

Nguyen Thi Kim Hang

PARAEDUCATORS' CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS

A content analysis of paraeducators' perceptions

ABSTRACT

Hang Nguyen: Paraeducators' Challenges and Expectations: A content analysis of paraeducators' perceptions
Master's thesis
Tampere University
Master's Degree Program in Teacher Education
November 2019

This study contributes to the qualitative research of paraeducators for special educational classes in mainstream schools. A lot of research is done to investigate the challenges faced by special education teachers working in mainstream school systems, but less effort is placed to explore how paraeducators deal with the challenges they encounter. Paraeducators have a crucial role in supporting learning in inclusive education environment. Thus, it is necessary to learn more also about their challenges particularly in consideration to the solutions to the encountered challenges. Awareness of the challenges and their expectations will allow us to support paraeducators in their job and better prepare future professionals in this field.

This qualitative study examined (1) the challenges encountered by paraeducators in relation to their work assist teachers in special education classes in daily teaching situations and (2) their expectations towards their job. The study was conducted in mainstream elementary schools in Finland. Data was collected by semi-structured qualitative interviews with special education paraeducators in Tampere in two different schools. The results reveal that paraeducators had the first difficulty mainly comes from interaction with students, then from their class teachers, and finally from the school administrators. Moreover, the results give insight into their expectations towards their job by which support plans and approaches are considered to enhance the effectiveness of paraeducator employment.

Keywords: paraeducator, difficulty, expectation, special education, inclusive education

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

Acknowledgement

I would like to firstly thank my thesis supervisor, Doctor Juliene Madureira Ferreira of School of Education (University of Tampere), for your countless support, considerable patience, tremendous enthusiasm, and immense knowledge for my thesis. You strongly encouraged me to complete this process when I had been completely vague and lost in the boundless field of research. Thanks to your guidance, I have grown up and become more mature in not only research but also self-development.

I would also like to thank all paraeducators who participated in the interviews and provided insightful responses as data of this study. Without your support and interest, I could definitely not complete this thesis. For research ethical standards, I cannot mention their names here, but I would like to express my finest appreciation to all of them.

My sincerest thanks also go to my friends in Vietnam and Finland (Tampere, Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Turku, Vaasa and Rovaniemi) for your continuous encouragement to help me overcome all (literally) dark days in Finland. Thanks for your care and heartfelt advice that lifted me up during my time of living and doing thesis in Finland.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my beloved family, my dad Nguyen Van Hoc and my mom Nguyen Thi Duyen for their unconditional, constant and abiding love and support. They are always and forever my greatest and irreplaceable love, my strength and my meaning of life. It is their nurture, encouragement, and spiritual lessons that has shaped me into who I am today.

Last but not least, I will not express my thanks or gratefulness but my pure love to my husband. You are my lifelong companion, my soulmate, my roommate, my everything. Thank you for all of your love and care for me in good times, in bad, in sickness and in health. To each day that passes, I love you more and more. Actually, without you, I would have completed this thesis one year and a half earlier!

Finally, in my prayers, I solemnly send my gratefulness to Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit and Mother Maria. They are my spiritual companions, carrying me throughout all life challenges. Thank you for having accompanied me yesterday, today, tomorrow, for ever and ever.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. This first chapter introduces readers to the topic of paraeducators – teaching assistants in special education classrooms in the mainstream schools, related issues regarding their roles and challenges, which leads to the exploration of their perceptions towards these issues. The following chapter focuses on outlining teacher’s challenges in inclusive classes and depicting paraeducators’ roles in Finnish comprehensive mainstream schools. Chapter 3 presents research methodology applied in the study to answer research questions. In chapter 4, collected data will be analyzed using the chosen framework and theory. The final chapter concludes main findings, discusses implications and suggests future research and recommendations.

1.2. Significance of the research

Paraeducators perform a crucial role in supporting teachers’ workload and students’ learning through crude research (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010). These assistants have become a part of some school staff, working directly in the classrooms, especially at special education class. However, it was also admitted that very little is studied about their effect on students despite an increase in the number of paraeducators. It is not until Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS), project implemented by an in-depth study in the UK setting from 2004-2009, that the effect of paraeducators’ support was critically examined (Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2011). Then, numerous studies, following DISS project, explored the impact of paraeducators in the classroom (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell, & Howes, 2009; Blatchford et al., 2011; Wren, 2017; Maher, & Vickerman, 2018; Bosanquet, & Radford, 2019), showing that paraeducators’ roles involve supporting students, teachers, and the school curriculum.

However, studies investigating paraeducators’ challenges in the current inclusive system are scarce. The little attention towards paraeducators and their difficulty compared with the vast number of studies addressing teacher’s challenges in the inclusive classroom could be explained by the position that these professionals occupy. Though paraeducators are not recognized as “teachers”,

their role is to support learning processes by working with teachers and students in the classroom, and working under class teacher's supervision has shaded the possible difficulties that can occur during their work life. The lack of knowledge, in this regard, restricts actions that could improve the service and enhance learning in school for children that demand the assistance of such professionals. Therefore, this study explored deeply what the current difficulty paraeducators face in inclusive classroom, synthesizing information based on their responses and summarizing their expectation of support.

1.3. Research objectives and research questions

This research aims at at first, exploring the perceptions of paraeducators about the challenges they encounter working in Finnish elementary schools and the expectations towards their job under these challenges. The study answers to the main question: What are the challenges that paraeducators encounter at school and what do they expect to help them with the job?

Sub-questions are:

- According to the paraeducators, what is the major difficulty?
- What do they do when a problem happens?
- What is their advice for other paraeducators to avoid the challenges?
- What do they expect when encountering such difficulty?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present three major topics related to the current study. First, special education class and educational inclusion in schools are discussed in terms of its history and support system in Finland. Next, special education teachers' challenges are discussed in order to raise a need of assistance and to compare with that of paraeducators at later stage. And finally, paraeducators and their roles in special education class are defined and discussed to see the complexity and huge amount of work in this job.

2.1. Special education and inclusive education

To understand why paraeducators are important and need the support no less than the teachers, it is important to grasp the background of inclusive education in Finland first to get a quick view of teachers and paraeducator's position in the inclusive education.

2.1.1. A brief background of inclusive education

Inclusive education in Finland, as other countries, flourished from the development of special education. In 1940s, special education schools in Finnish primary was respectively established, mainly focusing on those with sensory impairments until the Compulsory Education Act enacted in 1921. Therefore, students with certain disabilities were excluded from regular schools, and received education run by charity and non-profit associations (Tuunainen & Ihatsu, 1996).

These segregation continued, together with the start of part-time special education, not only for students with disabilities but for those with behavioral problems and intellectual disabilities between the 1940s and the 1960s. It was not until the 1970s that the introduction of integration took effect, allowing the participation of special needs learners in normal schools. Consequently, special education in special schools transformed into special classes in normal schools (Väyrynen, 2017, p.221). With the promotion of integration, special education curriculum in 1980s were adjusted to individual needs, coordinating with ordinary education guidance irrespective of student's learning

abilities and disabilities. The concept of integration was undergone a great change since Finland, together 91 countries, signed UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (1994) regarding inclusive education. Thereby Finnish Basic Education Act (1998) and the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004), playing a vital role in local curriculum, guaranteed an equal access to education and individual support for every child (Halinen & Järvinen, 2008).

Since 2008, all children in Finland, in spite of physical or intellectual disability, have received same basic education and equal opportunities for growth and learning. Thenceforth, a massive number of legislative reforms such as Basic Education amendment in 2011, New regulations about students' welfare in 2013 and the latest New Core Curriculum in 2014 have taken action in "promoting equality and equity in education and the rights of pupils throughout the country" (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014).

"If a pupil cannot be taught in a regular teaching group, he or she must be admitted to special needs education. This education is provided at regular schools (and in the nearest school) wherever possible". (Finnish Education in a Nutshell 2015)

Therefore, there is an increasing number of inclusive education classes at regular schools to provide education for students with special education needs, which leads to the need of specific supports and appropriate teacher staff to successfully perform inclusive program. To support students with special education needs in regular settings, a three-tiered support system was developed to help teachers deliver proper support to individual students. The next section will discuss how the three-tiered support works in regular educational settings.

2.1.2. Three tiered support used in Finland

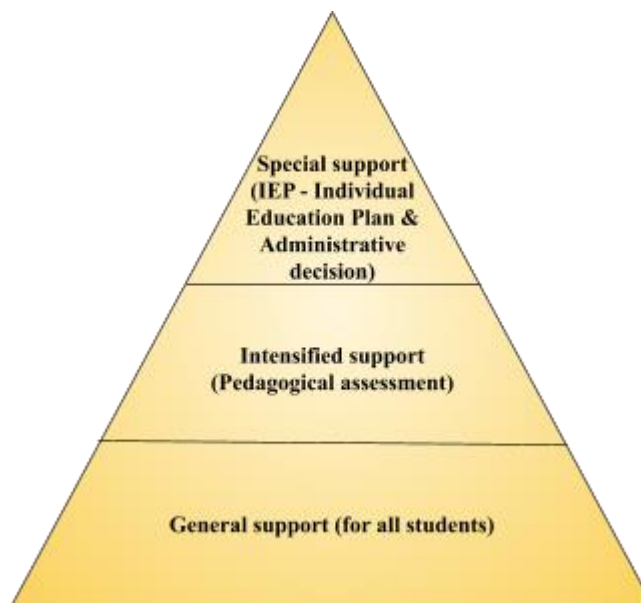


FIGURE 1. Three levels of support for students with special needs in Finland

Under the inclusive perspective, Finnish national curriculum develops a comprehensive system which grants as-early-as-possible intervention and appropriate support for growth, learning and school attendance. The system is constituted by three specified levels: general support, intensified support, and special support in which each student in need can receive only one support at a time.

General support is provided for all students regardless of their physical or mental ability, meaning that all individuals studying at school receive this form of support as a part of daily pedagogical solution when identified the need and their studies follow general curriculum. Then, students will receive the second tier - intensified support designated based on the pedagogical assessment made by in-charge teacher, the student and the student's guardian when they, besides general teaching curriculum, need proportionate forms of support (such as part-time teaching, remedial teaching, teachers' assistants, interpretation services, etc.). In this form of support, part of curriculum is individualized in a case that students study less extensively and have some subjects semi- or full- individualized. Finally, students will receive special support (the third tier) in case the intensified support is insufficient. With this support, all of subjects or syllabi will be individualized and students have less extensive learning time.

In summary, successful implementation of inclusive education largely involves and requires support from various sides such as policy, school, parents, teachers, and so on. However, the most

influential part is from teachers as well as paraeducators in guiding and facilitating students. Paraeducators will be employed to support the second and third tier of the system where they will help teachers and students in academic and behavioural aspects. The next session will discuss the challenges that teachers in these inclusive classes have to face with, giving the answer to the necessity of having paraeducators in the classroom.

2.2. Challenges of teachers in inclusive classroom

The previous paragraph has given a brief overview of inclusive education, teachers and paraeducators' employment in the inclusion program. Therefore, this paragraph will discuss possible challenges with which teachers have to face, leading to the necessity of paraeducators in the inclusive classroom. Inclusive education is seen as “a principled approach to education” (Ainscow & Miles, 2008) whose goal is to grant equal opportunities of education and assist student learning regardless of their differences (Craven, 2015 & Ferreira, 2017). Under this paradigm, all children must be admitted to any school and should be able to participate and achieve in mainstream educational environment, regardless of social status, ethnicity, or developmental specificities including children with disabilities or children with developmental disorders (Katz & Mirenda, 2002; Cornelius & Balakrishnan, 2012). Nevertheless, this paradigm demands transformations in all levels of the school's organization, especially regarding the teaching practices and interactive environment. All the demands impose challenges on teachers when they have to support different students with different special educational needs in their classes, and school report still having difficulties organizing a comprehensive supportive system for all the children. Moreover, challenges with which teachers are facing are well-documented in various research (Valerino, 2014).

There is a vast amount of research about challenges of teachers in implementing inclusive education. A study of schools in Maldives (Nishan, 2018) has investigated and identified challenges that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive practices such as lack of collaboration between teachers and paraeducators, lack of support for teachers, negative attitudes towards students with disruptive behaviors, lack of materials and training and lack of positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Similarly, Humphrey (2014) points out that shortage of support for teachers, lack of motivation and poor salary are the main reasons for a concrete implementation of special education within an inclusive perspective. In another research, the main challenges experienced by teachers are noted as lack of time for consultation and cooperation, unclear work profile and too much background work (Takala, Pirttimaa, & Tormanen, 2009). Furthermore, the teachers also disclose their feeling of loneliness and exhaustion with no support in this study.

Among all the situations that have been reported as restricting the transformations required for the implementation of inclusive education, three major issues should be well noted, namely: (1) constrains in time to assist all children in the classroom, (2) scarce assistance in the mainstream classroom, and (3) negative feelings towards children with special education needs.

First, regular teachers have reported Willis's research (2007) that they felt frustrated when a lot of time passes by when they have to assist students with special educational needs (SEN). In addition, many class teachers share the same feeling that they have to give to students with exceptionalities too much time and attention that decreases those for regular students (Valeo, 2008). Those teachers state that shortage of time puts pressure on them because they have to follow the curriculum in a given period time and attention on students with SEN delays that process. Consequently, this lack of time results from the scarce of assistance.

Second, as mentioned above, the shortage of extra support adds to difficulty for teachers in special educational classes. As stated in OCED (2003), to cater diverse students, it is common pattern that extra assistants should be made available in all schools to assist classes in making school inclusive; therefore, lack of teacher assistants to support classes would be very challenging. Many teachers posit that the cooperation with another teacher in the classroom contributes to assuaging pressures on inclusive achievement (Valeo, 2008). The primary finding in the same study shows that most teachers prefer to share responsibilities for students with SEN with another teacher in the regular classroom. Additionally, lack of assistance in such a diverse class is noted as main reason for teacher to have the early leave in profession (McKay, 2016). Consequently, this raises a strong need of extra adult assistance in the inclusive classroom, supporting the main teacher to do their job.

Finally, with the implementation of inclusive settings, expulsion of students out of classroom due to their disruptive behaviors is unlikely to happen. However, to meet the standard and response to accountability, teachers may resort to exclusion students whose behaviors may affect to achieve their required standard (Phyllis, 2014). In the US, teachers in inclusive classroom still label students with SEN as "challenging" or "problems", using "exclusion as necessary response" to control the classroom (Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013). Therefore, such dilemma leads to teacher's frustration and impatience with disruptive students. In other words, teacher exhibit frustration when dealing with misbehaviors, mishaps, or giving information to specific students to meet the inclusive expectations (Goodrow, 2016). School leaders also posits that as level of teacher's intolerance arises, teachers react adversely to students and behaviour problems accordingly escalate (Pearce, Gray, & Campbell-Evans, 2010). In another study, by applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour in examining teacher attitudes, MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) found that teachers had negative level of willingness towards students with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. This result was

plausibly explained that those teachers still retained their expectation and attitudes towards students in regular class before the application of inclusive practices. Therefore, they might have not been accustomed to the inclusion of students with special educational needs. Then, it can be inferred that they need an extra hand in dealing with behaviour difficulties.

With these challenges, it is indicative of the need of an assistance or an aide that allow teachers feel supported when running inclusive classes. One of support which has been proved effective is the additional adult support (Goodrow, 2016). Thus, the following text will discuss the use of additional adult assistance and depict their roles in inclusive classrooms.

2.3. Employment of paraeducators

It has been confirmed that effectiveness and success of the inclusive classroom depend on not only teachers but also a certain number of assistants or aids or paraeducators. In the contrast to the previous paragraph mentioning teacher's challenges, this paragraph will delve into paraeducators' roles, emphasizing how essential they are but little amount of research paid to their challenges.

2.3.1. Definition of paraeducators

The term "paraeducator" coined from the prefix "para", which means "alongside", with "educator" is synonymous with teacher's aide or teaching assistant. It refers to a person who works alongside with one or more certified teachers or educators aids them in an educational setting. (Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan et al., 2012; Cook, Richardson-Gibbs & Dotson, 2018). Therefore, in this study, "paraeducators" (PA) or "teaching assistant" (TA) will be used interchangeably. The notion of teaching assistants have first been introduced in the UK since 1960s (Open Learn, 2019) to perform support duty to students in primary schools. Now, the number of TAs are emerging in different contexts, playing an essential role in supporting students' learning. In this study, TAs will be discussed in a smaller scope, which is about TAs helping students with special education needs (SEN) in mainstream schools.

In Finland, the "paraeducator" program was first launched in 1967 (Leikas & Rantio, 2003, cited in Takala, 2007). According to Basic Education Act (1998), a disabled student or a student with special educational needs has additionally assistance services for the rehabilitation free of charge. The presence of paraeducators in supporting students with special educational needs is proved to be the primary key to implement inclusive education setting (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002).

As a result, understanding paraeducator's roles clearly is necessary to maximize their effectiveness in the classroom.

2.3.2. Paraeducators' roles

The contribution of paraeducators is of critical importance in inclusive education classroom, which leads to a numerous research on PAs' roles and impact in the classroom. Takala (2007) states that paraeducators (classroom assistants in the author's article) have to perform a diversity of tasks involving assisting the teacher, assisting the pupils, and teaching independently an individual, a small group, or even a whole class. In the broadest view, paraeducators or teaching assistant involve in two major responsibilities: assisting the main teacher and supporting students. However, Watkinson (2008) claims that TA roles are much more complex and varied. Then, the author also separates TA's work into four strands: Supporting pupils, supporting teachers, supporting curriculum and supporting the school. These categories once were suggested by Department for Education and Employment (2000) as a four-level support framework.

Student supporting is the first level of support in this framework. According to Watkinson (2008), PAs describe this role as "the most job satisfaction". In this area, PAs work closely with students that they can understand individual students with varied "nature of condition, age, and stage", develop individual educational plans or even provide advice to teachers on related students' needs. As supporting students is the major duty, an extended insight on how PAs support students with SEN (Wren, 2017) has classified into five groups.

- Academic support

It is considered the center of PA role as mentioned by main teachers, PAs themselves, and students. PAs may work as "interpreter", conveying information from the teacher to students (Watkinson, 2017). Usually, PAs will explain the instructions and guide students how to do assignments individually or in groups. Besides, they also help students with reading or writing depending on students' needs and condition. Furthermore, PAs, in some circumstances, substitute teachers to teach the whole class (Takala, 2007). Additionally, PAs will do the scaffolding job to ensure the students' completion of different learning tasks (Watkinson, 2017). It's the utmost important goal in supporting student learning is to motivate students to become an independent learner and enhance academic engagement.

- Behavioural support

This kind of support has risen controversial discussions on the definition of paraeducator roles. Clayton (1993) points out that paraeducators do not place high priority on behavioural management in their assistance. This argument has been reminded in Cajkler and Tennant's study which found that the support of disruptive behaviors is absent from paraeducator role description. In contrast, Causton-Theoharis (2009) argues paraeducator's reaction to such behaviors is critically important factor of student success. Furthermore, behavioural support is believed to be the most common and various type of support (Wren, 2017). With this aspect, PAs often help students in different ways according to students' behavioural needs. For example, they can intervene in conflicts and help solve disputes among students. For restless students, PAs can approach and sit calmly beside the students and they can recognize emotional difficulty which hinder students and other class members' learning progress and bring emotional support to students (Watkinson, 2008). Especially, for some students with diverse disorders who need more attention, sympathy and assistance...

- Social support

Students with SEN have difficulty socializing, playing and communicating with others. Therefore, PAs will help those students with social engagement in a proper manner. For those with hearing or speech impairment, PAs will help sound out the words, enabling students to clearly express their ideas (Wren, 2017). In addition, PAs have friendly discussions with these students, giving praise or encouragement to develop SEN students' social interaction (Takala, 2007). Besides in the classroom, the support continues outdoors, like at recess (Neal, 2013).

- Physical support

This kind of support relates to physically moving students from one place to another as following the class teacher's seating arrangements or as separating students with disruptive behaviors from others not to affect the learning. Takala, in her own study, identifies nurturing students like taking them to the nurse or taking care of medication for the students as one of eleven tasks that requires teacher aide assistance (Takala, 2007).

Teacher supporting is the second level of support in this framework. Assisting teachers is considered the essential part of PA's work. This role can be grouped into two main categories.

- Classroom support

Hardly do teachers deny the role of PAs that they stated most of the learning tasks would not be completed without PAs. While teacher give instructions, PAs will be ones explaining to individual or groups of students, helping them complete the tasks. When there are behavioural issues of

classroom arouse, PAs will move the students, separating students with disruptive or aggressive manners from the class, insuring the continuity in the classroom.

- Emotional support

Teachers claim that PAs are like their “hands, eyes, ears in the classroom” (Watkinson, 2008), understanding difficulty in teaching students with SEN, listening to their moans and other problems. It’s only PAs, who, together with the class teachers, understand the nature of individual students and classroom, to emotionally and mentally support and coordinate with the class teacher.

Curriculum supporting is the third level of support in this framework. Since the introduction of PAs program is effective, the partnership of two adults in a classroom has affected the curriculum (Watkinson, 2008). The presence of PAs enables the implementation of particular curriculum in many ways. They can support students in solving a math problem, make a complete pair in English speaking class, help a hand in class projects and so on. Additionally, PAs involve considerable adaptation and modification of the curriculum, materials or activities. In terms of students, PAs are aware of students’ ability, difficulty, behaviour, and needs. In regard to teachers, they understand the teacher’s instruction and purposes. Consequently, for the sake of supporting students, PAs will modify related materials to make the activity or work easier and funnier (Downing et al., 2000). PAs are indicated to make a meaningful contribution to “quality and breadth of the curriculum”, allowing the curriculum successfully implemented (Offsted, 2002).

School supporting is the fourth level of support in this framework. Schools are regarded as message systems; as a result, in the development of professional learning community and an invitational environment, each individual in the school has responsibilities in bringing a sense of respect, congeniality and connectedness in and outside the school (Davies, 2009; Purkey & Novak, 2008). Watkinson also adds that schools, amounting to high standards, are “visibly welcoming and organized places”, manifesting in various aspects of physical surroundings, emotional or cultural contexts (Watkinson, 2007). Therefore, PAs, as a joint member in the school, help the school achieve this goal by establishing trusting, motivating and supportive relationships with colleagues, students, and parents.

In addition to advocating the school policy regarding to students and teachers, sharing the same direction with the school, building constructive network with students and colleagues, PAs are reported to make significant contribution to the improvement of school-parent relations (French,

2003). It is suggested that PAs are information bridges between the school and parents, connecting teachers, school, and parents in sharing and discussing information about the students in and after school life for the development of the student.

In conclusion, with the increasing number of paraeducators, their roles are meticulously defined as supporters for students, teachers, curriculum and school, to serve the ultimate aim of inclusion education. Furthermore, as seen in the above discussion, the complexity of paraeducator's roles is undeniable that they also have no less challenges than the main teachers. Paraeducators can be considered the right hand of teachers in inclusive classrooms; hence, understanding paraeducator's difficulty and listening to their job expectation to support them is, without doubt, essentially valuable in practicing inclusive approach.

3. METHODOLOGY

The thesis's target is to address these following objectives within comprehensive school context:

- Identifying challenges that paraeducators encounter during their job.
- Identifying their expectation to the addressed challenges of the job; thus, understanding their expectations can enhance the effectiveness of paraeducator's deployment in the classroom.

This chapter will describe procedures in data collection from paraeducators currently in charge at different comprehensive schools, through which the challenges and their solutions are to be revealed during data analysis. Some limitations will also be presented.

3.1. *Data collection*

3.1.1. Participant and settings

This is a qualitative research that studies paraeducators' perceptions in two mainstream comprehensive schools in Tampere. Based on the National Core Curriculum (2014), these comprehensive school organizes special education classes, mostly for primary level. The students from these classes present different types of special educational needs. Participants were chosen following three criteria:

- currently supporting inclusive classes in comprehensive schools in Finland
- who are qualified by the recognition from Finnish National Agency for Education
- minimum of two years of experience in assistance

The reason for choosing such participants is because they have gained relatively enough time to fully experience school routines, acknowledge their professional roles and evaluate the challenges of this job. Those newly joining this career are not included because they might give biases or wrong evaluations about their job.

To conduct this research, I visited to some comprehensive schools in Tampere and asked for the contacts of paeducators working in those schools, asking their agreement to participate in the study. At the end of the interview, the participants were asked to introduce their colleagues either in

the same or different schools in Tampere region as long as they fulfill requirements. In addition, I also emailed to principals of some schools for their paraeducators' emails. This kind of technique allowed me to extend the network with other qualified interviewees. Moreover, this triangular relationship among the first participant and the invitees reinforced the trustworthiness for both the interviewees who could easily accept their participation in the interview and the researcher who could potentially collect quality responses. Furthermore, even though making use of reliable connections, not all suggested participants were invited to the interview; however, a cross-check step was done to ensure that all participants met the requirements of sampling before sending email of invitation. Thanks to that method, 15 contacts were obtained, of which 10 of them agreed to participate in the interview.

After confirming the participation, the interviewees chose the appropriate time according to their schedule to conduct the interview. The interview was supposed to last at least 30 minutes, but it is open to extend in case the participants would like to share more. I made a total of 10 interviews (eight off-line and 2 online through Skype meeting) and employed only 6 as data. The reason for reducing the data to 6 interviews only because 4 interviews did not meet the stated requirements. One interviewee used to work as a paraeducators, but now is working as a teacher of inclusive classroom; one interviewee is working at special education school, not at a comprehensive school. The other two are working as a teacher of mother tongue for non-native Finnish students and assisting them with Finnish in doing schoolwork. Out of 6 interviews, there are 4 females and 2 males. In order to easily refer and identify a paraeducator in the study, they will be labelled as PA, and numbered from 1-6 in which PA1, PA2, PA3 and PA4 are from the same school while the rest are from another school in Tampere. The list of interviewees can be seen in Appendix 1.

3.1.2. Semi-structured interviews

Preparation

From the beginning, the semi-structured interview is used for these following advantages. First, this method enables me to ask further questions based on participant's responses, especially *why* and *how* questions to delve into participant's perceptions (Adams, 2015). Open-ended questions coming up during the interviews will permit the research to explore further details. In addition, three interviews were conducted via Skype at the participants' convenience. However, some interviews conducted via Skype engender a concern about the absence of non-verbal cues and interactive communications (Balushi, 2018). Fortunately, all online interviews were video calls, so there was

not much difference from face-to-face ones because both sides could see each other and freely expressed non-verbal messages.

Understanding the nature of semi-structured interviews, the interview was followed five-phase framework (Kallio, Petila, & Kangasniemi, 2016). First, requirements were identified for using this kind of interview which were appropriate to study the participant's opinions towards a complex issues and intentions. Second, due to the sparse knowledge in the paraeducator's challenges, previous knowledge based on articles about teacher's challenges is used to connect with the necessity of paraeducators and deepen into their challenges. Then, preliminary outline of interview was formulated including main questions and possible follow-up questions. Next, a pilot testing was conducted counting with collaborators that are also professionals in the field of education. This field pilot testing allowed me to detect any ambiguity in the questions, evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of questions, and especially estimate needed time to complete an interview. Finally, after receiving feedback from the trial interview, the set of interview questions was completed. Following all five steps contributes to "credibility, confirmability and dependability of the study" (Kallio et al., 2016) which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The interview consists of four parts, starting with some questions related to the background of the interviewees, including their year of experiences, their interest in education field and some feelings towards the current job. Then, the main interview was divided into three themes: (i) the background of their class including the number of students, describing a day at class, the number of working hours, (ii) the challenges as being a paraeducator regarding the interaction with the class teacher, with students, with the administrators, and (iii) and finally their suggestion of solution to the encountered challenges, together with their advice for those who want to be an assistant in special educational class. The interview outline can be found in Appendix 3.

An information sheet was composed including the introduction, purpose of this research, what to expect if the attendees agree to participate in the research, possible advantages and disadvantages, length of time, and anonymity of personal information. The information sheet could be found in Appendix 2. Next, individual potential interviewees were contacted via emails, asking their approval of participation, attaching the information sheet and suggesting possible times to perform the interview. Out of 15 contacts, 10 interviews were conducted during May and June 2019. Finally, 6 interviews were valid for data analysis.

During the interview

All face-to-face interviews were conducted in library near the school where paraeducators are working. This allowed convenience, effectiveness and saving time for the participants because it did

not require much travelling to the interview location; furthermore, the interviews took place in such quiet location allowing the sense of reflection and concentration for the participants so that it was easier for them to share their thoughts. However, two of interviews was conducted via Skype because the interviewees worked at a different school and I had very limited time to come there. With this means of interview, I realized the disadvantages which were likely to happen such as poor connection, and particularly the feeling of untrustworthiness from the interviewees towards the researcher. Therefore, the researcher asked if the interviewees preferred video call or audio call, and all of them agreed to have video calls so that both sides could see each other and they felt comfortable to express their stories and feelings.

The language use is English because all of the interviewees were comfortable at speaking English. However, some of them wished to have it in Finnish which is their native language. This use of English language at times might cause the interviewees some embarrassing moments when they did not know what word to explain. At that time, their responses were paraphrased or another word was suggested which was comprehensible to both sides.

To start the interview, the purpose of the interviews, the study and the confidentiality of participants and information were mentioned. Furthermore, the participants were also asked to confirm their agreement on being audio recorded. Concurrently, I took notes of all interviews (besides recording) so that I could follow what the interviewees were talking about and ask extra questions for further details if needed.

Followed the outline of the interview, the topic of the discussion is about paraeducators' daily tasks when assisting a special education class, challenges and difficulty, and the support for them. Questions were asked regarding their inner feelings, their types of class, their relationship with class teachers, students, and student's parents, school administrators, and their solutions. Some silent times were adopted so that participants were encouraged to feeling expression and self-reflection. Then, after each answers, I paraphrased or shortly summarised what they had said to confirm the information. Additionally, based on given information, further questions were ask to clarify if anything is unclear or if any point was importantly contributory to the research.

To end the interview, I made a brief statement of main points having been discussed and thanked the interviewees for their participation and contribution to the study. Last but not least, I asked them to introduce their colleagues whose background was similar to them so that the researcher could contact and conduct similar interviews for the study.

After the interview

With a full carefulness, the researcher transcribed all the interviews verbatim. In addition, the researcher contacted the interviewee in case of any unclarity.

3.2. Data analysis

3.2.1. Content analysis

The study's objective is to identify challenges and needs of a specific group of people by grouping them into categories rather than building theory or relating relationship among different themes. In view of the research target, qualitative content analysis is employed as data analysis method. The original definition of content analysis shows that it is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p.18). However, currently, content analysis is redefined as a research technique "for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2018, p.18). Furthermore, content analysis is also described as a method that "classifies written or oral materials into identified categories of similar meanings" (Moretti et al., 2011). In short, content analysis is a systematic research method which analyzes and makes inferences from the texts from various sources of qualitative information like from interviews, documents, focus groups or open-ended questions. Consequently, in light of the characteristics of the research, this method of data analysis is utilized because of following reasons. Firstly, the research's interest is to identify the challenges and expectations of paraeducators and thus improve the quality of their job rather than looking into the influences of these challenges on their job. Secondly, content analysis is frequently applied "to answer questions such as what, why and how, and the common patterns in the data are searched for" (Heikkilä & Ekman, 2003); as a result, it satisfies the requirement of answering the research questions including *what* questions followed by *why* and *how* open-ended questions. Lastly, the underlying meaning of the statements or responses of the interviewees must be identified whereas coding in content analysis is able to present the both manifest and latent content meaning of communications (Ahuvia, 2001).

3.2.2. Coding data

Coding is the process that data is classified into meaning categories. This process could be viewed at *Figure 2* (Krippendorff, 2018).

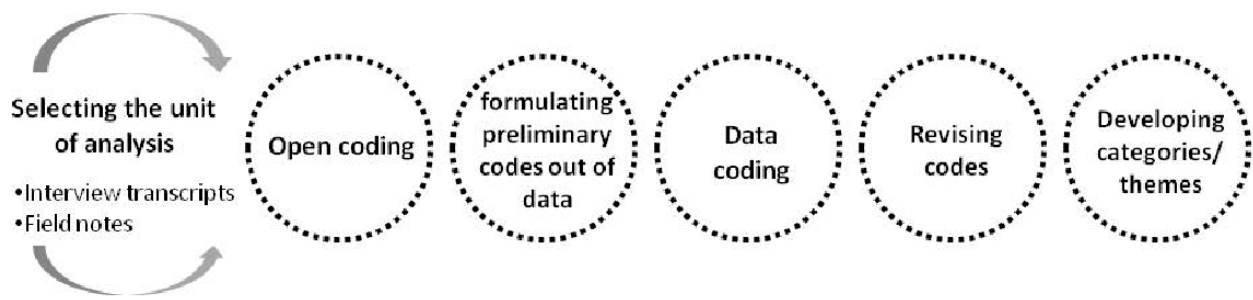


FIGURE 2. Steps of the inductive approach in qualitative content analysis

Due to no prior knowledge of categories of this study, to answer the research questions, I chose an inductive approach to qualitative content analysis for this study:

- what are the challenges of a paraeducator encountering in their job?
- what are their expectations corresponding to each challenge encountered?

First, texts are extracted from interview transcripts to identify challenges and needs of paraeducators have in special educational class in comprehensive schools. Then, the texts were divided and established into units of analysis. Next, the whole text was attentively scanned word by word for the open coding. After open coding, preliminary codes were formulated. At any data which did not belong to existing preliminary code, a new code was added. Subsequently, similar codes were grouped in one category. Thereafter, categories were revised to place in broader categories and finalized into two main themes. By implementing this procedure, the codes and themes are summarized in Coding Table which can be found in Appendix.

3.3. *Validity-Reliability*

The evaluation method of the quality and trustworthiness of this research is based on a different set of criteria offered by Guba, namely truth value (validity), consistency and confirmability (reliability), applicability (generalisability) (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cho & Lee, 2014). This part will discuss each criteria to ensure the credibility.

3.3.1. Truth value

Truth value refers to which the data truly reflects participants' knowledge and replies. Therefore, in this study, all data was collected on grounds of participant's willingness to share their

opinions and availability to clarify during data analysis. Moreover, semi-structured audio recorded interviews permits the researcher to re-access and check the raw data at any time in case of unclarity or misunderstanding. Finally, participant's accounts were meticulously transcribed verbatim to diminish the misinterpretation and increase the transparency of data. During the transcription process, the participants and researcher still kept in touch, so that inviting interviewees could comment on the transcript in the event of any skewed information.

3.3.2. Consistency and Confirmability

Consistency can be reached via “audit trail” whether this research follows the standard of research procedure. Therefore, from the beginning, the researcher outlined transparent description of the research process and kept track of it from the records to the transcriptions and to the data interpretation to maintain the whole process, lasting from the aim to method, a coherence. In addition, themes emerging from codes and texts were brought to discuss with the third party who also works in education research field and was not influenced by the mentioned assumptions.

Confirmability, or *neutrality*, refers to the findings which were based on participants' responses, but not any bias or potential motives of the researcher. Therefore, this value was maintained by recruiting participants without prior relationship, ensuring that findings accurately portray the participants' responses, but are not skewly interpreted and assumed by the relationship between the researcher and participants.

3.3.3. Applicability

Applicability, or transferability, is the capacity that its findings applies to other contexts on the condition that the researcher provides “boundaries of the study” or the background data including contexts, restriction of participant type, employment of data collection and time period (Shenton, 2004). To ensure this characteristic, the researcher devised a checklist of prerequisites of participant selection and detailed description of contexts. Hence, findings and conclusions are able to facilitate succeeding research which shares similar settings.

4. RESULTS

In this chapter, by analyzing participants' discourse, two topics regarding challenges and expectations/solutions are identified and discussed in relation to possible four categories involving the interaction with students, teachers, administrators and external factors.

4.1. Challenges and expectations regarding interaction with students

4.1.1. Challenges of interaction with students with special educational needs

All paraeducators in this study posited that interaction with students were the most challenging part of this job because the student's aggressive behaviors are unpredictable. The impulsive acts include physical attacks and verbal attacks. All 6 interviews reported that aggressive behaviors were normal and regular.

"It's normal in a special education group that some students hit a teacher. I have difficulty with the student. First I didn't know how to react. I tell to the main teacher what happened to me. We set up a meeting with her parents..... Another case is a boy who had problem with behaviour. He beat and kicked me very badly." (PA 1)

"The difficulty of this job is when they get angry....they shout, hit, and bite." (PA 2)

"The biggest difficulty of this job is to receive physical attacks..... Sometimes you get hit. I have been spitted, too." (PA 3)

"They throw things, and even throw fists to me." (PA 4)

"It's always their aggression. Their behaviors are unpredictable. They can suddenly hit you, shout loud, or throw things when you don't pay attention to them." (PA 5)

"If it comes to what makes the job the most difficult, it would be "students" that is the biggest challenge. You always meet the threat of violence and frustration when the student is unable to study for his own behavior." (PA 6)

Apart from physical attacks, two of six paraeducators also mentioned receiving negative words from students.

"I have been cursed." (PA 3)

“They can shout, say bad words, pound the table, scream, and even break things, anything in their hands at that time.” (PA 6)

When being asked how to deal with these attacks, they all confirmed that approaching them in a calm manner is the best solution, trying to separate students from the causing situation and let them calm. In addition, the PA 3 emphasized that paraeducators should ask help from other adults if the situation get worse.

“Taking him or her outside to calm down.” (PA 1)

“My job is to take them, hold them so they will calm down.” (PA 2)

“At that time, I just try to hold them tight to prevent them from further serious acts, but also to calm them” (PA 4)

“In such situation, do not react. Try to protect yourself. And try to be as calm as possible because if a teacher reacts aggressively or strongly, then the student starts to be more serious... Try to calm the situation by my own behavior.” (PA 3)

Paraeducators also expressed that they took a long time to stay calm with these fits of anger. Two of paraeducators admitted they used to feel frightened when they had to deal with unrestrained aggression in the beginning of doing this job.

“In some first years, it was really tired when I came home....” (PA 3)

“At the beginning of this job, when I first started this job, I felt a bit frightening, felt unsafe...” (PA 5)

However, they are by degrees accustomed to abrupt manners and know how to deal with unexpected outbursts.

“Everything with you was a sudden. Later, you will recognize some signs. I try to see before. Like, he may be little bit not calm. You have to expect when that student is going to “explode.” (PA 2)

“In some first years, it was really tired when I came home, and you know... But with time, you will grow kind of armor...you will learn to cope with these incidents. You are expected to get those hits. Nowadays, if I get hits from students, I don't react much.... I don't see it as a problem. You are gradually used to get hits, beaten, or cursed.” (PA 3)

“At the beginning of this job, when I first started this job, I felt a bit frightening, felt unsafe because you would easily get hurt. But then, I feel familiar. I must “smell” and I must have “feelers.” (PA 5)

One interview also shared an advice conducive to keep calm manner towards aggressive behaviors:

“It is not easy as start because you will feel frightened when somebody beats you and behave aggressively. My approach is I see that person is not aggressive or scary. He or she may be feeling bad and those behaviors are not towards me, but something else. Something else is the matter, the cause. I am something in a way, and I am not the reason of his madness. And I figure out that this is not my fault and maneuver the situation and it will solve itself.” (PA 3)

One noticeable point in their response was that students will not act the same with the class teacher, which means the aggressive manners occur with paraeducators more frequently than with the main teachers. According to paraeducators in the study, hardly do the class teacher receive hostile behaviors from students, but it is paraeducators who directly receive the attacks. They all explained the cause of this divergence originated from the difference in intimacy between students – paraeducators and students – teachers.

“The main teacher will not do this [take them, hold them, hug them]. Of course, she helps, but she helps the rest of the class, so my job is to do that with the students.” (PA 2)

“The students do not act similarly towards the teacher because usually, they [students] feel teachers like the boss. And they feel teacher assistants are more friend-like, so they think it is easier to hit their peers. Moreover, PAs are closer to students, I mean physically. PAs are always near while teachers are over there teaching, so it is easier to punch something next to them rather someone couple meters away. So, one reason is PA are nearby and usually jump in to solve any situation; another reason is the students think PA like peers.” (PA 3)

“...the students often share their thoughts with us - assistants rather than the teacher because we are closer to students than the teacher. When they get angry, it's us who approach and resolve the incident. It's the time I can explain to them, and they listen, understand, and that's why they share more stories to us. It's easier to build amicability with them. However, it brings you more “chance” to get frown upon.” (PA 4)

“Because they can sense that I am their friends, they easily show their emotions at the extreme. They feel safe to show outbursts.” (PA 5)

“Because teachers are more, I mean, severe. They do not feel as close as paraeducators like us. They sense that they can have a friendship with us, so after that, they are no more afraid to...hurt us. They don't get punishment when they hurt us. Yes, we don't often inflict punishment, because we understand them.” (PA 6)

Despite facing with these problems which could be recurring every day, paraeducators assured their determination to continue this job. First, they understand that receiving violence acts physically and verbally is unavoidable. One paraeducator stated that dealing the belligerent practice of these students is the nature of this job.

“Actually, to me, nothing more challenging than dealing with students. However, it does not mean I hate them or this job. I just want to mention the diverse range of difficult of working with students.” (PA 4)

“...we get more “throws, but, yeah, it’s a part of this job. When they throw anger to us, we must help them throw negative feelings away.” (PA 6)

However, more importantly, together with feeling familiar with aggression and abruptness, paraeducators grow their understanding and dedication to the students. None of interviewees showed their frustration or disaffection to the kids as well as their disruptive behaviors. Furthermore, they indicated that there is no likelihood to change their role as paraeducators. Instead, their solely wish is to approach the students to help them become more mature in controlling behavior.

“I love the kids. It is not because I answer your interview and say so. I say real. Yes, I get hurt outside, but seeing their anger hurts me more. I don’t want them hurt. I want to soothe them.” (PA 1)

“You have longer relationship with the children, and you can see him growing from this bit to this big...

.... I can communicate with children a lot more...I can be a bit more like their friend, not their boss. I can do much more with children than a teacher can. That is my opinion. I can be closer to the students.... And with children, I can be more parent-like or friend-like than the teachers...

.... PA does not have to be pushing other children. We find more friendly way to address a kid. You can talk to them more about their life, their weekend or hobbies. The conversation is more friend-like than with the teacher...” (PA 3)

“...it’s difficult, but I never think to quit this job. I know students sometimes are hard, but they do not really mean so. They are just unable to control their emotions and, on the way, to learn, to adjust their expressions and acts accordingly.” (PA 4)

“In reality, I must know the pupil. I must understand them as understand a friend and share their emotions as well as stories. I can’t treat them like teacher and student. To support them, I must sympathize like friends understand each other.... it’s still very challenging, but I never think I will give up this job and give up on them. They need us....

...I don’t think to become a teacher. I am happy with the job now. I can have close relationship with students.” (PA 5)

“They sense that they can have a friendship with us.... I work with them a lot, making friendship, building trust, so that they trust us, and say things, so we get more “throws. They [students] understand they’re incapable of doing something, then they get angry with themselves, and find the most possible outlet. And it’s us whom they pour their emotions on.... When they throw anger to us, we must help them throw negative feelings away....

...No, I will not stop this job to become a teacher. I love kids. I love seeing them getting older and older every day.” (PA 6)

In summary, students with their disruptive behaviors exhibiting at physical and verbal aggression are considered the major challenge that paraeducators in this study encounter. However, all paraeducators possess positive attitudes towards these challenges and maintain their devotion to assist the students to become more independent.

4.1.2. Paraeducator's expectation of the interaction with the students

As discussed above, it is a consensus among paraeducators on the considerable difficulties raised by students with special learning needs; yet, interviewed paraeducators affirm their passion in this job. Simultaneously, those paraeducators expressed their expectation from students which is a significant contributor to their devotion.

Emotional control

It turns out that students' increasing ability of handling emotions and negative expressions brings the paraeducators the most satisfactory. Two of paraeducators shared that seeing the students grow at managing their temper is the good side of being an assistant among challenges they have to encounter every day.

“When they start their school year, their journey, they can be bad at controlling their temper. But at the end of the school year, they have learnt something, they can become better. I can see the progress and that feeling is very rewarding, seeing somebody developing and learning something. So, that is positive side besides negative sides.” (PA 3)

“I want to see them grow up, go mature. Of course, they have the right to express their feelings. But, it means, they will show emotions in a more proper way rather screaming and hitting things.” (PA 5)

Paraeducators showed their understanding towards students' behaviors and expected a positive change of controlling emotions from students. According to paraeducators, witnessing their students' progress of emotion self-control or at least properly expressing negative emotions is the only thing they want from students and which helps them stay with the job.

Academic achievement

Together with the development of temper control, student's academic achievement is also expected, which claims the most rewarding feeling of paraeducators. Four of paraeducators talk about student's academic achievement as the student's ability to adapt to regular classes. At the finest indication, this is also the goal of inclusive education that educators aim at.

I hope I can see them graduate from the secondary school. That would be amazing. The goal of this education is to help them get to the same level with other kids.” (PA 3)

Seeing them gradually adapt to regular classes is my biggest hope.” (PA 4)

When they can do a math problem themselves or show me a picture they draw, I feel “That’s far enough to stay in this job”. Actually, I want to say goodbye to them, too. It means they are now included in regular class. It means they don’t need more special support from me.” (PA 5)

I try my best to bring them to regular classes. You know, some students started with very low motivation for study and school. So, if they smile more, laugh more when studying, and later they go to higher schools, they get a job, it’s the present for me. One of my students now is the hairdresser.” (PA 6)

Like other teachers, paraeducators also believe in their students’ academic progress in which they can study better and reach the same level as regular kids. Understanding those expectations will help paraeducators find a suitable approach to support the kids to grow emotionally and academically.

4.2. Challenges and expectations regarding interaction with the class teacher

4.2.1. Challenges of interaction with the class teacher

This study, from paraeducator’s perspectives, shows two prominent challenges may happen when they work with class teachers. By analyzing paraeducators’ responses, two challenges when interacting with teachers were identified as following.

Different opinions in helping students

It is clearly shown in the data that most of paraeducators, except paraeducator 2, find it difficult when they and class teachers have different opinions in helping students.

“Because the main teacher and the assistant don’t have the same idea about something; I got confused sometimes what to do.” (PA 1)

“We sometimes have disagreement of doing something... Usually, I may be like instructing them to do this way. Otherwise, the teacher does not like that. She has her own way, and you instruct the students otherwise.” (PA 3)

“Usually, it’s only about the way I guide the students to do homework. Sometimes, the teacher does not agree that I am likely to give too clear instructions as if I was going to show them the answers” (PA 4)

“We are teachers, you know, so there are not many problems. But yes, we still have some different thinking about one thing, one way to approach a problem.” (PA 5)

“There may be different approaches in dealing with student’s bad behaviors or how to solve a math problem. But no big deal. We can have a chat later, talking about it.” (PA 6)

Noticeably, all paraeducators who talked about different thinking with teachers claimed that it is a minor problem. There is one paraeducator who stated that she had no problem with the current teacher-in-charge because she has worked with the teacher for a long time and understand each other.

“No, I don’t have any difficulty working with the class teacher. We have worked so many years, so we know the other thinks.” (PA 2)

However, this paraeducator, pointed out that long term working with the teacher will lead to the mutual understanding and thereby reduce trivial conflicts between two adults in class. In one study, teachers are noted as being less happy at working with another adult (Symes, 2011). Takala (2009) also points out that teachers who are not used to working with other adults may find it “disturbing”. In her later study, Takala (2017) also stressed how paraeducators can avoid teacher’s frustration by understanding teacher’s expectation. Similarly, some other paraeducators in this study share this opinion, emphasizing the importance of understanding the teacher working with.

“If you have a new teacher, it takes some months to learn how to work together. If you get a new teacher every year, it’s very hard because you must first know the teacher and what she wants me to do, what she is thinking about working with the students.” (PA 2)

“Moreover, it depends on a teacher who like assistants to be active or not. As an assistant, you not only read the students but also read the teacher...”

To some teachers, they think this [paraeducator’s intervention] is quite disruptive. They [Teachers] would rather you to be in the shadow, quieter, helping exactly what they say. Some teachers see paraeducators as disruptive force there [class]. However, there’s several cases that assistants just wait and do when asked, and teachers don’t like that too.” (PA 3)

“I have worked for three teachers in four years. It’s not that easy to know what the right thing to do is or if you should jump in or not. There was one teacher who did not like me to come to a student in need at once while other teachers asked me to be less waiting and more active. You know, you have to adapt to their styles every year.” (PA 4)

“It depends on teacher’s persona...I have to work flexibly with them. So, when you are new to them, you don’t get what they mean, so they are a bit annoyed.” (PA 5)

“The teacher always expect what paraeducator is going to help and paraeducator must know what the teacher is expecting them to help. Otherwise, there would be, like, a ‘short traffic jam’ in assisting in the classroom” (PA 6)

As seen in the data, three of participants stated it is of importance to read the teacher, indicating that paraeducators must understand the teacher they are working with. PA 3 also added that some

teachers prefer active paraeducators while others do not. On the contrary, some paraeducators just wait and do when asked while teachers would like them to be active. PA_3 emphasizes that such situations lead to a subtle disagreement and weak rapport between the teacher and the paraeducator. The difference in working styles and expectation of different teachers causes a challenge for paraeducators in making sense of their teaching's thinking.

Teachers' disregard for paraeducators

Another problem with the teacher that should be mentioned is paraeducator's voice which is not always heard while their attachment with students with SEN are more direct than anyone else, including the class teacher (Chambers, 2015). This kind of "underappreciated" feeling could be found in Burton and Goodman's study (2011). Takala (2017) suggests that teachers have to handle many things, giving a reason for teacher's absent-mindedness in paraeducator's existence. Some paraeducators report that they feel underutilized by just standing there and doing nothing. In addition, they sometimes feel "ill at ease, devalued and invisible" (Chambers, 2015) in the classroom. Similarly, paraeducators in the interview also admitted that teachers not only do not appreciate their presence but also ignore their recommendation, which leads to the feeling of difficulty in working with the teacher in class.

"She has her own idea, and I give my own ideas if she prefers, but she usually goes on with her own ideas. For example, I suggested 10 instructions, maybe 2 or 3 of them are preferred to do... I felt quite bad, but it's ok. She's more experienced than me." (PA 1)

"Sometimes I feel a bit redundant here...I am told to sit at the back of the class, observing, and only come to help the assigned student" (PA 2)

"A lot of PAs feels taken for granted, they would be liked if work in the shadow. They are preferred to be in the background" (PA 3)

"I just follow her directions. But, you know, sometimes, I think I have another way. I suggest. Sometimes she listens, sometimes she doesn't. Anyway, she's a teacher, more qualified and experienced than me." (PA 5)

It is clearly shown in the data that paraeducators are willing to support and stay active in the classroom. However, teachers prefer them not to intervene so much in the classroom. Moreover, teachers are likely to stick to their own approach rather than consider paraeducator's supportive ideas. Moreover, it is indicated that even though the existence of paraeducators is essential, teachers tend to perform leadership in the classroom. Neglect of paraeducator's availability and disregard for their ideas add to the difficulty of this job when paraeducators need to figure out how to best support both students and teachers without disturbing their lessons.

In this study, understanding teacher's expectation and receiving teacher's disregard were claimed to be paraeducator's challenges, thus, they share some thoughts to overcome the conflict and maximize their deployment.

4.2.2. Expectations of interaction with the teachers

Increasing communication opportunity

Discussion and negotiation is believed to be the best channel to increase the collaboration between the teacher and the paraeducator. Saving some time for the communication between teacher and paraeducator is proved to be effective (Cauton-Theoharis, 2009). It is also paraeducator's expectation that class teachers had better arrange more meetings with them in advance, so that they can understand the goal of daily lessons and what the teacher expect from them.

“One good support for me is to be honest to each other's working style by talking what she expects for me, if she wants me to help in this way or that way.” (PA 1)

One of the paraeducators (PA 3) confirmed that lack of meetings and talks negatively affects the interaction in the classroom.

“It is more difficult we don't discuss, and argument may come. I think if I have more time to talk to discuss, it will help a lot when working with the teacher...That's why I need discussion with teachers beforehand how they would like PA to act, so there will not be much disagreement because all teachers need PAs support.”

That paraeducator suggested that mini meetings should be encouraged and short talks which last roughly 5-10 minutes before class will be of great use. Correspondingly, this idea accorded with other paraeducator's opinions.

“Usually, at the end of the week, we talk about the last week and prepare for the new week. And 5-10mins before class, we have mini meetings to know what tasks the teacher wants me to do today.” (PA 3)

“Discussion will help. I think we need to discuss before classes what the teacher wants to do on that day, and both should agree on each other's method.” (PA 4)

“I want to have meeting before class. Then, we can discuss first. It's not good to argue, even very slightly, in the class.” (PA 5)

“Usually, she [the class teacher] will guide me immediately in the class. We have, like a long meeting, only to prepare for a special upcoming event or a school project. I think it's better to meet and discuss lesson plan in advance. Maybe I can contribute something to hers. That's [the meeting] the support for me to work better”. (PA 6)

Besides wishing more talks and plans with the teacher in advance, Paraeducator 5 mentioned the necessity of the teacher's communication with students. That paraeducator showed her appreciation of receiving help with addressing student's behaviors from the teacher.

"I hope they talk to students more when they behave badly. It's not like helping me solve a disruptive situation, but talk in free time, sharing stories with them more or comfort them at recess. I know it's our job but if the teacher gives a hand in this, I think students will become better sooner. I know they need to be strict to keep class in order, but showing soft side to students is still good."

Teacher's trust in paraeducator's approach

In answer to the need of support, most of paraeducators claimed that they need the teacher to trust more in what they do in the classroom and give them free space to help the students.

"All I need is trust. She trusts what I am doing; she knows how and why I do something." (PA 2)

This paraeducator stressed the importance of long-term working to build up trust with each other. According to this paraeducator, the teacher and paraeducator can establish good connection and confidence after long time working with each other; hence, it is easier for a paraeducator to work with both the teacher and students. That paraeducator drew this conclusion, based on her fifteen-years working as a paraeducator, that the teacher's trust gains paraeducators flexibility and effectiveness of supporting.

"If you have a new teacher, it takes some months to learn how to work together. If you get a new teacher every year, it's very hard because you must first know the teacher, what she wants you to do, what she is thinking about working with the students, and if you are that good enough to work independently. When working for a while, the teacher will lessen the level of doubt about paraeducator's capacity and entrust more on the way they solve a problem." (PA 2)

"Besides discussions, I hope the teacher will let me do my job. It's their best support for me. Supporting does not always mean they...truly support or guide me to do something. It's their confidence that makes me more active and work all my best." (PA 4)

"I know, the teacher also has responsibility to guide us, but we sometimes have own opinions. It's also for good sake of students. If she asked me to do anything unplanned before, I'm happy to do because it's my job. But, like, sometimes, I want to be more active. It means I want to do something unplanned myself, not waiting "orders" from teachers" (PA 5)

"I understand that her role is not only teach students but also guide me how to help students in class. But, I think it is sometimes not necessary to guide me all the time. I hope she let me freely do my things. Then, she will have less things to worry about." (PA 6)

Obviously, most paraeducators inferred teacher's trust as their need of support in the classroom, referring to their efficacy and initiative in the job.

4.3. Challenges and expectations regarding interaction with the administrators

4.3.1. Challenges of interaction with the administrators

As working mostly with students and teachers, principals and other administrative leaders are often the least mentioned aspect in the research of their relationship with paraeducators. However, all paraeducators in this study claimed that principals still play an importantly supportive role in which lack of communication with the principal can lead to the difficulty while they are working at the school.

"They are still very polite. However, if we don't ask, they do not talk much..." (PA 1)

"Besides greetings, we do not talk much..." (PA 2)

"Before that, I could talk to the principal everyday before class what should be done better. But now, we can't have time to get feedback as the principal are so busy with expanding the school.... Like last year, there was a group in trouble in the beginning of the school year, but it was not until Christmas that the problem solved. So, I think it was quite late, and the situation would not have been worse if it had been talked, solved and reacted earlier." (PA 3)

"It might be a challenge of not talking much with them. I don't have many chances to meet the principal." (PA 4)

"I rarely talk with them. Sometimes, I have a problem with teacher or an issue that I need advice from them first before sharing with teachers, and they are at somewhere I don't know." (PA 5)

"I still need to see them [the principal] when I have problems with the teacher, but it seems to be difficult to catch them". (PA 6)

As seen from the interview quote, the absence of administrators is one cause to the problems of paraeducators. In fact, the lack of administration availability could be seen as challenges for the teachers in case they are in need of information exchanges or seeking an advice (Goodrow, 2016). Similarly, this need also applies to paraeducators when there are some situations they need some meetings and receive feedback from the administrators.

4.3.2. Expectations of the interaction with administrative leaders

As lack of discussion opportunities with the administrators mentioned above is considered one of challenges for the paraeducators, more chances of meeting the school leaders, consequently, is what the paraeducators expect from them. Two paraeducators shared that they expected the principal to be more concerned about their presence at school and bring more opportunities to have communication with them.

“We would feel supported and work better if the principal and we met more.” (PA 4)

“I just wish to have more chances talking with them... I want them to be more available in the school and spend more time with paraeducators like us.” (PA 5)

Moreover, the paraeducators would like to meet the principal not only to discuss problems with them but also gain the recognition from them. Similar to problems with class teachers, some paraeducators feel the same with the principal. Therefore, more meetings with the school leaders and giving the leaders their feedback are also in the list of their expectations.

“I feel like I could have not involved in the school without the students. Like, if I have problem or disagreement with the teacher, who should I share with to seek advice? I’d prefer the principal cared us more, instead of looking for the class teacher all the time.” (PA 5)

“They [school leaders] do not always understand the whole reality of difficult situations. So, they just suppose it should be solved like this or that. But we are with the kids more than them. They tend to ask or meet the teacher first, before meeting us. We’re closer to kids. We understand more. I wish they would ask us first. Let the teacher do their things. Behavior or any problems work with us, especially with the recurring problems with students.” (PA 6)

From the excerpt, there is an underlying need of directly discussing with the administrators among the paraeducators. Those paraeducators believed that they can contribute more to the school and students when the school leaders talk and listen to them more. In addition, talking more with the principals also brings them a sense of belonging and that of being appreciated of their presence in the school.

However, even though most of paraeducators mentioned lack of meetings with the leaders as one of their major difficulty, only one of six paraeducators, surprisingly, needed discussion with the school leaders the most. Remarkably, five of six paraeducators in this study placed a high priority on the need of school leader’s guidance on collaborative partnerships with the class teacher. Thus, receiving guidance from administrative force is the most expected need that the paraeducators shared in this study.

“I’d like the principal more leading us.” (PA 1)

“I have worked for a long time, so I am accustomed to dealing with unexpected problems from students and have little problem with the teachers. But I know I need to update the skills and the principal should help me more on this. And for the new assistants, they really need their [principals] support to work with class teachers.” (PA 2)

“They should push the teachers and PAs together as a team. The principal has the big part in the relationship between teachers and PAs. The principal should give instruction how PA and teachers work together. Sometimes, they can’t do it by themselves. The principal should guide the team meeting, instructing how to utilize the relationship. It’s principal who supports this relationship. They must understand, give resources and let time for us to grow the relationship.” (PA 3)

“I need their guidance in working collaboratively with the teacher and hold more meetings only for paraeducators to share their thoughts.” (PA 4)

“They should work as the connector for me and the teacher. Their policy can bring assistants and teachers together.” (PA 6)

Obviously, according to those interviewed paraeducators, the principal’s guidance in building relationship with teachers is expected necessary for their job. In fact, this expectation is rationally practical because supporting in establishing collaboration with the paraeducators and the teachers proved to be the most effective means that the principal can support the paraeducators (Daniels & McBride, 2001). Moreover, Daniels and McBride also claim that the school leaders have responsibility in providing assistance for the paraeducator and the class teacher in resolving any problems in the classroom. Therefore, it turns out that the expectation from the paraeducators fits with what the principals is supposed to support and effectively use the deployment of paraeducators.

Apart from the challenges of interaction with students, teachers, and administrators mentioned above, paraeducators also expressed their concerns about other difficulty such as low salary compared to teachers and lack of training courses for their development. In the meanwhile, the amount and complexity of support in inclusive classes also bring to paraeducators various difficulties and challenges which are no fewer that of teachers. Therefore, there should be more attention to paraeducators in equipping them with proper trainings, workshops as well as pay rates to support them in this job. The summary of difficulty and paraeducator’s expectations can be found in the table below, giving an overview of what has been discussed.

TABLE 1. Challenges and expectations of paraeducators

	Encountering challenges		Paraeducator's expectations	
Interaction with Students	Physical attacks	Verbal attacks		
	- hitting, beating - throwing things - kicking - spitting	- cursing - shouting	Emotional control	Academic achievements
Interaction with Class teacher	Understanding teacher's expectations	Disregard	Communication	Trust
	- Different opinions in guiding students' assignment	- Paraeducators preferred to be in the background - Feeling of being taken for granted and ignoring their suggestions and ideas	- Mini meetings before class - Weekly meetings with other teachers and paraeducators	- Understand the reasons of one paraeducator's actions - Give more freedom in assisting students
Interaction with Administrators	Lack of communication		Guidance	
	- Not many talks with the head of the school, besides greetings		- Guiding the team meetings - Instructing how to enhance relationship between teachers and paraeducators	
Other factors	Financial issues	Further development	Financial support	Professional support
	Low salary	- lack of courses - lack of workshops	Higher salary	- more courses - informal meetings to get more motivation, reduce stress, broaden network

5. DISCUSSION

The previous chapter has reported the result synthesized from the interviews about paraeducators' challenges and their expectations. The question now is how to support the paraeducators in their work after knowing their challenges and expectations. This chapter will discuss some possible supports that paraeducators need to overcome their working challenges.

5.1. Support for paraeducators in the interaction with students

There is a large number of reports on the student's problematic behaviors towards other students such as bullying or attacks. However, it has been claimed that a limited number of research has been done to investigate student-on-teacher threats (Williams, Billingsley, & Banks, 2018). Moreover, in the same study in the context of special education, the authors concluded "a statically significant higher number of threats and attacks" on the special education teachers when compared to their general education colleagues. However, the study was conducted to make a comparison between general education teachers and special educators, but yet did not specify if paraeducators were included in the group of special education teachers. In another study of student-related aggressive behaviors, it is admitted that there is more attention on the teachers and much less known to educational assistants (Schofield & Ryan, 2016). In the same study, educational assistants are said to receive "a burden of injury" than other targets; however, this study was conducted in some educational sectors in the US and did not yet specify if they are special educational classes. As seen from the data, paraeducators in this study encounter the same challenges in the interaction with students regarding to physical and verbal attacks received. Such undesirable behaviors negatively affect paraeducators' safety and the effectiveness of their help. Understanding that, it is critical to implement specific measurements to prevent disruptive behaviours as well as improve the interaction between paraeducators and students. Even though all paraeducators in this study claimed that they understood their students and their unexpected outburst, would get used to the attacks and knew how to deal with each disruptive manners, a preventive measure should be take into consideration in order

to increase paraeducators' safety, reduce negative behaviours, and enhance students' learning. One of the measurements which can be taken into account is School-wide positive behavioural support (SWPBS). It is a three-tiered-system for intervening, monitoring students' challenging behaviors, and simultaneously helping students achieve social and learning success (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Horner et al., 2009; Williams, Billingsley, & Banks, 2018). This approach has been proved to be effective in managing behavioral difficulties irrespective of students with disabilities or special education needs to develop a safe and supportive learning environment (Williams, Billingsley, & Banks, 2018).

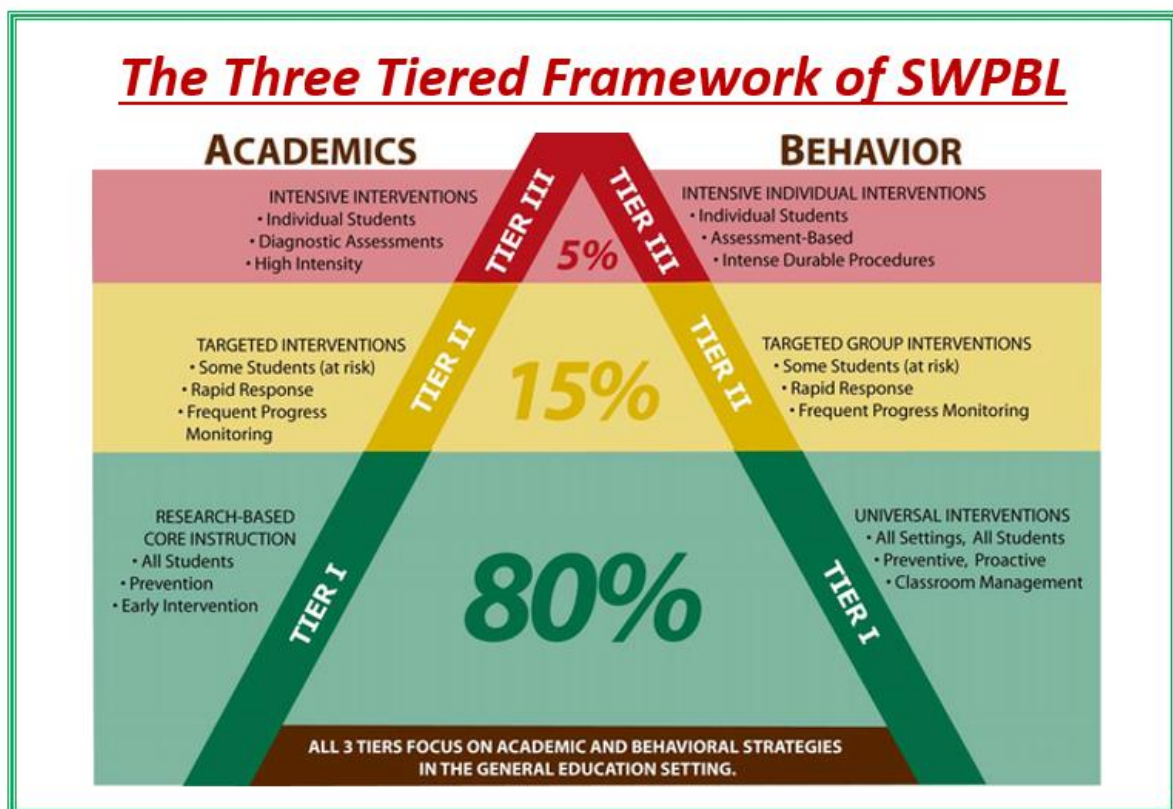


FIGURE 3. The Three-tiered Framework of School-wide Positive Behaviors for Learning

This framework focuses on both academic and behavioural strategies in the general education setting, which is also suitable in the comprehensive schools involved in this research. Moreover, in this framework, the primary intervention (tier 1) supports not only teachers but also staff and other school participants including supervisors, custodial staff and other workers. That means it also comprises paraeducators who are directly affected by these behavioural challenges. The secondary and tertiary prevention bring more specialized and individualized supports for students at risk or high risk behaviour. With this behaviour management approach, it not only improves respectful

relationship among students, teachers and paraeducators but also reinforces student social behaviours and academic achievement (Sugai & Horner, 2006). These two outcomes are also paraeducator's expectations which were expressed during this research.

5.2. Support for paraeducators in the interaction with class teachers

Paraeducator-teacher collaboration is the integral part of inclusive classroom (Chambers, 2015). There is a lot of research on the relationship between teachers and paraeducators and the significance of maximizing the effectiveness of this relationship (Vincett, Cremin, & Thomas, 2005; Takala, 2007; Bedford, Jackson, & Wilson, 2008; Symes, & Humphrey, 2011; Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2019). Based on teacher's perspectives, such research mostly discusses how to support teachers in guiding paraeducators, how to work with another adult in class, how to have joint planning with assistants. Stockall (2014) reviewed an approach called "Direct instruction training model (DITM)" in order to show paraeducators how to support the class teachers step-by-step and receive feedback from the class teachers. Nevertheless, this model does emphasize on professional development rather than building an effective communication with the class teachers. Remarkably, according to a study by Riggs and Mueller (2001), the ineffective collaboration with the class teacher and utilization of paraeducators in the classroom are considered causes of teacher's frustration and inferiority. Moreover, lack of chemistry between the class teacher and paraeducator engenders negative influences on the relationship with the students (Takala, 2007). The paraeducators in this study reported that they also had different opinions with the teachers in helping students. In addition, they feel underappreciated and stay in a shadow when working with the class teachers. Accordingly, it is posited that building an effective collaborative teaching team should be based on trust, respect and understanding (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012). Therefore, Collaboration Classroom Support Plan (CCSP), developed and suggested by Capizzi and Da Fonte (2012), could be employed to specifically help teachers and paraeducators work more effectively in the classroom. This systematic support plan also covers all of paraeducators' expectations which were stated in their replies in the interview. The plan consists of four components: Orientation to the setting (1), Professional duties and responsibilities (2), Communication (3), and Professional development (4). The first section (Orientation to the setting) helps new paraeducators be familiar with the school and other school staff; therefore, paraeducators not only understand about the place where they are going to work but also feel valued and welcomed, preparing the collaboration with the workplace. In the interview, paraeducators expressed that they sometimes did not understand teacher's expectations, and vice

versa class teachers do not feel comfortable with what paraeducators have been doing. The reason might lie in the teacher's unclear definition of paraeducator's roles: This teacher may consider paraeducators an assistant to the students, but the other teacher expects paraeducators as assistants to them (French, 1998). Then, the second section (Professional duties and responsibilities) helps both class teachers and paraeducators clearly define their expected roles, which, hence, develops positive and effective working relationship. The conflict over responsibilities is regarded as a noticeable challenge for paraeducators (Shyman, 2010); hence, it would be helpful for paraeducators if they were prepared with clear understanding of the teacher and their own roles. In this section, the expectations, roles, and working styles of both sides are identified, reviewed, listened, discussed, and respected; therefore, paraeducators and teachers can avoid misunderstanding or confusion about their roles and other expectations. As for the third section (Communication), the plan focuses on regular meetings where paraeducators can receive constructive feedback, training, and appreciation from the class teachers. Following this plan, paraeducators' working styles are acknowledged and trusted by the teachers, which is their need and expectation expressed in the research interview. The fourth section (Professional development) provides a list of various areas in which paraeducators can easily choose to learn more; then, class teachers and even administrators can understand and support the right area for them. In conclusion, CCSP can be used in general schools where paraeducators are employed to reinforce their relationship with class teachers and increase effectiveness of the inclusive classrooms.

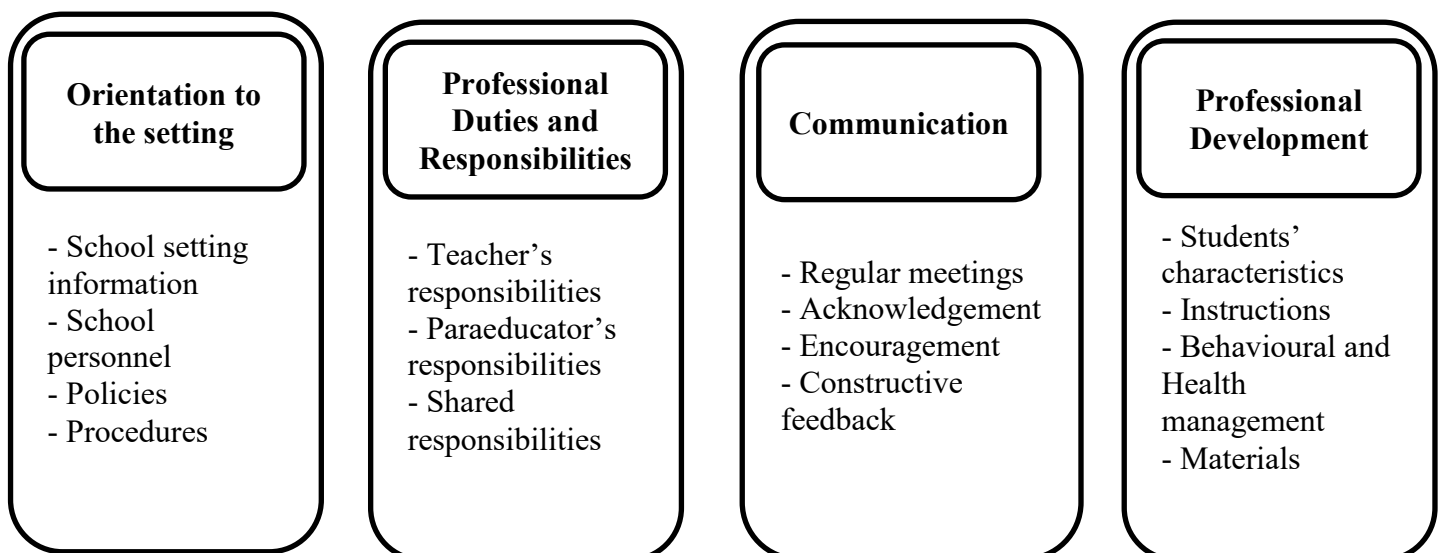


FIGURE 4. Collaboration Classroom Support Plan

5.3. Support for paraeducators in the interaction with administrators

Administrator's role is considered "catalyst" in building a successful inclusion program (Riggs, 2002). In the same study, Riggs also points out that there are 3Rs (Responsibilities, Relationship, and Respect) which are paraeducators' needs and if administrators understand and support them, they can be successful in their job (2002).

- Responsibilities:

In this area, administrators should help paraeducators define their roles and assigned tasks. Moreover, administrators are expected to demonstrate their understanding towards paraeducators' tasks and the nature of their responsibilities. This expectation is also the one expressed in this interview (PA 6), in which they need administrators to understand the difficulty of this job and give them some guidance to work effectively. Another important point is also mentioned in this area is the role of administrators of planning time allocated to paraeducators and teachers. It is suggested that paraeducators should not be assigned to different teachers to work in multiple classrooms for a longer time, which is similar to one of the interviewed paraeducators' wishes (PA 2). In order to build a "reciprocal team", it would be better for paraeducators to work with one teacher for a longer (block of) time. Finally, to reinforce paraeducators' knowledge of responsibilities, administrators should plan more meeting times and facilitate training sessions where paraeducators have chance to receive trainings and instructions, as well as give the teachers their own feedback on student progress.

- Relationship:

It has been discussed that the collaboration of the class teacher and the paraeducator is vital to the success of inclusive classroom. Accordingly, one of the effective channels that connects two adults in the class is the principal whose capability is believed to encourage the connection between teachers and paraeducators (Valeo, 2008). Critically, Valeo also points out that principals sometimes bear the responsibility for the failure of close cooperation. Therefore, the connective role of the principal is critically important in maximizing the effect of teacher and paraeducator. Similarly, it has been emphasized that administrators are the ones who foster the relationship between paraeducators and class teachers. In addition, it is administrator's responsibilities to provide paraeducators with on-site instructions and supervision (Riggs, 2002). This administrator's involvement is considered essential to build a consistent communication channel to understand paraeducators and their concerns.

- Respect

It has been strongly confirmed that paraeducators work successfully in the environment of respect and appreciation (Riggs, 2002; Winans, 2004; Rando, 2017). It is also administrator's responsibilities to bring about this sense of belonging to paraeducators. Riggs (2002) points out three actions which

administrators can make to help paraeducators understand that their work is valued and they are not “just a para” (Rando, 2017).

- 1) Know and get everyone in the school community know paraeducators’ names instead of regarding them as some class teachers’ assistants.
- 2) Involve paraeducators and encourage them to take part in school events. Moreover, administrators should change the name of some certain celebrations, like “staff celebrations” instead of “teacher celebrations”; thus, paraeducators do not feel marginalized in the school.
- 3) Involve paraeducators in important meetings and consider their suggestions in decision-making process, so that paraeducators feel their contribution acknowledged and recognized.

In conclusion, administrators also play a pivotal role in supporting back their paraeducators at school by organizing and involving paraeducators into more meetings, listening to their ideas, encouraging the relationship between them and the class teachers and guiding them with job together with the teachers. Also, those acts from administrators are similar to what paraeducators in this study shared about their expectations. Accordingly, the administrators’ support for paraeducators will successfully lead to the effective support of students, teachers, curriculum and school from paraeducators.

6. CONCLUSION

The inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools is increasing in recent years, resulting in many paraeducators employed in those schools. The presence of paraeducators has been proved to make huge contribution to the inclusive practices (Ainscow & Farrell, 2002; Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016; Douglas, 2019). While there are a lot of research on teachers' wellbeing (Brittle, 2020) or supervision strategies for teachers (Mason Schnitz, Gerow, An & Wills, 2019), there is little amount of attention paid to paraeducators who are indispensable part of a successful inclusion program. They, alike the class teachers, have to cope with certain challenges of daily working. The research has found out three main possible challenges that paraeducators are facing with from the interviews, namely, challenges of interaction with students, teachers, and administrators. This result partly agrees with previous study in which paraeducators receive low levels of respect and lack of training (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016). In addition, the research has learnt from the paraeducators that they also have difficulty in direct interaction with students. In this research, paraeducators do not intend to suggest any solution to their challenges, but express their expectations towards students, communication with teachers and administrators. Understanding their expectations could help build specific and appropriate support for them in order to increase the quality of their work. As for support of interaction with students, the three-tiered Framework of School-wide Positive Behaviors for Learning can be used to build positive behaviours of students, improve communication between students and paraeducators, as well as improve students' academic achievement, which aligns with paraeducator's expectation. As for support of interaction with teachers, Collaboration Classroom Support Plan is exclusively suggested for teachers and paraeducators to build an effective team. As for interaction with administrators, following 3Rs will help administrators build the tangible solution to support paraeducators in their school. It could be said that each plan is a solution not only to meet paraeducators' expectations but also solve their challenges.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE WORK

The first limitation of this study lies at its lack of diversity in terms of sizes, levels and location. Firstly, the sampling size was small and limited; accordingly, the results cannot be generalized. However, the main goal of this study is not generalization, but investigation of an issue in a specific context with an on-purpose selected group of participants. Additionally, in terms of gender, there are multiple discrepancies in emotional perceptions between men and women (Fisher, Kret & Broekens, 2018) which leads to the influence in paraeducators' self-perception, work perception and their replies. Even though the researcher attempted to maintain gender balance in the study, the size was too small to come to a holistic result. The small number of interviews just helps to identify possible challenges and expectations of paraeducators which can improve their job quality in their own settings.

Moreover, this set of data is not regarded as representative because of the employment of convenience sampling, a non-random sampling technique, but based on some criteria on experience to participate in this study. Due to the nature of this study which is perception exploration but not generalization, convenience sampling is the most and feasible and rational data collection method in a limited time and limited potential connections. Another limitation is that participants assist students at the primary education. In the meanwhile, the scope of workload and students is varied at different stages and education level such as daycare centers, kindergarten or secondary level. Moreover, in spite of working in special education classes, the paraeducators participating in this study are assisting in the mainstream school, not in special education school. The nature of the school and classes as well as the work assignment are, therefore, different from other schools and locations. Finally, there is highly likelihood of limitation from the participants' replies. They might have assuaged their difficulty as well as aggravated its degree.

In summary, many careful checks has done to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Despite potential limitations, the findings of this study could serve as pilot project that it would be considered an initiative step in more in-depth large-scale study on paraeducators.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of interviews

Interview code	Sex	Year of experience	Class in charge (grade)	Number of students in charge
PA_1	F	6	3	12
PA_2	F	15	5	10
PA_3	M	6	5	7
PA_4	M	4	4	8
PA_5	F	15	5	9
PA_6	F	5	6	7

Appendix 2. Coding table

Theme 1: Challenges that paraeducators encounter		
Categories	Codes (emerging from data)	Key words from data
Interaction with Students	Physical attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - get hit, spitted - kick - bite me - throw things to me - hit me as I'm their peers - never do that with class teacher - get punched to stomach when standing near - it's normal that a student hits a PA
	Verbal attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - get cursed - be shouted at me

		- get sworn continuously
Interaction with Class teachers	Disagreement	- teachers see some PA's acts as disruptive - Not recommended to work with new teacher every year because - The main teacher and PA don't share the same idea and teacher goes with her own ideas. - not only read the students, but read the teacher also
	Disregard	- some teachers prefer PA to be in shadow - a lot of PAs feel taken for granted - do in the "background" - teachers not happy when PA active
Administrators	Lack of communication	- No feedback because the principal are so busy - if we (PA) don't ask, the do not talk much - besides greetings, we do not talk much

Theme 2: The expectation from paraeducators

Student's development	Emotional control	- calm down after a year - less aggressive behaviours - When they start a journey, they can be bad at controlling temper. But at the end, they become better. - rewarding to see them develop over years - it's, in turn, the emotional support for me to continue
	Academic achievement	- want to see them graduate from secondary school - happier when they can be included in regular classes - my goal is to help them get to the same class, same level with other kids

			- this rewarding feeling keeps me this job
Class teachers	Discussions		- better to have short talk before class - would like to have more talks, discussions and negotiations - should have mini meetings to know what the teacher wants to do today
	Trust		- teachers and PA have good connection when they trust what I am doing - hope they understand what PA does is because PA wants good things for students - hope they understand why I do something
Administrators	Guidance		- hope they are more proactive - push the teachers and PA together as a team - guide the team meeting - principal should instruct how to utilize the relationship - the only thing I want from admin is more talks with them, more leading us.
Other factors	Financial support		- bigger, higher salary - salary is the first thing because the salary of a teacher is double compared to teaching assistants - it is very very low compared to what assistants do.
	Professional support	Education	- we need more knowledge - courses of responding student's behaviours - it's good if we have more education for that - courses are effective, making us feel more motivated - I love PA meetings - I want more gatherings when we can share daily matters, problems, reducing stress - we grow professionally after meetings

			- meeting is like communication channel for developing
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Appendix 3. Interview sheet for interviewees

Introduction

I would like to invite you to participate in this interview for my study. This research seeks to explore the challenges that a paraeducator in a special educational class in mainstream school can encounter.

Why am I doing this research?

I am doing this research as part of my Master's degree in Teacher Education at University of Tampere.

My research interest is Inclusive Education and the implementation of inclusive classroom. After two years in a comprehensive school in Finland, I notice the influence and necessity of the presence of paraeducators. However, there are little to none studies discussing their role, and particularly the challenges in their job. In this research, I would like to discover their difficulty and their needs; thereby provide useful information to better their job to reach the ultimate goal of the inclusive education which is to help students with special educational needs achieve their potential.

What will you do if you agree to take part in this research?

- You will suggest a suitable time slot for our meeting, which is the most convenient to you.
- The interview will take place at your working location (at your school) or will be conducted via Skype in case the location is not available (All classrooms were occupied).
- You will be asked some questions regarding your background, class background and current experience at class.
- You can refuse to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable.
- You are welcomed to extend your answer that you feel important but not yet mentioned in the questions.
- I will take notes of your answers during the interview. The interview will be audio-recorded upon your permission.
- At the end of the interview, I would like to ask you to introduce your colleagues for further interviews. If you agree to provide me their contacts, I will be in touch with them by myself.

How long does the interview last?

An interview is expected to last 30-45 minutes. However, you could stop the interview at any time. In contrast, you can totally extend the interview should you be willing to share more.

Will your information be kept confidential?

Yes, definitely. If you agree to participate in the interview, not only your personal information, including your name and institution but also your job information including classroom, colleagues, student information will remain anonymous and not be disclosed to any other parties. The information you provide in the interview will be used for research purpose only.

What are possible advantages of taking part in this research?

You will be able to reflect on your tasks and experience. You may enjoy sharing this experience as it will make the voice of other paraeducators heard. After the research is done, it could provide information about your advice, expectation, or recommendation to the education field, educational agency and your schools to better accommodate your work and other paraeducators.

What are possible disadvantages of taking part in this research?

There is no risk or danger taking part in this research, except you might feel uncomfortable talking about your difficulties or opinions towards administration. You can skip any question you do not feel like answering, or even stop the interview at any point.

Do you have take part in the further research?

No, you are not obliged to participate in the further research. You are invited to this interview because your experience are meaningful to the study. If you might not feel interested in participating, you do not have to. There is no consequence if you do so.

Appendix 3. Interview outline

Dear paraeducator,

Thanks for agreeing on participation in this interview. The purpose of the interview is to address the challenges that you may encounter when doing this your assistance. Your information will be kept confidential, and only used anonymously in the study.

The interview will include the following content:

- Beginning of the interview, please provide information of your background (qualification, years of experience, number of students you are currently in charge)
- Reflection of the assistance will be asked covering:
 - Challenges from the students
 - Challenges from the class teacher
 - Challenges from administrators
- Sharing your expectation of support or any advice

- At the end of the interview, please provide your feedback to help me improve my succeeding interviews. If possible, please introduce other paraeducators who are working in mainstream schools like you.

Thank you very much!

Hang Nguyen

Master's degree student in Teacher Education

University of Tampere, Kalevantie 4, 33100 Tampere, Finland

|email+telephone| Skype: skype address