. During the data analysis process, the researcher checked for consistency by taking random pages of the transcripts and re-coding

them. In addition, the central question was always displayed so as to reiterate the focus of the study and prevent the analysis from straying.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct research was sought from the Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education. Participants were also informed about the nature and purpose of the research and their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time. Assurance was given to participants that anonymity and confidentiality of their identities and shared information will also be preserved.

Limitations

This study had limitations inherent in its design. The first design limitation was in scheduling interviews since the researcher had to schedule meetings at participants' convenience. School activities and other commitments of participants limited the time they had to participate. The second limitation resulted from reporting bias-free information which proved challenging since the researcher was the sole instrument for data collection and analysis.

Delimitations

The research was confined to one SSSD Educational District. Therefore, the results are specific to the participants of the study and cannot be generalized.

Referencing

The presentation of this study with respect to referencing and citation of literature was based on the format prescribed by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th Edition (2010).

Summary

This chapter provided the methodology for this qualitative case study by which participants were selected purposively to unearth the data to better understand the participants' realities in regard to their roles in the inclusive setting. In Chapter Four, the analysis of the data collected and the findings are presented in relation to the main research question.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Introduction

This study investigated the perceptions of SERAs regarding the roles they fulfill in inclusive settings in District X. SERAs participated in face-to-face interviews where each of the two research sub-questions were driven by interview questions as described in Chapter 3 (also see Appendix B). This chapter presents findings based on an analysis of the results. Five main themes emerged that included: (1) a range of roles; (2) the need for partnership between the SERA and school; (3) the reality of inappropriate inclusive environments; (4) SERAs being treated as outsider SSSD staff members and (5) concerns regarding compensation.

Research Questions

Main Question

How do Special Education Resource Aides perceive their roles while working in inclusive settings in District X?

Sub-questions

1. What duties and responsibilities do SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting?
2. What concerns do SERAs have regarding their roles?

Familiarization Data from Interviews

All four aides were female and ranged from 27 to 36 years old. Their educational backgrounds varied with some of them having attained CXC as their highest level of education, while others attained a bachelor' degree. All participants described their job as being challenging but enjoyable. They all worked at different locations within the SSSD District X and provided

support for students of varying disabilities. Some of these disabilities included physical disabilities, autism, mental retardation and learning disabilities.

All of the participants viewed their job as being very important for students to be able to access educational opportunities within the regular primary school system. In their own words the SERAs noted that their role was important to “uplift the child to work to the level of the class teacher”, “to accomplish the IEP that is set out” and “critical” for the inclusion of the child.

Research sub-question 1: What duties and responsibilities do SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting?

Range of Roles. It was found that SERAs perceived that they performed a wide range of duties and responsibilities during a typical workday in the inclusive setting. These included: (1) teaching, (2) behaviour management, (3) support for teachers and students, and (4) being a liaison for SSSD, the school and parents.

Teaching. Three of the four participants indicated that their day was heavily inclusive of teaching students with special needs on a one-on-one basis or in a group setting. They indicated that responsibility for their student or group of students included lesson planning, making resources, and teaching concepts in the resource room or by their desks. For example, one SERA reported:

“I have the three children structured right around my desk and do explanation of the concept, make additional resources to help them understand and reinforcement.”

Another SERA also stated:

“They don’t treat me like a teacher, like extend the courtesy the other teachers get, but they expect me to teach the child because the class teacher can’t wait for him and keep back the class...”

This responsibility of teaching the students was what school staff, especially general education teachers, expected that SERAs were supposed to do. It was the aides' perceptions that teachers believed that their job was to teach the students with special needs, despite the fact that they were not given the regard like a teacher. So even though this teaching responsibility was not formally laid out for them in their job description by the SSSD of the MOE, most of the aides took on the task.

Behaviour management. All of the SERAs interviewed indicated that the management of student behavior was one of their primary roles. During the course of the work day, any demonstration of inappropriate or disruptive behaviours by children with special needs (e.g. refusing to work, aggression, not following the teacher's instructions) was the responsibility of the SERA. When difficulties in dealing with behaviour are encountered, SERAs indicated that they sometimes told the class teacher or just wrote the incident in their logs and gave the child a time out. The experience of one SERA was:

“Sometimes I go to the class teacher and let her know. But I get the feeling that she thinks I am supposed to know how to deal with him all the time. So sometimes I just give him a time out, let him be and then start work again a little later when he calms down. I try to discuss my challenges with the SET that is assigned to my school and she gives me strategies. Other times I just Google ideas. Rewards work for getting my child to behave, but yuh [you] know that mean I have to spend from my own money.”

All of the SERAs in this study felt responsible for making sure the children behaved well. This was especially since school personnel and they themselves referred to the children with whom the SERA worked as “their child”. The study revealed that aides took on the responsibility to

deal with behaviour as much as possible on their own without asking the teacher for help, often by seeking out strategies for themselves.

Support for teachers and students. Another role that SERAs perceived that they fulfilled in the inclusive setting was that of providing support for teachers and students. This was seen as a major duty as defined by their job description. Some of their support tasks included helping students write, making sure students followed through with the teacher's instructions, keeping students on task, staying with the child throughout the day to ensure he/she could fit in with their regular peers even at break and lunch times, supervising the class when the teacher was not there, and helping the general education class teacher make resources not only for the child with special needs but for the whole class. One visibly upset SERA said:

“The cleaners and some teachers tell me how they are glad that I am here to help children who need it. There are some teachers though who act as though I am the servant for the child.”

While none of the participants showed any sort of resentment for their roles, they did indicate that they felt undervalued for all that they do. This was especially evident through their tone and facial expressions when relating their experiences during the interviews. Another SERA described her support role saying:

“Right now I basically have to keep him on task so that he does not disturb the class and [I] help him write. Sometimes I have to help supervise a class when the teacher isn't there and sometimes I am asked to help other students in the class that don't cope well with their lessons.”

From these direct statements, it can be seen that the SERA provided support not only for the child with special needs, but for the general education teacher who was absent and for other

regular students in the classroom who may have needed help. All of the aides interviewed expressed that providing these kinds of support was a major part of their role in the inclusive setting and without their provision of such, it would be very difficult for teachers and students to cope in the inclusive setting. What was most upsetting for the SERAs was the fact that most teachers did not show them appreciation for the support they provided.

Liaison for SSSD, the school and parents. SERAs also perceived their roles as including being a liaison for the SSSD, the school and family in terms of sharing instructional objectives for the child with special needs and updating the class teacher, principal and parents about the child's progress. The aides shared that they are required to keep daily logs about what activities their students engaged in and how the students responded. Samples of the children's work are also compiled into a portfolio. These are lodged at the SSSD Office on a monthly basis. This, in addition to face to face conversations, was viewed as the means of communicating information to those concerned about the children to whom the SERAs were assigned. In relating how they liaise with others regarding the children they work with, SERAs shared their experiences as follows:

"The principal calls me into the office for updates sometimes. She also reads my logs."

"I talk to the parents sometimes to give them updates when I see them. They are grateful."

In their role of communicating with teachers, principals, parents and SSSD personnel about the work they do with the children and the progress that has been seen, SERAs viewed it as very important. It was interesting that of all the stakeholders mentioned, that parents were the only group that was mentioned as being perceived to be grateful for the work the SERAs did.

Research sub-question 2: What concerns do SERAs have regarding their roles?

Need for partnership between the SERA and school. From the interviews, SERAs shared their perceptions that there was no sense of shared responsibility for the children with special needs between them and the general education class teacher. They pointed out that children were not allowed to participate in the general education class activities if the SERA was absent and that teachers did not support them in their roles. Instead, pressure was put on them to take full responsibility for the children. The following was one SERA's direct statement in this regard and the researcher could sense how heartbroken she was as she told of the incident:

“Sometimes they tell the children to ask me “Miss want to know if yuh [you] taking me now”... sometimes I feel like they want to get rid of the children and yuh [you] could see that the child senses not being wanted in the classroom. Sometimes when I say “go back to class, I will come for you when I am ready” they go back with halfway tears in their eyes and stand up outside of the classroom waiting for when I have to come and take them.”

The SERAs also pointed out that teachers seemed to be ‘tricky’ because they pretended not to understand what the real job of the SERA was just so that they would not have to deal with some children. All of the SERAs interviewed wanted teachers to know that they were there to support the child in the inclusive setting and not to spy on the class teacher. It was a recommendation of all participants in this study that teachers should be educated about what the role of the SSSD was and what was the job description of a SERA. Some supporting statements of these points from the interviews were:

“First of all I think we should educate them about our [job] description and what our tasks and responsibilities are. Some people don’t know and they think we just here to spy on them. Some of them feel that yuh [you] just here to sit down with the child and yuh [you] not doing anything.”

“I want them to understand my job spec [specification], in that I am assigned to the student who needs support. This is something that they don’t understand. Because sometimes they will ask you to take care of a whole class and I will be like “that is not in my job spec[specification], but I will do the favour for you...but if my supervisor is to walk in here she will not be pleased with that”. It is something that they know but I think they just pretend that they don’t know.”

With regard to partnership between the SERA and the school also, aides felt as though they were not given the respect due to them by school staff and even some regular students. As one SERA expressed:

“Sometimes they say “What it is yuh [you] send them [the SERA] here for cause we [the class teachers] are already doing that?”..but is how they are doing it! Because they [the class teachers] will teach something and think that the child is able to do it, but the child will not be able to do it. So is how they handle the situation. We [SERAs] are just here to help them to reach the child.”

Sharing about the resistance she experienced from staff in the inclusive setting, another SERA said:

“I get the feeling the vice principal does not like me... he sometime gives me a hard time, like questioning why I have to go to the SSSD office when we have our monthly meetings.”

Overall, all the participants said that there was a need for the school and aides to work together for the benefit of the child. They perceived that there was no need for teachers to pressure them to take the children out of the class for individual work and for administrators to protest against them having to go to the SSSD office for meetings. Rather, a partnership in how they work together should exist.

Inappropriate inclusive environments. Another concern of SERAs was that the regular primary school classroom environment was not always conducive to learning for the child with special needs. Classrooms were described as distracting and often it was seen as difficult to get children to focus because the class was noisy and some children had short attention spans. The following excerpts described this concern:

“I don’t mind having to teach him, but the classroom is so distracting.”

“Because the class teacher moves very fast, very few concepts could be remodeled. I feel like I playing catch up...”

Related to this dilemma of inappropriate inclusive environments, was the report that students were separated from their peers in learning activities, that there was a lack of available resources to support inclusion of children and that Special Education Teachers (SETs) were not able to visit SERAs frequently enough to monitor what they were doing.

“Teachers will tell the children “go by your teacher...that is your teacher over there”... Now the children will feel special, because they have the attention...but yuh [you] separating them from the class, and that not right.”

“Strategies and resources...that ‘resources’ is one of the problems.”

“I know the SETs do the best that they can because they limited in how many we have. But I need the SETs to visit more often.”

SERAs also believed that since teachers did not fully understand the concept of inclusion, they refused to include students with special needs in their lessons even when the children could cope. The SERAs further thought that teachers did this because they felt that the SERA should continue instruction of the child.

“It is very important for them to know the level that the child is...so like they could see he was working at this level... now he reach here...good! We could include him to do something with the class![But] No they don’t do this...they just say “well you do this... ok...when the end of the term reach well ministry will find out what you do”.”

These were some of the views of SERAs as to why the regular primary school settings in which they worked were not truly inclusive. Their body language as well as tone of voice when relating these experiences spoke volumes as to the aides’ personal beliefs that their role involved making the best of the settings that they worked in so that inclusion could take place. They seemed to be sold on the idea of inclusion and wanted the same for general education teachers.

Outsider SSSD Staff. Although none of the SERAs interviewed had previous training in special education, they all had high praises for the in-house training they received from the SSSD

that was relevant to their jobs. These trainings were described as ongoing and SERAs said that they were very helpful. They were all glad to be employees of the SSSD but their concern was founded in the fact that they were not always treated as a part of the school community. This bothered them because they worked in the regular primary school on a daily basis but were still viewed as outsiders. It was found though that different schools offered different experiences and levels of acceptance for SERAs. One SERA commented:

“I am invited to staff lunch and stuff but not staff meetings. I feel accepted by the staff sometimes and sometimes not.”

Another said:

“They never really have no communication with me unless they need to. I was never invited to staff meetings or luncheons etc.”

It was evident that such practices affect how the SERAs feel about the job they do and how they interact with school personnel. During three out of the four interviews, the SERAs shook their heads as to indicate their displeasure while they were making points related to questions for which this theme emerged. While they are at the school for the entire day, all of the participants said that they were not treated equally as the rest of the school staff. The quotation below sums up their views:

“I need the class teacher and other school personnel to let the children know that I too am a member of staff and should be respected.”

SERAs felt that teachers did not explain to students adequately that they should be respected like any other member of staff. The teachers themselves did not demonstrate this in their relations

with the SERAs since they viewed them as SSSD personnel who were at the school to deal with students with special needs. It was interesting that they noted that SERA OJTs are treated even worse than those on MOE contracts, even though they fulfill the same duties and responsibilities.

Concerns regarding compensation. Participants, in general, expressed a concern as being inadequately compensated for their roles. They noted that they were expected to stay with the child for the entire day, “even during break and lunch”. As such, they did not get any time for themselves to have a proper break as the rest of teachers do during the school day. SERAs indicated that they sometimes used their own money to purchase rewards and resources for the children to whom they were assigned. They all were aware that they possessed higher qualifications than the mere three CXC’s required for the job and felt as though that should count for something. Dissatisfaction with their salary was expressed, for example, by the statement:

“The salary we get doe [does not] even compensate for all the things we have to do. But dem [them; school staff) doe [do not] know that.”

The above statement was made in relation to SERAs being dissatisfied with administrators whom they believed were in a position to change policies. While the aides expressed that it was the teachers who expected them to do all the extra work that they were not compensated for, they did not blame the teachers for the inadequacy of salaries since they were aware that it was a matter for the MOE to address.

Summary of Findings

In relation to the research sub-question 1, a range of roles were described above - teaching, behaviour management, support for teachers and students, and liaison – which reflected

what were found to be the duties and responsibilities that SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting in District X.

In relation to the research sub-question 2, some of the concerns that SERAs had concerning their roles included the need for partnership between the SERA and school, the reality of inappropriate inclusive environments, the issue of the SERAs being treated as outsider SSSD staff members and concerns regarding compensation.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The overarching research question for this study aimed at uncovering how SERAs perceived their roles while working in inclusive settings in District X. Two research sub-questions were operationalized and themes emerged to answer the overarching research question. As the final chapter in this study, the purpose is to reprise the findings and discuss each in light of the literature. Recommendations will also be made that are linked to each finding.

Summary of Research Findings

All of the SERAs in this study were young females with over a year experience of working in various inclusive settings as aides to children with many different needs. Their educational backgrounds ranged from five CXC's to a bachelor's degree and while they saw their roles as challenging, they all enjoyed their jobs.

Overall, there were five main themes that emerged from the data analysis of the two research sub-questions in answer to the overarching research question. It was found that SERAs perceived their roles while working in inclusive settings in District X as:

- i. Having to perform a wide range of duties and responsibilities during a typical workday. These included: teaching their student or group of students; managing any demonstration of inappropriate or disruptive behaviour (e.g. refusing to work, aggression, not following the teacher's instructions); providing support for teachers and students (e.g. helping students write, making sure students followed through with the teacher's instructions, keeping students on task, staying with the child throughout the day, supervising the class when the teacher was not there, helping the teacher make resources); and being a liaison

- for the SSSD, the school and family in terms of sharing instructional objectives and updating the class teacher, principal and parents about the child's progress.
- ii. Lacking partnership between the SERA and school. It is believed that there was no sense of shared responsibility. Children who were assigned an aide were not allowed to participate in the general education class activities if the SERA was absent. Pressure was also put on SERAs to take full responsibility throughout the day for the children they were assigned to. Aides also felt as though they were not given the respect due to them for all the roles they took on.
 - iii. Functioning in an environment that was not truly inclusive. SERAs perceived that the regular primary school classroom environment was distracting and often it was seen as difficult to get children to focus because the class was noisy and some children had short attention spans. General education teachers did not fully understand the concept of inclusion and students were separated from their peers in learning activities.
 - iv. Being treated as outsider SSSD staff members. While all the SERAs interviewed were glad to be employees of the SSSD, their concern was founded in the fact that they were not always treated as a part of the school community. This affected how the SERAs felt about the job they did and how they interacted with school personnel. It was found though, that different schools offered different experiences and levels of acceptance for SERAs.
 - v. Having to work for inadequate compensation. SERAs viewed the salary they got as not being able to compensate for all the things they had to do. They noted that they did not get any time for themselves to have proper breaks as the rest of teachers do during the school

day. They sometimes used their own money to purchase rewards and resources for children also.

Discussion of Findings

Finding about SERAs. In agreement with McVittie (2005) and others in the literature, this study revealed that SERAs were indeed persons who supported children with a range of special educational needs in mainstream primary schools. This support was critical for the inclusion of children as was believed from the onset.

In contrast to the view in the literature that aides were unqualified and untrained staff (Mueller, 2002), it was found that the SERAs all possessed higher qualifications than were required for the job. In some cases, the SERA was even more qualified than the classroom teacher who they worked under. This might possibly account for why the SERAs felt undervalued. It can be assumed that SERAs were also put into positions of expertise because their supervisors at the SSSD and school personnel, upon realizing their ability to perform tasks and assume responsibilities, made use of them in such ways that sometimes demanded more than the SERAs bargained for.

First finding about perceived roles. With regard to SERAs having to perform a wide range of duties and responsibilities during a typical workday, this study's finding was in support of what the literature purported. As highlighted in the review of literature, Riggs and Mueller (2001) ascertained in their study that paraprofessionals carried out several functions and responsibilities, some of which went unnoticed. It was evident that the SERA's range of roles did include teaching, behaviour management, provision of support and being a liaison, and fit securely into the range of roles previously identified by Harris (2012).

While McVay (1998) argued that “as the complexity of classrooms change, the role of the paraprofessional will also change”, this was not supported by the findings of this study. When compared to studies from as far back as Lamont and Hill (1991), then Patterson (2006) and more recently Malian (2011), this present study in the year 2014 still reported similar findings about what are the duties and responsibilities of the SERA. Yet, as Campbell (2002) purported, one of the biggest obstacles to successful inclusive practice has been the failure of policymakers to detail and clarify the roles of aides. This suggests that although those in charge are aware of what is really expected of the SERA in inclusive settings, they fail to recognize it formally.

Giangreco (2001) contested that nothing is wrong with the paraprofessional having to take on many duties and responsibilities because it is essentially why they are hired. While having knowledge of behaviour management strategies, providing classroom support, and serving as a liaison, are acceptable roles though, attention must be given to the teaching role that this study identified that SERAs fulfill. It is, in some arenas, controversial to state that a SERA is required to teach. There are those who refuse to admit that it happens. Nevertheless, the finding of Broer (2005), who reported that it was the paraprofessional, rather than the classroom teacher, who interacted with students and functioned as their primary teacher was confirmed by this study.

Even though teaching is not expected of SERAs by the managers of the SSSD District X; major implications do exist as a result of this finding. It may now be important to consider if this could be why SERAs feel undervalued. Is not recognizing them for doing this task treating them unfairly or taking advantage of them? These are questions that management of SSSD must consider and seek to rectify if they are to preserve an already scarce workforce.

The JCM Theory pointed to the fact that when employees' roles are not recognized, they feel de-motivated. This was initially felt at the start of this study as being the reasons why SERAs feel undervalued. Drawing from this framework, it is this researcher's view that SERAs should be recognized for all their roles or else measures should be put in place to ensure that they do not have to do the ones, like teaching, that they are not recognized for. There should be the same role expectations shared among all stakeholders (Thompson et al., 1997).

Second finding of perceived roles. With the government of Trinidad and Tobago's thrust toward inclusion being fairly new and underdeveloped, it is expected that things will not be perfect all at once. However, once imperfections in the system are identified, measures should be taken to address them. The finding that there is a lack of partnership between the SERA and school can be seen as one area where attention must be given. Bourke (2007) was adamant in the literature that effective collaboration between teachers and aide must be developed. Although it may seem shocking to some that such a state of discord exists, this finding confirms the researcher's personal experience during her time practicing as a SERA.

Contrary to the definition put forward for inclusion from the literature, that an inclusive setting is "one where two or more educators have responsibility for teaching students with and without disabilities (Liston, Nevin & Malian, 2009)", the lack of shared responsibility in inclusive settings in District X affirms the speculation that inclusion is not happening in the T&T context. Inclusion by its very name suggests partnership and togetherness and if this is not happening in reality in regular primary schools that are supposed to be inclusive environments, then students will not benefit.

Archibals' (2008) claimed that power struggles between the classroom teacher and aide existed and it demonstrates that this is not a new phenomenon that is exclusive to the district under study. The findings of the study were also in line with Migyanka (2005), showing that teachers indeed thought SERAs were there to scrutinize their teaching, Therefore, questions as to why teachers are uncomfortable with SERAs coming into their classrooms must be answered. Teachers are seen the prime implementers of inclusion (Cardona, 2009) yet as Beare (1985) challenge, these teachers are frequently not ready to meet the needs of students with special needs, nor are their attitudes easily changed. The literature demonstrated that teachers have no reason to feel uncomfortable with an aide being present because the aide is there to assist; yet the reality exists that they do feel uncomfortable. Is it that teachers themselves feel insecure about their own abilities? It is my opinion that before sending a SERA into the regular primary school setting to support a child with special needs, general education teachers should be properly informed. When this is done they can then receive the SERA with a clear understanding of what each person's role is.

Third finding of perceived roles. Although this may not be seen as new knowledge, it certainly serves as a stark reminder that education in T&T is not at the place it should be. The finding that SERAs are required to function in environments that are not truly inclusive for students with special needs points out that care must be taken to ensure that mere integration is not the aim of education in T&T under the guise of inclusion. It was widely recognized in the literature that integration is often mistaken for inclusion. This was attributed to the fact that students are placed in a regular primary school classroom, which is a step towards inclusion. However, if there has not been a paradigm shift within the school and students are not perceived as equals, if subject content is not taught for the understanding of all instead of some, then the

students with disabilities are in the school with their regular peers, but not included in its activities (Kohama, 2012).

Maybe most important, this finding about “less than inclusive” settings from the study tends to substantiate concerns I had about whether students with disabilities are receiving ample instruction and fair support. The finding indicates a substantial reliance on SERAs to provide primary educational support in most cases. The implication for this is that segregation is promoted even in an environment that is promoted as inclusive. Since T&T is a signatory to the Daakar Framework for Action (2000) which encourages the need to change education systems from that of segregation and separation to that of inclusion, it is essential that in order to live up to our agreement, all stakeholders, including school staff, SSSD personnel, students and parents must have a clear understanding of what inclusion is about.

The Miske Witt Report (2008) indicated that T&T was not ready for inclusion because schools were not equipped and teachers and administrators were not fully ready to accept inclusive education. Could it be true that now in 2014 we are no better off? Proper inclusion speaks to accommodations and modifications being in place. It should not be the responsibility of the SERAs, who themselves serve as an accommodation for students with special needs, to be the ones to set up the accommodations and modifications for students. The regular primary schools should already be equipped and when the SERAs go in, they must be the ones who just provide the support.

Fourth finding of perceived roles. Many of the studies reviewed that looked at SERAs in inclusive settings referred to them as staff members of the school who were district employees and who help to improve the quality of education in schools (Akerman, 2008; Pickett, 1990).

This study did not prove this to be true for SERAs; rather they were made to feel as visiting helpers of the primary school who were staff of the SSSD. It has always been the researcher's position that SERAs, due to no fault of their own, are in a unique situation of belonging to two places. While it is understandable that this may seem unfair that SERAs require the best of both worlds, i.e. being a staff member of both the SSSD and the inclusive primary school to which they are assigned, it is my view that it is only reasonable that SERAs are not made to feel as outcasts in either setting. This too was shared by the SERAs in the study.

SERAs reported that they were glad to be staff members of the SSSD and contrary to the lack of training opportunities for aides as purported in the literature (Magolda, 2004); Patterson, 2006), SERAs in District X noted that they were provided with adequate and relevant in-house training. This they saw as a distinct advantage of being an SSSD staff member. Nevertheless, not being treated as a school staff member in the inclusive setting can most likely lead to a breakdown in the relationship between the aide and other school personnel, and on a larger scale - the SSSD and the school. It must be remembered that employees of SSSD and those of the respective primary schools all work under the umbrella of the MOE of T&T. Therefore, they should all work collegially toward the effective education of our nation's children.

Fifth finding of perceived roles. When speaking to satisfaction with compensation overall, the findings of this study agreed with Nemerowicz (2009) who indicated that SERAs performed highly important responsibilities and that their pay did not compensate fairly. Discussion with aides during this study revealed that they sometimes used their own money to purchase resources and rewards for children. For SERAs who were assigned to students with physical challenges especially, their day seemed to be more demanding than for other aides and

teachers. They had to stay with the children all day, even through break and lunch and therefore did not get a chance sometimes to even eat their lunch.

Dessler, (2005) defined compensation as all forms of payments or rewards given to employees which arise from their employment. SERAs not only spoke about their financial rewards, but mentioned being given breaks throughout the day too as being compensation that was unsatisfactory. In light of this finding, it can be assumed that compensation may be a major determinant of motivation and attrition of SERAs. Bearing this in mind, compensation for the SERA must be competitive and fair in relation to the roles they fulfill.

A review of compensation for aides in the international arena revealed that compensation varied depending on the setting and situation (Strauss, 2014). This was something the researcher was unaware of at the start of this study, and now I believe that it can be a good practice even for T&T to adopt. While the joy of providing support for a child with special needs to be able to function and cope in the inclusive setting is in itself a rewarding feeling, in fairness to the SERA, financial rewards must also be appropriate.

Recommendations

Having examined the findings, the following recommendations for each finding are submitted below for consideration:

- i. The Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education should embark on a revision of the job specifications for SERAs to recognize all the roles that they fulfill. As part of the revision exercise, further research should be conducted to find out from all SERAs and co-operating general education teachers what the duties and responsibilities of SERAs are. After analysis of the data, a new job description should be drawn up.

- ii. It should be a policy of the SSSD that before SERAs are assigned to schools, that workshops will be held with all members of staff of the schools to inform them of about the SERAs' roles, and how they can collaborate for successful inclusion of students with special needs. This should be followed by on-going collaboration and training for general education staff and special education staff regarding inclusive practice. Workshops and other joint professional development activities should be done to enhance collaboration and communication between the school and SSSD so that no discord exists.
- iii. The Ministry of Education should focus significant resources (financial and human expertise) to ensure that primary school environments are truly inclusive. As it relates to the physical infrastructure of the building, the teaching resources and assistive technologies available for students' use, and the general knowledge base and attitudes about inclusive practice that staff have, all these should be addressed in a timely manner so that real inclusion can take place.
- iv. School administrators should begin including SERAs in matters related to the school community, such as staff meeting and other staff development and recreational activities. Such practices will encourage teachers to be more accepting of SERAs, will demonstrate to students that the SERA is an important member of staff and should be respected just as their other teachers. This will also make SERAs feel like they are indeed members of the school's staff and are valued.
- v. The Ministry of Education should implement a new system of determining compensation offered to SERAs based on the SERA's level of training, experience and their assigned student's type of disability. Further research should be conducted to find out what additional criteria are used internationally to determine how aides are compensated.

Self-Reflection

Even though this research project was an academic requirement, the process for completion was a great learning experience. There were a variety of emotions that I experienced which included the tediousness of summarizing relevant articles and the alarm of the impending due date. On the other hand, the relief of its completion and the knowledge that it will provide in helping others to understand and appreciate the roles of the SERA, gives a feeling of pride. I want the preeminent for inclusive practice here in Trinidad and Tobago and my aim has always been to contribute to its development. This study is a step in that direction.

Conclusion

There is still a long way to go in the journey towards inclusion in T&T. Inclusion cannot be implemented at its best if the very persons expected to operationalize it do not have the right conditions. SERAs, who are one of the most important resources for inclusive practice, experience challenges as they perceive their roles as being understated and sometimes unwanted.

This study revealed that a range of roles, inclusive of teaching, are fulfilled by SERAs in the inclusive setting. For their variety of duties and responsibilities taken on, they are not appropriately compensated. Additionally, they fulfill their roles without the appropriate level of partnership and acceptance required from school personnel for smooth and successful inclusion. It was also recognized that the claim of regular primary school setting being inclusive environments in our local setting is not entirely true because segregation for students with special needs still exists. The results of this study have led the researcher to a better understanding and appreciation of the roles of SERAs in the inclusive setting. Therefore, the purpose of the study was achieved.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

RESEARCH TITLE: *The Perceptions of Special Education Resource Aides (SERAs) Regarding the Roles They Fulfill In Inclusive Settings in District X*

Pleasant day to you!

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Amanda Seunarine, an M.Ed (Inclusive and Special Education) student at the University of the West Indies. The purpose of this research is to understand what are SERAs’ duties and responsibilities, as well as their concerns about their roles.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. It will involve taking part in a face to face interview that will last approximately 20 to 35 minutes. I am also requesting that you allow me to audio-tape the interview.

You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

There are no known risks associated with this research. I will do everything I can to protect your privacy and your identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please feel free to contact me at seunarine3@hotmail.com or 1-868-303-4826.

Thanking you in advance and I look forward to your participation.

Regards,
Amanda Seunarine
M.Ed Student
UWI St. Augustine

.....Consent.....

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant’s signature _____ Date: _____

A copy of this consent form should be given to you.

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Main Research Question: How do Special Education Resource Aides perceive their roles while working in inclusive settings in District X?

Thank you for agreeing to this meeting. This interview forms part of my research project into the perceptions of SERAs regarding the roles they fulfill in inclusive settings. The purpose of this interview is to obtain your views on the tasks and responsibilities you fulfilled in your experience working in the primary school. Please read the consent form and sign indicating your consent.

<p><i>Familiarization</i></p> <p><i>Establish Background Information</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How old are you? 2. What are is your highest level of education? 3. How long have you been working as a SERA? 4. Do you enjoy your job? 5. When you took the job, what were you told would be your role? 6. How important do you see your role as being for students?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What duties and responsibilities do SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. What class level do you work with? 8. Describe what you do during the typical workday? 9. Describe what you do if you encounter difficulties working with students. 10. Describe your interactions with

	<p>school personnel and families.</p> <p>11. What do school personnel expect of you in the classroom?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What concerns do SERAs have regarding their roles? 	<p>12. Were you previously trained?</p> <p>13. Did you receive training after initial employment?</p> <p>14. Describe the training you received that were related to your job.</p> <p>15. Describe your challenges.</p> <p>16. What do you wish you knew before starting this job?</p> <p>17. What assistance do you need to be supported in your current role?</p> <p>18. What do you want teachers to know about paraprofessionals?</p> <p>19. What else do you believe is important for us to know?</p>

Appendix C

Interview Transcript: Hand Coded Data

Main Research Question: How do Special Education Resource Aides perceive their roles while working in inclusive settings in District X?

A1: SERA 1

A2: SERA 2

A3: SERA 3

A4: SERA 4

MEMOS		CODES
<p>Full Charge for child? Why isn't the class teacher there?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What duties and responsibilities do SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting? <p>1. Describe what you do during the typical workday?</p> <p><u>A1:</u> I get to work early, around quarter to 8, and soon after my student arrives. I help him unpack his bag and copy his homework. I call the words for him and he writes it down. Sometimes I get a lot of trouble to get him to settle because he does not want to do his work. But I try to coax him and eventually he listens. When the bell goes, I ensure that he goes to the line for assembly. I also make sure the other children in the class do the same because the class teacher most of the time is not in the class, although she is at school. During the day I ensure that he copies his work, sometimes I write for him, I ensure that he pays attention. Plenty times he needs one-on-one instruction because he</p>	<p>Start work as soon as arrive at school</p> <p>Help write</p> <p>Trouble to get child settled</p> <p>“Coax him”</p> <p>Follow through on instructions</p> <p>Make sure other children listen</p> <p>“one on one instruction”</p>

<p>can't keep up with the rest of the class. Other children in class also come to me for help, so I am sometimes flustered.</p> <p>A2: Right now I basically have to keep him on task so that he does not disturb the class and help him write. Sometimes I have to help supervise a class when the teacher isn't there and sometimes I am asked to help other students in the class that don't cope well with their lessons.</p> <p>A3: A typical day...well...as I say you come to school on mornings...indicate him that he have to go to his lines, he will follow. For school work he will work, is not to say he cannot work. He might not get everything correct but he will work. The only thing is when he want something he will indicate. Like if he want snack he will point. He is nonverbal...little...little speech. He will more show yuh. So I have to be with him at all times to see when he doing that. When a teacher wasn't there the class teacher might leave work and just ask me to share books and look at the class.</p> <p>A4: When I get to school once the child arrives I help het unpack. When the bell goes, I take her to assembly, stand with her till it is over then take her back to class. I have the 3 children structured right around my desk and do</p>	<p>Help other children</p> <p>Keep on task</p> <p>Help write</p> <p>supervise class</p> <p>Help other children</p> <p>Start work as soon as arrive at school</p> <p>Follow through on instructions</p> <p>Stay with child throughout day</p> <p>supervise class</p> <p>Start work as soon as arrive at school</p> <p>Follow through on instructions</p> <p>“one on one instruction”</p>
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	<p>explanation of the concept, make additional resources to help them understand and reinforcement.</p> <p>2. Describe what you do if you encounter difficulties working with students.</p> <p><u>A1:</u> Sometimes I go to the class teacher and let her know. But I get the feeling that she thinks I am supposed to know how to deal with him all the time. So sometimes I just give him a time out, let him be and then start work again a little later when he calms down. I try to discuss my challenges with the SET that is assigned to my school and she gives me strategies. Other times I just Google ideas. Rewards work for getting my child to behave, but yuh know that mean I have to spend from my own money.</p> <p><u>A2:</u> Once something happens I have to log everything and I have to call the supervisor. I have never had to do this though.</p> <p><u>A3:</u> Ok well I haven't been in that position but the only thing is that I was told by the supervisor what to do in case the child gets a seizure. When other children come to me for help and I feel flustered. But once I have time I will assist the child. Afterwards when the teacher have time I</p>	<p>Let teacher know</p> <p>Give time out</p> <p>Talk to SET</p> <p>Research ideas</p> <p>Use rewards</p> <p>Write in logs</p> <p>Let teacher know</p>
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	<p>will let her know well look...this child doe understand what yuh teach before so I think yuh have to just go it over with him.</p> <p>A4: I work in a resource room with the children. When I get problems I give them time out and send them back to class if it gets unbearable.</p> <p>3. Describe your interactions with school personnel.</p> <p>A1: I greet everyone I see when I get to school. The principal calls me into the office for updates sometimes. She also reads my logs. I get the feeling the vice principal does not like me, he sometime gives me a hard time. Like questioning why I have to go to the SSSD office when we have our monthly meetings. The cleaners and some teachers tell me how they are glad that I am here to help children who need it. There are some teachers though who act as though I am the servant for the child. I talk to the parents sometimes to give them updates when I see them. They are grateful.</p> <p>A2: Okay, well my class teacher and the other teacher team teach. The teacher comes to see what I do with him and if I</p>	<p>Give time-out</p> <p>Send back to class</p> <p>Update principal</p> <p>Hard time from VP</p> <p>Support staff glad aide there</p> <p>Teachers over-use</p> <p>Update parents</p> <p>Teacher offer help</p>
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<p>No routine?</p>	<p>need any help she would help. I am invited to staff lunch and stuff but not staff meetings. I feel accepted by the staff sometimes and sometimes not.</p> <p>A3: Ok the class teacher and I have a good relationship because she did special ed. so she have a little knowledge. OJT the principal wasn't fully understanding what an aide is like she had lil knowledge and the teacher had lil knowledge not the other teachers in the school didn't have any as to what is yuh position, what is yuh role. They never really have no communication with me unless they need to. I was never invited to staff meetings or luncheons etc.</p> <p>A4: There is respect for me in the classroom because I respect the teacher. I always let her feel and know that she is in charge because I don't want her to put all the responsibility for the student on me and think that this is yours. Like sometimes the little disciplining and ting, I speak to him and he doe listen, I tell miss and she will take it up from there.</p> <p>4. What do school personnel expect of you in the classroom?</p> <p>A1: Huh...I don't know na! Cause it always changing. When I just started to work I was told by the SET that my</p>	<p>Selective participation/belonging mixed acceptance</p> <p>good relationship</p> <p>principal little knowledge</p> <p>other teachers unaware no belonging</p> <p>teacher in charge</p> <p>“Expectation always changing”</p>
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<p>Your child</p> <p>Does the salary compensate?</p>	<p>job was just to support the child in the class. No direct teaching and stuff just reinforcement. But everyone at school expects me to be in total charge of the child. They don't treat me like a teacher...like extend the courtesy the other teachers get, but they expect me to teach the child because the class teacher can't wait for him and keep back the class, make sure he behaves, supervise him during break and lunch, make sure he eats, and everything else.</p> <p>A2: They expect you to do every single thing for the child. They label it as your child.</p> <p>A3: Well at times they do like is your child, especially outside the classroom. In the classroom she would supervise like behaviour but academic I do everything. I have to prepare worksheets and thing. Sometimes I use my resources [money] and sometimes the school...well office...resources.</p> <p>A4: Sometimes they tell the children to ask me "Miss want to know if yuh taking me now". Sometimes I feel like they want to get rid of the children and yuh could see that they child senses not being wanted in the classroom. Sometimes when I say go back to class they go back with halfway tears in their eyes and stand up outside of the classroom waiting</p>	<p>"total charge of the child"</p> <p>"Teach the child"</p> <p>Manage behaviour</p> <p>Supervise breaks (food and play)</p> <p>Take total control</p> <p>Total academic responsibility</p> <p>Own resources</p> <p>School resources</p> <p>Get rid of children</p> <p>Children wait especially for aide</p>
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	<p>for when I have to come and take them.</p>	
	<p>• What concerns do SERAs have regarding their roles?</p> <p>5. Were you previously trained?</p> <p>A1: Not in special education. But I have a B.Ed.</p> <p>A2: No.</p> <p>A3: Only OJT training...no special ed training.</p> <p>A4: No. No previous training in special ed.</p> <p>6. Did you receive training after initial employment?</p> <p>A1: SSSD has had some in house training. I did learn strategies about how to deal with my child.</p> <p>A2: Yes. Ministry of Education had alot of training seminars for us. They had Autism workshops, they have training like in Learning Resource Centre and there was training in office about how to cope with some of the children.</p> <p>A3: Yes. We did courses at the office on little things we could use with the child.</p>	<p>No special ed. training</p> <p>In house training</p> <p>MOE workshops</p> <p>Specific strategies</p> <p>Personal professional development</p>

	<p><u>A4:</u> Yes from the office and I did a sign language course.</p> <p>7. Describe the training you received that were related to your job.</p> <p><u>A1:</u> We participated in a reading workshop. I learnt really good strategies in that. Does the talks I have with my SET count? Well I have learnt specific strategies from her when she demonstrated what to do.</p> <p><u>A2:</u> All d training was relevant because I use it to work with the children.</p> <p><u>A3:</u> Well when I start I worked with ah autism child...so I get training for that.</p> <p><u>A4:</u> Well the sign language course was important because now I could communicate with children with hearing and speech problems. All the strategies I learn from the special ed. teachers come in handy to help me deal with the children.</p> <p>8. Describe your challenges.</p> <p><u>A1:</u> Getting the child to focus. I don't mind having to teach him, but the classroom is so distracting. This is a major challenge.</p> <p><u>A2:</u> Sometimes you know yuh have activities going on in</p>	<p>Reading workshop SET gave strategies</p> <p>All training relevant</p> <p>Autism training</p> <p>Sign language</p> <p>“getting the child to focus” Distracting classroom</p>
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	<p>school and they would call you here to the office. In order for the child to participate I must be there. That is one of the rules in that school. In order for him to attend school, he must have an aide. When I am going to be absent, I have to inform the parents and the child will not go to school.</p> <p>A3: The major challenge is that well yuh doe really get much time for yourself during the school hours. Because the class teacher moves very fast, very few concepts could be remodelled. I feel like I playing catch up and if I do not teach of my own self I feel pressured that I not doing what the teacher and parents expect.</p> <p>A4: I have to be very careful with some teachers. Cause they always up to some trick. They don't understand or like that we are there. So they give us a hard time to do everything for ourself.</p> <p>9. What do you wish you knew before starting this job?</p> <p>A1: Definitely how much work it was. I mean I expected that it would be challenging, but I also expected that the class teacher would deal with it. Little did I know that the burden would be on me solely for the child I aide. I thought that since I had a B.Ed I would be respected and the class teacher would tap into my knowledge to assist generally,</p>	<p>Child does not participate if aide absent</p> <p>No time for self break/lunch supervision "playing catch up" expectation pressure</p> <p>tricky teachers teacher understanding of role</p> <p>"how much work it was"</p> <p>Sole burden "treated as less than"</p>
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	<p>but I should have prepared my mind to ignore being treated as “less than”.</p> <p>A2: Nothing really na. I suppose the best way is to learn on the job. Else I doe know if I might da be here.</p> <p>A3: Well now that I working with the ministry I does get a little better treatment than when I was an OJT...I would have to say that if I knew this from the start it would have prepared me better. They does look down on OJT’s...we doing the same job now too as then yuh know..but that is just how it is.</p> <p>A4: That in the inclusive setting you will have to take full charge of the child. Teachers will tell the children “go by your teacher...that is your teacher over there”. Now the children will feel special, because they have the attention...but yuh separating them from the class, and that not right.</p> <p>10. What assistance do you need to be supported in your current role?</p> <p>A1: Hmmm...Basically moral support. I need the class teacher and other school personnel to let the children know that I too am a member of staff and should be respected.</p>	<p>Nothing else wouldn’t be here</p> <p>Better to be MOE than OJT</p> <p>Aide in inclusion means take full charge of child</p> <p>Moral support</p> <p>Teacher support</p>
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	<p>Children refer to me as the OJT, and they know that teachers have more power. So they don't listen. I don't like this.</p> <p>A2: Strategies and resources. That 'resources' is one of the problems.</p> <p>A3: I know the SETs do the best that they can because they limited in how many we have. But I need the SETs to visit more often.</p> <p>A4: I basically need the teachers to support me and not try to palm off the children on me. We all doing this for the children. Yuh see the principal and senior teacher, they understand and support me. But the classroom teacher and some of the other teachers they always looking for a way to get rid of the children and I don't like this.</p> <p>11. What do you want teachers to know about paraprofessionals?</p> <p>A1: First of all they need to know what Student Support is all about because most of them doesn't. Because they don't know, that affects how they treat us. Some of them take it as a negative because remember now because you keeping</p>	<p>Student respect</p> <p>Strategies</p> <p>Resources</p> <p>More SET visits</p> <p>Teacher support</p> <p>All on board</p> <p>Raise SSSD awareness</p> <p>No logs on teachers</p>
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<p>logs they think you writing about them.</p> <p>A2: It is very important for them to know the level that the child is...so like they could see he was working at this level, now he reach here...good we could include him to do something with the class. No they don't do this...they just say well you do this ok...when the end of the term reach well ministry will find out what you do. They don't take any kinda responsibility.</p> <p>A3: That we not here to spy on you or come to take over yuh job. Sometimes they say "what it is yuh send them here for cause we are already doing that"..but is how they are doing it! Beacuse they will teach something and think that the child is able to do it, but the child will not be able to do it. So is how they handle the situtation. We are just here to help them to reach the child.</p> <p>A4: I want them to understand my job spec in that I am assigned to the student who needs support. This is something that they don't understand. Because sometimes they will ask you to take care of a whole class and I will be like "that is not in my job spec, but I will do the favour for you...but if my supervisor is to walk in here she will not be pleased with that". It is something that they know but I</p>	<p>Level child is at</p> <p>Student can be included in activities</p> <p>Not there to spy</p> <p>Not there to take job</p> <p>There to support</p> <p>Job spec.</p> <p>Willing to do favour</p> <p>Don't take advantage</p>
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<p>think they just pretend that they don't know.</p> <p>12. What else do you believe is important for us to know?</p> <p>A1: First of all I think we should educate them about our description and what our roles and responsibilities are. Some people don't know and they think we just here to spy on them. Some of them feel that yuh just here to sit down with the child and yuh not doing anything. The salary we get doe even compensate for all the things we does have to do. But dem doe know that.</p> <p>A2: They have to give aides the same respect as all the other teachers in the school. Our jobs come similar...although we might'n be a teacher but we there to assist a child...making a child reach a level that he suppose to reach.</p> <p>A3: That children on a whole they have equal rights to learning, And the aide is there to assist to help the children access those rights. We need to work together for the benefit of the child.</p> <p>A4: Different schools offer different experiences. This should not be so.</p>	<p>Educate about job description</p> <p>Hot just sitting whole day</p> <p>Salary does not compensate</p> <p>vital to student success</p> <p>work together for benefit of child</p> <p>want same school expectations</p>
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Appendix D

Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Notes: -codes in inverted commas are in vivo codes

-similar colours represent grouped codes which were then reduced to themes

RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION	CODES	EMERGING THEMES/CATEGORIES
<p>What duties and responsibilities do SERAs fulfill in the inclusive setting?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start work as soon as arrive at school • Help write • Trouble to get child settled • “Coax ” • Follow through on instructions • Make sure other children listen • “one on one instruction” • Help other children • Keep on task • supervise class • Help other children • Stay with child throughout day • Let teacher know • Give time out • Talk to SET • Research ideas 	<p>Teaching</p> <p>Liaison</p> <p>Behaviour Management</p> <p>Support for Staff and Students</p> <p>Expected to know</p> <p>Lacking Teamship</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use rewards • Write in logs • Send back to class • Update principal • Hard time from VP • Support staff glad aide there • Teachers over-use • Update parents • Teacher offer help • Selective participation/belonging • mixed acceptance • good relationship • principal little knowledge • other teachers unaware • no belonging • teacher in charge • “Expectation always changing” • “total charge of the child” • “Teach the child” • Manage behaviour • Supervise breaks (food and play) • Take total control • Total academic responsibility • Own resources 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School resources • Get rid of children • Children wait especially for aide 	
<p>What concerns do SERAs have regarding their roles?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No special ed. training • In house training • MOE workshops • Specific strategies • Personal professional development • Reading workshop • SET gave strategies • All training relevant • Autism training • Sign language • “getting the child to focus” • Distracting classroom • Child does not participate if aide absent • No time for self • break/lunch supervision • “playing catch up” • expectation pressure • tricky teachers • teacher understanding of role • “how much work it was” 	<p>SSSD staff</p> <p>Inappropriate inclusive environment</p> <p>Concerns regarding shared Responsibility</p> <p>Concerns regarding compensation</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sole burden • “treated as less than” • “ wouldn’t be here • Better to be MOE than OJT • Aide = full charge of child • Moral support • Teacher support • Student respect • Strategies • Resources • “own money” • More SET visits • Teacher support • All on board • Raise SSSD awareness • No logs on teachers • Level child is at • Student can be included in activities • Not there to spy • Not there to take job • There to support • Job spec. • Willing to do favour • Don’t take advantage • Educate about job description 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not just sitting whole day • Salary does not compensate • vital to student success • work together for benefit of child • want same school expectations 	
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DATA REDUCTION

1 st SET OF EMERGING THEMES	FURTHER REDUCED THEMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching • Liaison • Behaviour Management • Support for Staff and Students • Expected to know • Teamship • SSSD staff • Inappropriate inclusive environment • concerns regarding shared responsibility • Concerns regarding compensation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Range of roles (Sub-Question1) 2. Need for Partnership between SERA and School (Sub-Question 2) 3. Inappropriate inclusive environments (Sub-Question2) 4. Outsider SSSD staff (Sub-Question2) ▪ Concerns regarding compensation (Sub-Question 2)