

Identifying resource gap in mainstream schools of the UK to integrate children with special needs

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The primary aim of the study is to identify the resource gap in mainstream schools of the UK to implement children with special needs.

Method: The study utilizes primary qualitative method where the researcher conducted interviews from the teachers which was then analyzed through thematic analysis.

Findings: The findings of the study reveals that there are various resource gaps observed in the mainstream schools of UK integrated to learners with special needs which include lack of skilled workers, limited access to learning materials, lack of trainings for the teachers, absence of equipment, and personalized educational services.

Keywords: Resource Gap, Mainstream schools, Children, Special needs, UK

INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs is referred as the kind of disability and a learning or developmental disorder that needs added support for efficiently contributing in mainstream educational landscapes. The number of children with disability differ country wise as per some researches which estimates that there are 15-20% of school aged children globally having a disability or other kind of special needs (Aboelmaaty, et al., 2023). Incorporation of children with disability into regular schools is highly debated from both the teacher as well as the parents. The problem of students with special needs is one of the vital challenges affecting nations and their progression globally. Observing people with disabilities (PWDs) needs, fulfilling their basic needs, and offering them with equal rights is the most significant stage towards permitting them to completely implement within the community. As per WHO, more than one billion people, or 15% of the global populace have certain sort of impairment, having 80% of them that lives in developing countries (Bourne, et al., 2017).

In this regard, it is found that children with special needs have inferior care and an absence of contribution in underdeveloped countries. While, education is one of the major areas from which those who are disabled are excluded. Meanwhile, there are various disabled children who have a dispute on setting up and maintaining connections with their friends. While, children with disabilities such as constantly struggling with behavioral problems could damage experts' relationships and failure to academia (Brussino, 2020). In addition, a lot of children with deficiencies struggle in communication abilities. As children grow, communication space becomes detectable and could adversely influence the opportunities of children in making friends. Thus, children with impairments require external help for supporting them to enter in social activities.

Social and educational inclusion is the increased challenge that are faced by the education systems globally (Strogilos and Ward, 2024). The presence of students with special educational needs and disabilities within mainstream schools who prioritize in English education system that is relied in the growth removal of barriers for learning and contributing in mainstream education. Individuals with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) have the higher need for effective teaching and are entitled to provision that enables supporting encouragement at and enjoyment of school (Cullen, et al., 2020). In this regard, the identified gap among individuals with SEND and their experts is twice as large as the gap among individuals eligible for free meals at school and their practitioners. Though, people with SEND are more than twice as likely eligible for free meals at school. An inclusive school eradicates the barriers for learning and participating that offers education that is relevant for the need of the pupils and promotes increased standards and accomplishment of potential for pupil. Therefore, it is recommended to schools to market positive connections, active involvement, and health of the individuals, by ensuring that all individuals are capable of accessing effective teaching and adopting a positive technique to behavior as explained in EEF (Cullen, et al., 2020).

The primary aim of the research is to explore resource gap in mainstream schools of the UK to implement children with special needs. The objectives of the study include;

- To identify the Resource gap in mainstream schools of the UK to integrate children with special needs
- To determine the teaching methods provided to children with special needs in mainstream schools
- To rectify the challenges faced by children with special needs in UK
- To determine the Strategies to mitigate these challenges

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are more than 1.6 million pupils in UK who have special educational needs (SEN) that increases up to 101,000 from 2023 (Gov.UK, 2024). This involves the number of pupils having an education, health, and care (EHC) plan along with the number of pupils with the support of SEN which continues since 2016 (Black, 2019).

According to Strogilos and Ward (2024), there is an existence of children with SEN in mainstream schools in England which is a commitment under the articles 7 and 24 of United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the government of the UK is devoted for an inclusive education of the disabled children and young individuals along with their growing exclusion of obstructions towards learning and contributions in mainstream education. There are various students with an Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) in mainstream schools in UK that increases in 2022 up to 4% while Resource Provision (RPs) have increased from 1028 in 2020 till 1066 in 2021 and leads to 1125 in 2022 (Strogilos and Ward, 2024). Despite having these increases, the existing report by OFSTED have observed the establishment of these students that is fragmented and unpredictable. While, the inclusion of mainstream lacks in creating dilemmas for the parents of students having SEND and are astounded by the load of choosing a setting for their child that lacks in support for making decisions and experiencing an illusion of choice that could ultimately be eradicated through an absence of funding as well as geographical limitations (Hasson, et al., 2022).

There are various studies on Resource Provision that emphasizes on the opinions and experiences of the employers of the school, autistic students and parents. The study by Bond and Hebron (2016) depicts the views of employees from eight British schools for autistic students. The findings reveals that the complimentary roles and accountability in the establishment team are necessary input from external experts while positive effects are practiced by RP in schools. While, the employees were highly positive related towards students education with SEND in mixed provisions while there are some kind of concerns that are expressed related to the lack of communication between staff in RP and mainstream classes. Thus, it is observed that most of the parents highlighted on various issues with Local Authority (LA) in identifying the best provision for their child and some noted that employees in RP were not appropriately aware of their child's disability in contrast to special schools. The students therefore, have had positive opinions regarding mixed institution. It is further found that students with autism have more friends in comparison to RP than the mainstream class that provides RP with protected and supported landscape (Warren et al., 2020). Additionally, employees have positive views related to mixed establishment and observed students that adapted well in their shifts from RP to mainstream classes

due to an adult. The positive parental opinions for the education of students with difficulties in speech and language and RP reported Lindsay et al. (2016) as per the survey conducted from 129 parents in England.

There are several teaching methods for children with special needs in mainstream schools which entails a variety of strategies by making sure that they could contribute completely in the classroom environment. These effective techniques include;

Differentiated Instructions

To customize teaching methods and materials for accommodating number of learning styles and capabilities. This might include utilising visual aids, hands on activities and providing distinct kinds of intricacies for assignments (Bachtsis, Perifanou and Economides, 2024).

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

It is important to create and follow a personalized education plan for every child, explaining particular objectives, housings, and support services. The IEP is developed mutually with educators, parents, and experts.

Co-Teaching

To use a team-teaching method where special education teachers and general education teachers work collaboratively in similar classrooms. This permits for more targeted guidelines and support.

Assistive Technology

To employ technology for providing supportive learning. This might involve speech-to-text programs, audiobooks, and other approaches that could assist children in accessing to the curriculum.

Behavioral Interventions

To integrate strategies for supporting positive behavior and manage any kind of challenging behavior. This might involve structured routines, précised expectations, and positive support.

Classroom Modifications

It is important to adapt classroom environment for providing support to the students. This might entail seating arrangements, giving quiet areas for breaks and altering assignments for matching the needs of the individuals.

Resilient Grouping

Using resilient grouping strategies to the learners by skill level or learning needs that offers customized guidelines and expert support.

Parental Engagement

To involve parents in educational procedures by keeping them informed and engaged in their child's learning. Parents could offer valuable insights and support at home.

Social Skills Training

To involve chances for social skills development in the classroom setting that aids children with particular needs to connect efficiently with their practitioners.

Professional Development for Teachers

To give an ongoing training for teachers for ensuring that they are equipped with the current strategies and knowledge for supporting learners with special needs.

By integrating these approaches, schools develop a comprehensive environment that provides support to the diverse needs of the students and assists them in succeeding academically and socially.

The challenges faced by children with special needs in the UK were in terms of conducting online education, impeding their learning experiences. The other challenges encountered were in terms of inflexible learning management system (LMS) networks, online deadlines for tasks, and an

inadequate appropriate digital skills (Bachtsis, Perifanou and Economides, 2024). According to the teachers, it has been recognised that students with special needs faces increased stresses along with remote communication and coordination challenges. While, collaborative and cooperative teaching strategies enable the students with disabilities to get engaged with their classmates and considers themselves as the part of the class. Moreover, it is important to have personalized teaching along with the accessibility to technology and training that is necessary for their students. Additionally, most of the reported issues were regarding the psychological effects in terms of worry, anxiety, nervousness, frustration, and fear) during online teaching because of pandemic lockdown.

In addition, while online education, students with disabilities have to manage an extra load. The online education needs students for using computers and digital media that students do not have an access to and is even hard for those with learning disabilities for gaining essential equipment to be used (Bachtsis, Perifanou and Economides, 2024). Furthermore, the absence of physical connectedness causes extra psychological issues for students with special needs for instance stress, fatigue, and sadness. While, the adjustment issues along with adverse emotion for instance sadness and anxiety were more pronounced in these students. Besides, disable students' faces additional difficulties in operating digital devices and tools.

Addressing to these challenges, the children with special needs facing online education with complex approach is essential. By integrating a resilient and a comprehensive Learning Management System (LMS) that accommodates numerous learning styles is critical. This entails adaptive technologies that personalises the delivery of content that makes it accessible for the students with varied needs. By implementing speech-to-text and text-to-speech tools could assist those with visual and reading complications. On the other hand, it is important to develop a coordinated learning environment could mitigate feelings of isolation. Teachers employed coordinated learning strategies that motivates expert connections for instance group projects, or online discussion forums that permits students for involving meaningfully with the classmates. This sense of belonging is essential for their psychological health.

In addition, the support to mental health should be implemented into educational models. Continuous check-ins with students, accessing to counselling services, and developing a supportive society that could assist in easing anxiety and stress. Lastly, it is important to make sure that students have the accessibility to essential digital tools and equipment through school provided resources and government initiatives is crucial for mitigating these barriers for online learning of the children with special needs. Thus, these strategies collaboratively develop a more comprehensive and supportive online learning landscape. Adopting inclusive service model, students belonging to the RP are majorly educated in mainstream classrooms with RP employees

support and have individual or small group activities in the RP. While, in the safe space model, students are highly educated in RP class and spend certain hours daily in the mainstream class (Strogilos and Ward, 2024). While, RP as a service should be prioritised due to its promotion to academic and social inclusion of students with SEND along with their education and their experts. Thus, resilience in the utilization of both models is required for those students that does not involve mainstream classes.

METHODOLOGY

This part of the research is based on determining the method used in this study. This study employs primary qualitative materials that is gained from various sources for analyzing the views of teachers with respect to the children with special needs in the UK. The purpose of utilizing qualitative method is that it provides relevant insights regarding the problems faced by students with special needs. While, the rationale behind opting primary data collection method is that it enables towards gathering first hand data that is collected directly from the target audiences. In addition, primary data is gathered from interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. In this regard, the researcher focuses on conducting interviews that were found to be the most suitable option. The researcher makes use of interviews that were conducted from teachers in order to identify the problems faced by students with special needs, and the methods they use to overcome it. With the help of interviews, researcher was capable of easily understanding the issues faced by teachers in teaching students with special needs, as well as the problems faced by students in learning. The teachers were opted from UK particularly teaching students with special needs in the UK. This enabled the interviewer to acquire relevant insights and data. While, there are 6-8 teachers selected for conducting interview. Whereas, in order to assess interviews conducted by teachers, it will be examined through thematic analysis. The analysed data will help in deriving effective conclusions.

RESULTS

The first theme is based on identifying the resource gaps in the UK's mainstream schools that is integrated to children with special needs. The interviewer was asked a question that; *“What do you think are resource gaps in mainstream schools of the UK integrated to children with special needs?”* In this regard, the participants answer to the question that;

“The resource gaps in mainstream schools of the UK integrated to children with special needs entails inadequate expert staff, constraint accessibility to customised learning materials, insufficient trainings for the teachers based on inclusive practicing.”

Another participant therefore answer to the above question that;

“The resource gaps found in the mainstream schools in the UK are the absence of dedicated equipment or materials for individualised support, lack of expert staff, lack of personalised education for these students, and hindering efficient integration.”

The above findings reveals that there are various resource gaps observed in the mainstream schools of UK integrated to learners with special needs which include lack of skilled workers, limited access to learning materials, lack of trainings for the teachers, absence of equipment, and personalised educational services. Similar, findings have been obtained through the study by , which also highlighted on the absence of specialised workforce for instance teaching assistants who are trained in special education is found as one of the major problem (Buchner, et al., 2021). This gap tends towards leading to an over-dependency on general education teachers that have inadequate essential expertise for meeting the diverse needs of the students. This literature further focuses on the lack of customised learning resources that are necessary to adopt the curriculum that are aligned with learning styles and needs. Irrespective of these resources, children with special needs might struggle for accessing complete curriculum. Moreover, it is further highlighted that lack of training for teachers is recurring which exhibits that teachers are usually willing for providing support to inclusive education that are less equipped which is because of the lack of professional development chances (Jackson, 2021). Besides, it is determined that the absence of dedicated spaces and equipment is the other vital barrier that constraints the capability for offering personalised interferences and adjustments. This indicates that both the interviews responses and literature findings are aligned with the findings.

The second theme is based on teaching methods given to children with special needs in mainstream schools. In this regard, the question was asked from the research participants that *“What do you think are the teaching methods that could be provided to learners with special needs in mainstream schools?”* The teacher answer to the question that;

“The teaching methods for children with special needs in mainstream schools involves differentiated instructions, multisensory learning techniques, utilization of assistive technology, and individualised education plans (IEPs) along with coordinated teaching strategies. These approaches cater to the varied learning styles by ensuring accessible content and offer personalised support for the adoption of efficient learning environment.”

Another participant responded to the question that;

“The other teaching methods used for the children with special needs entails visual assistance, hands on activities, and continuous feedback which ensures personalised learning experiences that accommodates varied capabilities and develop inclusion.”

The aforementioned findings reveals that the adoption of differentiated instructions, visual assistance, hands on activities, and constant feedbacks as efficient teaching methods for the learners with special needs in mainstream schools. These methods are aligned with efficient practices rectified in the study that focuses on the significance of adapting teaching techniques for meeting the diverse needs for learners. The study by Saloviita (2020), exhibits that the customised teaching approaches, materials, and assessments for accommodating varied learning styles, capabilities and interests. This technique is specifically advantageous for the learners with special needs that permits that to feasibly access the curriculum at individual level. The findings demonstrates that differentiated instructions could enhance involvement and academic results for these children.

The research exhibits that multisensory learning which includes visual, auditory, and tactile aspects enables towards improving understanding and retention for children with special needs. Such as visual help assists children with autism and dyslexia to effectively comprehend complicated ideas whereas, hand on activities involves students with ADHD by offering kinesthetic learning chances (Numpaque Salamanca, 2021). The research further exhibits that on-time and continuous feedback aids these children for staying on track, embraces learning and boosts their confidence. Moreover, assistive technology for instance text-to-speech techniques and adaptive software which is a valuable resource for assisting individualised learning.

The third theme is based on identifying the challenges that are faced by children with special needs in the UK. In this regard, the interviewee was asked a question that; *“In your opinion, what challenges are faced by children with special needs in the UK?”* The interviewer responded to the question in a way that;

“The challenges faced by the children with special needs in the UK involves constraint accessibility to expert support, lack of individualised education plans (IEPs), social exclusion, and an absence of customised resources. These problems tends to problems in academic attainment, emotional health, and efficient implementation in mainstream educational settings.”

The other participant responded to similar question that;

“The challenges encountered by the children with special needs include unpredictable accessibility to professional services, lack of teacher training in comprehensive practices, mistreatment and social inaccessibility, and inflexible curriculum structures. These hindrances

could obstruct their academic growth, development of emotional intelligence and complete contribution in the school society.”

The above findings reveals that there are number of challenges that were encountered by the children with special needs. These challenges include constraint accessibility to expert support, lack of teacher training, social isolation, and rigid structures of curriculum. Similar views have been observed from the study conducted by Asbury et al. (2021) that accessibility to expert support is a crucial problem. The research further highlight on the absence of expert workforces for instance speech therapists, and professional education teachers that results in inadequate or delayed interventions for students with special needs. This absence of on-time and relevant support could adversely influence their academic growth and the entire development. Whereas, inefficient training is the other major challenges that is found. Most of the studies indicates that teachers in mainstream schools usually feel unprepared for meeting the varied student needs. This gap in training leads to inefficient teaching strategies and minimises confidence among the educators, often leads to influence the education quality of the children (Webster, 2022).

Similarly, social isolation and bullying are other prevalent problems. This depicts that students with special needs are at an increased risk of being excluded or targeted by practitioners that leads to emotional distress and obstruct their capability to develop positive connections (Ngo, et al., 2021). In addition, inflexible prospectus structures lacks in accommodating the varied needs of the learners that could worsen these issues faced by learners to keep up with the experts.

The fourth theme is based on strategies that could assist in mitigating these challenges. In this regard, the interviewee was asked a question that; *“What do you think could be the strategies that could help in mitigating the challenges?”* The response obtained from the participant exhibits that;

“To mitigate these challenges, the strategies include improved teacher training in inclusive practices, integrating resilient adaptation of curriculum, developing expert support programs, and making sure to have continuous coordination among educators, parents, and experts. These techniques could develop a more encouraged and inclusive learning landscape for all the students.”

The other participant share their views in response to the above question that;

“To overcome these challenges, schools could emphasise on adopting strategies such as tailored learning plans, implementing assistive technology, giving ongoing expert development for the teachers, marketing an inclusive school culture, and rising accessibility to expert services. These

initiatives could assist in addressing varied needs and make sure that the students with special needs acquire the help they need.”

The findings of the study reveals that there are various strategies that could be used to overcome the challenges encountered by the children with special needs. The findings indicates to provide personalised learning plans, assistive technology, teacher expert development, and an inclusive culture of the school, and improved accessibility to expert services. In this regard, customised learning plans are critical for addressing the needs of the children with special needs. The study focuses on individualised education plans (IEPs) that could majorly influence the results academically by customising instructions and supporting individual students’ novel needs (Dhiman, et al., 2020). This method permits for targeted interventions and accommodations by improving the experiences of the learners. Similarly, assistive technology is the other efficient strategy that continuously supports the utilisation of technology, for instance speech-to-text software and adaptive devices for facilitating learning for children with disabilities. These tools offers alternative ways for accessing and involving with curriculum that make education more accessible and inclusive.

In this regard, the significance of ongoing practitioner development for teachers is well-documented. The research indicates that targeted training in inclusive practices equips the educators with efficient skills and required knowledge for supporting varied learners with efficacy (Donath, et al., 2023). This professional growth leads towards more efficient teaching strategies and enhanced student results. In this regard, marketing a comprehensive culture at school and rising accessibility to expert services are other strategies that could assist in effective growth. Besides, a comprehensive culture develops acceptance and comprehending while accessing to experts’ services which make sure that children obtains essential support. Collaboratively, these strategies develops a more helpful and unbiased educational landscape.

CONCLUSION

This journal article intends to explore the resource gap in mainstream schools of the UK to integrate children with special needs. The study draws upon the conclusion through the interviews conducted by teacher that reveals critical insights regarding the research topic. The findings exhibits the key issues in terms of constraint accessibility to expert support, lack of teacher training and social isolation. Teachers mainly focuses on the need for tailored learning plans, implementing assistive technology, and ongoing professional development for addressing the challenges with efficacy. Thus, several strategies were used for overcoming these challenges that improves educational outcomes for children with special needs.

The current research explores the research gap in mainstream schools in the UK while in future it could identify other factors to expand the scope of the study. In future, there is a capability of enhanced educational outcomes and inclusion for children with special needs that nurtures an equitable learning environment. By addressing these gaps it leads to more efficient policies and funding strategies improving the efficacies of school and marketing effective social integration and support for diverse needs of students. This proactive technique could participate in a more inclusive education and societal equity.

There are various limitations to the study which include time, budget and resources that are considered the most common restrictions. The other limitations are that the current study is constraint to qualitative research that focuses only on contextual based data while in future it could focus more on numerical data.

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Appendix

Interview Question

1. What do you think are resource gaps in mainstream schools of the UK integrated to children with special needs?
2. What do you think are the teaching methods that could be provided to learners with special needs in mainstream schools?
3. In your opinion, what challenges are faced by children with special needs in the UK?
4. What do you think could be the strategies that could help in mitigating the challenges?