

Special Education in Elementary and Secondary Schools in Ontario

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Abstract: This paper presents a study on special education in elementary and secondary schools in Ontario.

Keywords: Special education, Elementary schools, Secondary schools.

1. Barriers in Education for Students with Disabilities

In the current era, providing education programs for students with disabilities is a serious issue of concern. Ignoring such students would drastically affect a significant segment of society, and the affected students would not meet education-related goals, thereby causing many social issues, such as reliance on public welfare and health services and lower literacy rates. This paper is focussed on the renewed vision for special education in Ontario and is divided into three parts: the problem statement, a literature review, and research questions.

2. Problem Statement

All students need support from teachers, classmates, family, friends, and society to advance and gain benefit from their school experience. Some students have special needs that require supports other than those ordinarily received in the school setting. Students possessing behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical, mental or multiple problems may require special education programs and services to grow academically, though instructional and assessment practices do not always fulfil these needs.

Special education programs and services consist of instruction and assessments that are different from those provided to the general student population. These services may be in the form of accommodations, such as specific teaching strategies, assistive technology, or educational programs that are modified for age-appropriate grade-level expectations in a particular course or subject as outlined in the Ministry of Education's (2017) curriculum policy documents. The Ministry of Education (2017) has developed Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide to support educators in the implementation of effective programs and services for students with special education needs. However, these education programs are insufficient in fulfilling the needs of special students due to various barriers, which includes inadequate funding, physical unavailability, and ineffective firm settlement mechanisms.

Inadequate Funding:

Inadequate funding is one of the main reason for detained and decreased special education services at the elementary and secondary levels. Accommodation decisions are frequently made based on budgetary considerations more than on an assessment of the actual needs of students with disabilities. At the post-secondary level, the funding structure is highly complex, with programs containing eligibility requirements and restrictions.

Physical Unavailability:

Students with disabilities meet physical barriers to educational services, such as a lack of elevators in multi-level school buildings, heavy doors, inaccessible washrooms, and inaccessible transportation to and from school. Students at the post-secondary level also have trouble in getting accessible student housing.

Ineffective firm Settlement Mechanisms:

The firm Settlement mechanisms, which deal with accommodation issues, are often ineffective, cause students to lose time in school, and are increasingly sent to the Ontario Human Rights Commission as complaints. At the elementary and secondary levels, the appeal process for decisions regarding identification and placement of exceptional students is unmanageable, time-consuming and does not allow for appeals regarding programs and services.

3. Literature Review

Schemes and proposals for inclusion in the classroom are important in developing a high quality, inclusive experience for students with special education needs. Schemes are not engaged towards specific exceptionalities. Rix, Hall, Nind, Sheehy, and Wearmouth (2009) determined that co-operation among staff, commitment and accountability to the teaching of all students, differentiation of instruction, and recognizing "that social interaction is the means through which student knowledge is developed" (p. 17) are key to successful inclusion of students with special needs. This could be a good method because without co-operation between the staff and proper communication, students fail to develop and could fail academically. In addition, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) conducted two substantive international, evidence-based

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literature reviews. Areas of focus included evidence-based strategies to support inclusion of students with special needs in both the elementary and secondary levels (EADSNE, 2001, p. 31-32).

Evidence based strategies include several levels such as:

At the elementary level

- Cooperative teaching where special education teachers support general education teachers by providing instruction in the general education class (EADSNE, 2001). This support would not only help students, but also assist teachers in their swift growth and development in the teaching and learning process.
- Peer tutoring in heterogeneous groups. (Mitchell 2010) This is significant in making an unbiased workplace where tutors with high abilities teach to their juniors the well- structured teaching methods.

At the secondary level

- Problem solving as a team. Teachers guide students through the processes involved in problem solving. The school system should make sure every student is taught with problem solving skills as this would help them, not only in academics, but also for their future endeavours.
- Promoting co-operation and shared responsibility by involving parents in the classroom, shared and co-operative teaching, peer tutoring, planning approached collaboratively by the teaching staff (EADSNE, 2001). It is of a critical concern and requires greater effort to teach students with special needs and hence, teachers alone would not be able to help such students. Concern and involvement of parents, support from school administration and encouragement from society can collectively help special students meet their academic and career goals.

4. Inclusion of Students with Specific Exceptionalities

Research has been conducted on how certain exceptionalities can be successfully included in the classroom.

Autism: Harrower and Dunlop (2001) suggest that students with Autism can be successfully included in the classroom as long as they are supported and accommodated. Autistic students need extra time and facilities apart from support and accommodation which can serve to make them eligible to get good grades and succeed in academics.

Learning Disabilities: McLeskey and Waldron (2011) concluded that inclusive classrooms offer a good basis for quality education for students with LD. However, they were unconvinced that the intensive instruction some students with LD may require could be offered in either an inclusive or segregated setting. Segregated setting would make the students feel inferior to the normal students and they are likely to get into inferiority complexes or other types of depression.

Mild Intellectual Disability: Research studies (Crawford, 2005; Myklebust & Batevik, 2009) demonstrate the importance of inclusion for students with low functional skills and/or intellectual disabilities. Results from both studies indicated that

students who were taught in inclusive, general education classes were more likely to find employment and be economically independent post-high school. General education classes can eliminate biases unlike the segregated ones and fulfills student's needs and requirements.

Behaviour Disorders: Simpson (2004) argues that the reason why students with emotional or behavioral disorders appear to fare poorly within general education classrooms is that intentional inclusion, based on evidence supported strategies, has not been rigorously researched or implemented. There is a considerable gap in empirical research into the inclusion of students with emotional or behavioral disorders (Simpson, 2004). Students undergoing with emotional or behavioural disorders needs extra time and supported strategies to be implemented well and just accommodation and support would not meet the criteria.

Furthermore, Shaddock, MacDonald, Hook, Giorcelli and Arthur Kelly (2009 as cited in Mitchell, 2010) explored the impact of individual instruction for struggling readers. Their research synthesis demonstrated that classroom effect on student learning far outweighed the effect of individual instruction (Shaddock et al, 2009 as cited in Mitchell, 2010). Focus on individual support, giving some extra time apart from regular classroom, student's needs and interests may help the teachers to make the struggling readers excel in academics and whereas differentiated instruction would disinterest them even more.

5. Research Questions/Hypothesis

The purpose of this study was to explore the experienced barriers in elementary and secondary education by students with special needs in Ontario. The study also aim to know the effects of experienced barriers in education and the categories of persons with special needs that experienced the barriers in education.

1. *What barriers do students with special needs face in their education in elementary and secondary education?*

Many possible barriers are likely to affect the academics of students with special needs that would stop them from achieving good grades, success in higher education and may cause them lead an unsuccessful life if those barriers are not resolved. Out of the many barriers inadequate funding, Physical unavailability, Ineffective firm Settlement mechanisms were found to be prominent.

2. *How far these barriers effect the students lives with special needs?*

The above-mentioned barriers would not only affect the academics of students with special needs but also cause them to suffer in their social, environmental lives and drastically effects the financial status. If these barriers are not resolved in elementary and secondary schools, students might fail in academics, would not be able to get jobs interrupting their social and environmental lives.

3. *Which category of students with special needs are likely to suffer most?*

Students with autism and mental disabilities are likely to suffer most as schools do not have sufficient classroom

materials to teach, most teachers in higher Institution are not trained to teach the disabled.

6. Conclusion

Access to education for students with special needs is a big task because it is difficult to find appropriate schools that offer individual support, sufficient funding and effective settlement mechanism such as accommodation and transport. Parents alone would find it difficult to entirely fund the schooling of such students as they will have to fulfill medical expenses and other basic necessities of their children. Hence, Government should support the development of and access to education and training programs that enhance the opportunities of individuals with disabilities to become good students in school and to pursue their careers.

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