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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATORS IN THE RESOURCE ROOM: A CASE STUDY ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN PALESTINE

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Abstract:

In Palestine, resource rooms were established to assist students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Therefore, getting acquainted and familiarized with the knowledge, experiences, and professional needs of resource room teachers (RRTs) is vital. This qualitative case study aimed to explore RRTs' professional needs. Data were collected from three resource room teachers using semi-structured interviews and reviewing relevant documentation. Thematic analysis of the data generated two themes in addressing the objective of the study. The emerging themes were (1) professional development, and (2) resources. Results revealed that RRTs required in-service training, including diagnosing students with special needs, teaching methods, creating teaching aids and IEPs, and assessments. Additionally, hands-on experience is required. RRTs also needed resources including raw materials, stationery, devices, and references. The novelty factor of this research is that this is the first Palestinian study to provide insight into RRTs' professional needs. The outcomes may considerably help policymakers improve resource room practices and enhance the services, support, and special education programs offered to special educators.

Keywords:

Resource Room, Resource Room Teacher, Professional Development, Resources, Special Education

Introduction

In harmony with the global "Education for All" trend, the Palestinian Ministry of education (MOE) formally established an inclusive education (IE) program in 2000. This effort aimed to increase inclusivity by including students with special needs among their regular peers in public schools (Heran, 2014; Qawasmi, 2016). Due to the lack of special education teachers, the Palestinian MOE, in cooperation with UNESCO, local experts, and international experts, has developed a long-term plan to train a group of general education teachers in various areas of the inclusive education program, which lasted for three years from 1997 to 1999 (Al'ajiz & Assaf, 2016; Heran, 2014; Hijazi, 2017; MOE, 2015). As a result, students with different disabilities were taught in regular classrooms and supported by general education teachers (Al'ajiz & Assaf, 2016; Heran, 2014; MOE, 2015). However, this support was insufficient because the general teachers were not qualified enough to deal with disabled students (Heran, 2014; Shbeitah & Besalat, 2016).

In response to the increased interest in students with special needs and the continued effort to provide them with the best educational and social services, the MOE, in collaboration with the Swedish organization (SIWAR), formally approved the "Resource Room" project in 2004. A resource room is a small school classroom equipped with certain instruments to assist pupils with SEN to learn Arabic and Math (the three skills: reading, writing, and Math), as well as some basic behavioral and social skills (MOE, 2015). Concerning RRTs, they are general education or special education teachers with bachelor's degrees. They have undergone official special education training and have been designated by the Ministry of Education to support SEN children in the resource room (MOE, 2018). RRTs organize individual or small group visits to the resource room in advance. For the rest of the day, students with SEN attend regular school with their age-appropriate peers (MOE, 2015). In this study, RRTs are typically referred to as special educators who direct and coordinate resource room activities.

Surprisingly, the researcher found a few published Palestinian research concerning resource rooms and RRTs. Most of these studies were quantitative that used questionnaires and surveys. They were primarily descriptive without diving into the problem of concern. Findings indicated that, in Palestine, most resource rooms suffer from a lack of equipment and teaching aids necessary to assist students with SEN. In addition, few RRTs are competent in dealing with special needs students (Dababna, 2016; Heran, 2014; Shbeitah & Besalat, 2016). Studies pointed out that there is a significant shortage of special education teachers, and most of the Palestinian RRTs are general education teachers who lack the essential experiences needed to deal with and help special needs students (Heran, 2014; Hijazi, 2017; Shbeitah & Besalat 2016). Other studies indicated that even Palestinian special education teachers lack the practical experience to deal with disabled students in resource rooms (Al'ajiz & Assaf, 2016; Heran, 2014; Hijazi, 2017; Samhan, 2014). Therefore, Palestinian RRTs need to be provided with the necessary theoretical and practical experiences, including skills, knowledge, trends, methods, integration strategies, and resources that enable them to help students with SEN in the resource rooms as well as the general classroom (Abu Nada & Al'ikr, 2017; Hijazi, 2017; Qawasmi, 2016; Shbeitah & Besalat 2016). To gain insight into the knowledge, skills, and resources that RRTs require when teaching students with SEN, this qualitative research aims to explore the professional needs of RRTs in Bethlehem primary schools in Palestine. It is crucial to explore RRTs' professional needs from their perspectives. Therefore, the researcher actively sought out the voices of Palestinian RRTs and reviewed documents related to their needs.

The main results of this study could influence policy direction and enable decision-makers in special education in Palestine to re-evaluate the support, services, and special education programs available to RRTs. Additionally, they could determine the best pre-and in-service training and support to meet RRTs' requirements as well as enhance their professional development. Consequently, the services offered to students with SEN in the resource room or the inclusive classroom would be improved.

Moreover, this study seeks authentic information about Palestinian resource rooms and RRTs. It will be the first qualitative study that explores this topic using method triangulation: interviews and documentation. It will be a new addition and scientific enrichment in special education about resource rooms and special educators.

In light of what was mentioned above, there is an urgent need to explore professional development and resources for Palestinian RRTs. Through this qualitative study, the researcher hopes to fill the gap in the literature as the first study in Palestine in this field.

Literature Review

This section offers a background on the main concepts investigated in the current study. The first topic is professional development. Second, the resources that special educators require to perform their job effectively. The review of self-determination theory and how it pertains to teachers' professional requirements comes last.

Professional Development

The teaching profession is regarded as one of the most difficult careers since it requires field experience, patience, creativity, and teaching capability as well as field-specific knowledge and skills. Therefore, it is crucial to provide teachers with the training and resources they need to do their job effectively (Agcam & Babanoglu, 2016; Karakose et al., 2023). One of the central discussions on teacher education today is the need for redesigning these programs to enable teachers to meet the changing demands of the 21st century and adapt to their new roles in the face of global changes (Flores, 2020). With this regard, equipping prospective teachers with the knowledge, skills, and expertise to cope with the ever-changing expectations and roles in contemporary schooling environments is of crucial significance (Karakose et al., 2023). For example, Gözümlü et al. (2022) indicated that preschool teachers should receive STEM training since it will improve their teaching abilities and qualify them to deliver STEM instruction.

In special education, educators need to continuously develop and change their practices to meet the academic, social, and behavioral needs of students with disabilities (Ruppar et al., 2017). Although special educators were prepared for teaching in an inclusive setting, they reported the importance of professional learning to educate learners with diverse abilities (Ellis, 2019). They also need to learn more about the different reading strategies to support SWD in academic vocabulary and reading comprehension (Aflobia, 2018). Dev and Haynes (2015) conducted a qualitative study to explore the experiences of special education teachers in an inclusive setting. They found that two-thirds of informants were unsatisfied with the preservice training and considered it insufficient to support SWD in inclusive classrooms. In addition, participants pointed out that they needed preservice training on how to implement intervention plans. Likewise, in their study conducted in Malaysia, Bin Hussin and Bin Hamdan (2016) found that most mainstream Malaysian teachers desperately need training courses for teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive setting.

Concerning instruction in resource rooms, Memduhoğlu and Altunova (2020) conducted a qualitative case study to explore the perspectives of special educators on the activities in the resource room. Findings showed that special educators lacked adequate awareness and background information about resource rooms. Therefore, they need more preservice and in-service training programs on the use of resources. Special educators also need more professional training to diagnose and evaluate students with special needs and to determine the appropriate educational level for students with learning disabilities to support them in the resource room (Al-Mamari 2017; Mendes & D Affonseca, 2014). In the same context, Mendes and D Affonseca (2014) found that RRTs in Brazil faced difficulties in diagnosing and evaluating students with special needs. Special needs students were referred to other professionals for evaluation. RRTs also had problems assessing student performance and achievement due to the gap between teaching in the resource room and general classrooms. Hence, RRTs needed professional training to provide them with appropriate evaluation mechanisms and increase their critical thinking regarding teaching practices. Other studies found that, in Jordan schools, RRTs need to acquire diagnostic skills to identify students with disabilities. They also need more professional training, knowledge, and experience to satisfy the various needs of resource room students (Amaireh, 2017; Muflih, 2018). Similarly, Ozaydin et al. (2017) found that RRTs' knowledge of teaching methods and implementation was limited. Therefore, RRTs must participate in on-the-job training courses to enhance their teaching experiences. Eldar et al. (2018) also emphasized that special educators need to join training programs that provide them with evidence-based practices and classroom management skills. Other past research indicated that special educators must be involved in effective pre-service and in-service teaching programs that help them to design and implement IEP effectively (Al-Mamari, 2017; Al-Shoura & Ahmad, 2014; Al-Zoubi, 2016; Heran, 2014; Tams, 2019).

On the other hand, several studies have focused on the psychological aspect of the teaching profession both before and during the service, and drawn attention to the significance of understanding these psychological factors in developing prospective teachers' success in the profession (Avcı & Babanoğlu, 2016; Flores, 2020; Karaköse et al., 2023). In the same context, LeFebvre and Allen (2014) indicated that special educators need training in developing immediate skills and practicing those behaviors while teaching, which ultimately boosts their self-confidence. According to Salako (2014), special educators should attend in-service training courses involving information updating, confidence, and efficiency building. Layne and Blasingame (2018) also found that providing preservice teachers with field experiences increases their self-confidence and enables them to teach learners with severe or profound disabilities.

Resources

To do their job effectively, special educators require many resources and logistical tools, such as textbooks, to direct and assist them when instructing in the resource room (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Siuty et al., 2018). This is corroborated by a study by Billingsley et al. (2020), which found that resource room special educators depend on logistical supports, which include educational resources like curriculum and supplies. Other earlier research discovered that equipping special educators with resources enhanced their working environments and assisted them in meeting students' requirements (Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020; De Matthews, 2014; McLeskey et al., 2014). In the same context, Fowler et al. (2019) found that special educators lacked the instructional resources (e.g., curriculum and materials) needed to

succeed in working with students with special needs. According to Pemik (2017), RRTs faced difficulty implementing resource room programs because of the lack of an educational plan and curriculum and the poor physical conditions and materials. Similarly, Chao et al. (2016) found that many schools lacked the resources, equipment, unique furniture, and competent special educators required to integrate pupils successfully. Other past studies indicated that preschool teachers faced many challenges during school closure, such as the lack of infrastructure and digital tools necessary to implement online schooling. They have suffered from a lack of equipment or internet connection in schools and students (Abdul-Majied et al., 2022; Lavidas et al., 2022; Timmons et al., 2021). Therefore, policymakers should provide the infrastructure necessary for online teaching. Additionally, online activities should be included in the preschool curricula (Apostolou and Lavidas, 2022; Lavidas et al., 2022; Nikolopoulou, 2022). Similarly, (Lavidas et al. (2022) indicated that more digital tools should be created and/or recreated in this context, providing enriched environments with suitable materials for learning. These environments should include activities for all content standards.

Moreover, school administrators must provide special educators with administrative support that includes logistical resources and demands (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019), in addition to ensuring that special educators and regular teachers have the same curricular resources as well as resources for remediated interventions required to assist students with special needs (Bettini et al., 2020). For example, to save time finding or creating materials, Billingsley and Bettini (2019) explained that school principals should consider special educators' needs and essential curricular resources when requesting materials.

On the other hand, Stelitano et al. (2019) pointed out that 66% of RRTs had complete and adequate access to tools for their work. Resource rooms were equipped with computers and equipment such as TV, DVD player, projector, and laptop; however, the number of tools was minimal to avoid maintenance and sustainability issues.

In conclusion, all general and special education teachers need professional support. It enhances teachers' competency, knowledge, and skills and provides them with the educational tools necessary to do their job effectively.

Self-Determination Theory

In the current study, the researcher employed Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to address RRTs' professional needs. The central theme of self-determination theory is intrinsic motivation which involves enhancing people's self-motivation to develop their abilities and skills in a specific activity. SDT could assist RRTs in their professional development by meeting their basic psychological needs: Autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Based on the SDT, autonomous teachers are confident and are able to control their actions and behavior. They behave in a friendly manner with students and encourage them to participate. They also avoid using controlling language or placing unnecessary stress on students (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Hence, supporting RRTs to be autonomous is necessary for their professional development as well as student's academic and social development.

Moreover, RRTs must acquire new knowledge and skills to make them feel competent. Therefore, administrators, coaches, and policymakers should provide RRTs with knowledge and skills that make them successful and able to face challenges in their social environment (Chiu et al., 2021; Irvine, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Competent RRTs can increase students' competence through good instruction, adequate feedback, and effective educational materials that achieve the desired goals.

Additionally, when teachers' need for relatedness is satisfied, they become productive and more interactive with students. Teachers can achieve a sense of relatedness through training and interaction with others. In the classroom, teachers can enhance relatedness by supporting students emotionally, socially, and academically. They respect students and make them feel safe and welcome. Teachers also encourage students to interact with the learning environment and participate in educational activities. These practices increase students' involvement and encourage them to be autonomous (Chiu et al., 2021; Irvine, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

To conclude, administrators, policymakers, and coaches should create a supportive environment for RRTs and provide them with training, knowledge, and skills that meet their basic psychological needs. When teachers' basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, they can meet students' social, emotional, and educational needs.

Methodology

Research Design

For this study, an explorative case study research design was employed. The main objective of employing the case study is to understand a complex social phenomenon in a real-life setting, such as organizational and managerial processes (Yin, 2018). Semi-structured interviews and documentation were administered to three RRTs purposively chosen from Palestinian primary schools to gather their perception of the professional needs that would improve their performance in the resource room.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used in this study, and three participants were chosen based on the criterion set. Firstly, they are required to be RRTs from different schools located in the vicinity of Bethlehem, Palestine. Participants must hold a bachelor's degree in special education and have at least four years of experience working in Palestinian elementary schools' resource rooms. The Ministry of Education must hire them to teach Mathematics and Arabic. They must have formal special education training, which covers diagnosing students with special educational needs by implementing assessment portfolios in Arabic and mathematics, creating lesson plans, creating teaching aids, creating individual educational plans, and evaluating and teaching students with learning disabilities. Importantly, in this study, RRTs are also known as special education teachers. They are educators in leading and managing the resource room activities.

Instrument of The Study

In the current qualitative study, the researcher collected data using two qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, and documentation.

Interview Protocol

To achieve the purpose of the current study, the researcher designed an interview protocol that included different sections to improve the efficiency of the interview process. It contained the purpose of the study, research question, and interview questions related to the research question. The interview questions included open-ended questions to obtain information about RRTs' professional needs. Some interview questions were self-made based on the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the subject matter of the study, while other questions were taken either from previous studies or based on questions in these studies. The interview protocol helped the researcher obtain comprehensive data during the allotted time. It also helped the researcher direct the conversation with participants toward the targeted topics which was then translated into a script for how the interview was conducted.

Documentation Protocol

In the current study, the researcher analyzed documents related to the research question and they served as triangulation sources. The researcher analyzed documents related to RRTs' professional needs. The documentation protocol was used to organize the information contained in each document. It is mainly based on Alborno (2014), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and the manual of the MOE (2014). It made data analysis easy by identifying specific documents related to this study.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher collected data using method triangulation that included semi-structured interviews and documentation. The researcher has chosen the interview as the primary data collection method because interviews provide researchers with detailed, comprehensive, and rich descriptive information to understand informants' experiences, how they describe those experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences. In terms of documentation, it was a triangulation source to support the interviews. Moreover, documents of all kinds allowed the researcher to develop an understanding, discover meaning, and uncover insights related to the research problem. To ensure the clarity of the interview questions and the contents of the documentation, the researcher verified the two tools by experts in special education. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher used different open-ended and follow-up questions or probes to get information from informants related to the research topic. Open-ended questions were formulated to obtain information about the topic of the study based on a review of the literature regarding professional development and resources for special educators. Interviews were conducted with three RRTs at three different primary schools in Bethlehem. These interviews were conducted within the resource room outside the resource room hours as convenient for each teacher. Each interview was conducted during the 45-minute resource room period. The time was extended to 60 minutes based on the researcher's questions and the interviewee's responses. The researcher determined the date and time of the face-to-face interview with each informant. Before each interview, each informant was contacted by phone to remind them of the date and time of the interview. Each participant was allowed to withdraw from the interview process at any time. All three participants were given sufficient time and equal opportunity to answer all the open-ended questions freely and in their own words. Before conducting interviews, the researcher requested permission to audio-record the interviews, which was crucial to accurately document the participants' responses. Immediately after each interview, the researcher transcribed the recording into a Microsoft Word document. Verbatim

transcripts of taped interviews provided the researcher with a good database for analysis. Moreover, the researcher needed to write notes during the interview and reflect upon them to control the data collection process and start to analyze it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher understood that data collection is not specified according to its time limit but according to its saturation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, in the current study, priority was given to data saturation, and data were collected until redundancy or saturation across interviews was achieved.

To ensure confidentiality, the interviews were conducted in a resource room setting, and the researcher confirmed the confidentiality of information obtained from the participants. In other words, the researcher assured each participant that their personal information would remain confidential, that the researcher would use any information provided by participants for research purposes only, and that it would not impact their career in any way. Furthermore, interviews were conducted in Arabic, and before starting the data analysis process, the researcher translated the interviews into English. Then, they were reviewed by an English language teacher with an MA in translation.

Regarding documentation, the researcher analyzed documents related to the research objective and served as sources of triangulation. Briefly, they supported interviews to answer the research question. After conducting the interviews, the researcher arranged with teachers and the school principal to collect and analyze documents related to RRTs' professional needs.

Data Analysis Procedure

In the current study, the researcher transcribed the data for each interview and summarized the notes taken from documentation directly before moving on to another case. This process included transforming the recorded data into written words and typing the field notes and the notes obtained from documentation to be ready for analysis. Additionally, the researcher applied two stages of analysis—the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis (Yin, 2008). For the within-case analysis, the researcher applied the first five stages of Braun and Clarke (2006) before moving on to the next case. This required a bracketing process where the researchers put aside all the information and themes from the previous case. In other words, the researcher became familiar with the data collected from interviews and documentation for each case. First, open coding was performed and completed on each participant's data set before any comparisons were attempted across participants. Next, sub-themes and themes were generated for each case. After that, the researcher crafted individual case studies. Finally, the researcher triangulated data from participant interviews and documentation in creating cases. A thorough prolonged engagement with the data for each participant allowed the researcher to triangulate evidence and develop rich cases. In the final data analysis stage, the researcher conducted a cross-case analysis, looking for the connections across cases and studying what was highlighted across cases. The cross-case themes emerged as the researcher continually refined and regrouped codes across the three cases. The final two cross-case themes that answered the research question were: professional development and resources.

Results were presented based on the study question and the final themes associated with the research objective. In the analysis process, the researcher compared the similarities and differences that emerged from the data collected in addition to the researcher's notes and interpretations. Interestingly, all participants shared similar themes and provided feedback confirming the analysis's 'dependability and confirmability.'

Results

Require professional development and resources to do their job effectively. There are two sections in this study. Section A will first highlight the demographic profiles of the participants involved in this study. Section B subsequently discussed the emerging themes. The interviewees were coded as RRTA (resource room teacher A) to RRTC. The demographic data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles For Informants

| Demographic | RRTA | RRTB | RRTC |
|---|--------|--------|--------|
| Age | 27 | 35 | 29 |
| Gender | Female | Female | Female |
| Bachelor's Degree | SE | SE | SE |
| Years of Experience in Education Field | 6 | 11 | 9 |
| Years of Experience in Resource Room | 6 | 8 | 7 |

The profile of participants includes their age, highest academic qualification, years of experience in the education field, and years of experience in the resource room. All the informants have at least four years of working experience in the resource room. They hold a bachelor's degree in special education and work in resource rooms at Palestinian primary schools in Bethlehem City.

The following section will present the findings according to the research question. The major themes are introduced in accordance with what the informants said.

Resource Room Teachers Professional Needs

Analysis of the data from interviews and documentation indicated that RRTs' professional needs were evident in the two emerging themes: (a) Professional Development; and (b) Resources. Table 2 shows the open coding and axial coding process for the themes.

Table 2: Open Coding And Axial Coding For Research Objective

| Open Coding | Axial Coding | |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| | Theme 1 Professional Development | Theme 2 Resources |
| In-service training, Hands-on training, Devices, References, Stationary | In-service training, Hands-on training | Devices, References, Stationary |

Theme 1: Professional Development

Education is a continuous process that does not end after obtaining a degree and starting work. Career-minded individuals can develop their abilities and become more proficient at employment by continuing their education. Therefore, special educators must undergo in-service training and take part in professional development programs to increase their knowledge and understanding of pupils with special needs. In this study, all informants participated in novice-teacher programs, including lesson procedures, creating IEPs, assessment mechanisms, formulating objectives, students with special needs, and teaching strategies. Below are statements from participants.

I was employed in 2017 and went through a four-day intensive training session. It entails gaining knowledge of the Math, Arabic, and Abilities Assessment Portfolio and understanding how to use and complete them.

(RRTB/ Interview transcripts/ Lines402-404)

I received training regarding implementing and discharging the assessment portfolio and filling out the referral form. We also learned about the IEP, lesson procedure, and teaching strategies.

(RRTA/ Interview transcripts / Lines 420-422)

I attended training courses regarding the assessment portfolio, teaching strategies used in the resource room, filling out the referral form, and how to create IEPs. I had been trained well to give classes at many good resource rooms before being appointed.

(RRTC/ Interview transcripts / Lines 410-412)

According to the records reviewed by the researcher, all the informants received some kind of in-service training at the beginning of their appointment in the resource room. The training courses covered different topics, including teaching methods, lesson procedures, creating IEPs, filling out the referral form, and implementing the assessment portfolio.

RRTB took part in a training course for novice teachers that lasted four days and a training course for one day regarding lesson procedures, implementing the assessment portfolio, creating IEPs, and designing lesson plans.

(RRTB/ Documentation/ Lines649-651)

RRTA received courses in learning and teaching methods, creating appropriate lesson plans, and filling out the referral form. RRTA was also invited to a workshop on teaching strategies for students with special needs.

(RRTA/ Documentation/ Lines 677-679)

RRTC attended training courses on students with special needs, teaching methods used in the resource room, implementing and discharging the assessment portfolio, working in the resource room, creating IEPs, and creating lesson plans.

(RRTC / Documentation/ Lines 649-651)

However, all the participants indicated that they still need training in different special education issues. RRTC, for example, explained that she needs to undergo specific training to teach the many types of special needs students. She believed that RRTs must deal with both individuals who had severe learning difficulties and those who had trouble pronouncing words correctly. She also needs to learn how to help children with learning disabilities develop their abilities, including tiny details and directions. In addition, she requires training in designing teaching aids and creating suitable worksheets for each learning objective. RRTC added that gaining new ideas about classroom procedures and learning new teaching approaches appropriate for students with SEN is vital. She believed learners get bored when she employs the same teaching methods in every lesson. Although she is well-trained in the assessment portfolio, she needs additional training on implementing and discharging it.

Although RRTB attended different training sessions on various subjects, she claimed they were inadequate and was perplexed and disappointed. She, therefore, relied on her efforts to promote her profession. She used the Internet and profited from the expertise of other teachers. However, she still requires additional training in various topics, including teaching aids creation, lesson planning, and teaching strategies. It is essential to receive training in using drama and play to teach children with SEN. RRTB also needs training in goal setting and learning the criteria for moving from one objective to another. In addition, RRTB believed that RRTs required a more in-depth review of the assessment portfolio in Arabic, mathematics, and abilities.

RRTs are not required to classify RRS; however, RRTA believed it was essential to understand the many kinds of students with special needs. She added that classifying RRS enables teachers to provide them with the necessary assistance. She must therefore have more knowledge about how to differentiate between students who are slow learners and those who have learning disabilities. In addition, RRTA said that RRTs must go deeper into more specific concepts, such as understanding visual-motor integration and audio-visual sequences. She illustrated that learning new teaching methods for special needs students is also beneficial.

According to all the participants, RRTs require in-service development training and exchange visits with other competent RRTs from different schools. Participants stated they learned much from the exchange visits with other skilled teachers. For example, they have learned how to design worksheets and teaching aids as well as gain new teaching approaches. RRTB and RRTA indicated that they need to resume exchange visits. They think that visiting other teachers help them gain new experiences in different topics, such as classroom management and resource room instruction. According to RRTC, she requested permission from the principals and special education supervisors to undertake more exchange visits with other expert teachers. Participants concluded that these visits would be highly beneficial to their professional development. However, none of the participants documented their visits to other expert RRTs' classrooms in different schools. Most of these visits were planned by the participants with the principal's knowledge, while the special education supervisors organized some. Below are statements from participants.

I also visited other expert resource room teachers, where I learned how to use drama, play, and storytelling. Mutual visits with other resource room teachers were beneficial and enhanced my knowledge. However, I still need to learn more from expert teachers.
(RRTA/ Interview transcripts / Lines333-336)

I also got ideas from other resource teachers during training courses or exchange visits. I asked my special education supervisor and school principal to arrange more visits to other competent resource room teachers in other schools. I need to learn more about classroom management, students with SEN, and how to deal with students' different abilities.

(RRTC/ Interview transcripts 1/ Lines 418-422)

We asked special education supervisors to arrange visits among resource room teachers from different schools. These visits will provide us with practical skills regarding teaching students with SEN.

(RRTB/ Interview transcripts/ Lines 349-351)

In conclusion, special educators frequently experienced stress. They need to take a break from their usual routine. Therefore, Professional development enables teachers to play the role of the student instead of the teacher. Special educators keep participating in training because they believe they receive the professional assistance they need to become better educators. After all, professional development feeds the skills of teachers who want to lead in education. In addition to training, RRTs need to learn from skilled special educators.

Theme 2: Resources

In the resource room, teachers require various resources to do their job effectively. The participants mentioned that they made most of the teaching tools used in the resource room. Therefore, they require the essential raw materials to create the various teaching tools that support the objectives set in the IEP. Their daily needs include crayons, papers for photocopying, colors, solids, playdoh, solid figures, scotch tape, files, cardboard, felt, gelatin, and ready-made teaching toys. Below are statements from participants.

I need printers, plain paper sheets, colored paper sheets, and adhesive covers to preserve cards and tools. In addition, I constantly need colors, paper, and scotch tapes. I use them in large quantities in the resource room.

(RRTC/Transcript Interview/Lines 395-397)

I needed to photocopy many worksheets that I use in every class. I also need books from which I will select activities, colored cardboard, and paper.. Unfortunately, the photocopying paper was scarce. I also had trouble finding materials, like Sol to construct letters and words. I also required felt, play-doh, and a large number of files.

(RRTA/Transcript Interview1/Lines 405-408)

I always need stationery, paper, colors, material things, cardboard, cards, scotch tape, crayons, solid figures, children's coloring books, and educational toys.

(RRTB/Transcript Interview1/Lines368-369)

Participants also mentioned they require audio-visual tools to help them work in the resource room. Using audio-visual tools makes learning enjoyable and simple. They improve student-teacher interaction and knowledge retention. Voiceovers, smartboards, LCDs, and other visual aids draw students' attention and make learning more appealing and applicable.

RRTB and RRTC indicated they required a smartboard and LCD to make learning enjoyable. They believe that the smartboard helps learners interact and learn better. Although RRTA had a smartboard, she complained that it was not connected to the Internet and, therefore, was not working. She said that she did not know how to use it.

According to RRTA, the LCD screen is necessary because it improves learner participation and interaction. She added that learners always ask her to go to the library since it has an LCD, and they want to watch the things they learn on a big screen. RRTB and RRTC also believed that the LCD is useful for teaching SEN students.

There is no prescribed curriculum in the resource room. As a result, each participant bases their curriculum on students' IEPs. RRTA and RRTB stated they needed references to help them with their work. RRTB, for example, explained that she needs a booklet that describes how to

teach numbers from 1 to 10 ascending and descending to learners struggling with these numbers. She also needs a guidebook describing how to approach the assessment portfolio, arrange the objectives chronologically, and formulate them at each stage of the application procedure. In terms of worksheets, she would like for them to be available and approved by the MOE for use by all teachers. RRTA also indicated she needed a booklet on the professional standards for an RRT. It benefits her in working as well as in evaluating her performance. RRTC indicated that she would like books from which they would select activities. Due to the Corona pandemic, online learning has gained popularity. All participants have therefore asked their supervisors for instructional materials and electronic tools to help them teach online. RRTB explained:

Regarding online learning, we faced several issues. We need training on how to use the Teams program and online PowerPoint. I asked for standardized educational packages to be used by RRTs.

(RRTB/Transcript Interview1/Lines380-382)

On the other hand, RRTA and RRTC explained that they need unique furniture suitable for resource room students. Tables and chairs should be comfortable and easy to move around. RRTA stated:

I also need chairs and tables made specifically for the resource room. They are comfortable and assist children with SEN to work in groups or individually.

(RRTA/Transcript Interview1/Lines415-416)

Similarly, RRTC explained:

I need chairs and tables that are comfortable and easy to use and allow for open discussion in class, individual learning, or group work. I also require new curtains, two cupboards, and new carpets. The old ones have an unpleasant smell.

(RRTC/Transcript Interview1/Lines421-423)

The researcher also reviewed documents related to teachers' resource needs. RRTA and RRTC had documented their requirements. In comparison, RRTB did not formally request her needs in writing and instead asked the principal for them informally. Participants generally ordered a lot of stationery, including papers, educational toys, crayons, pens, felt, Sol, and scotch tape. RRTC is the only participant who ordered a CD recorder, a printer, and two cupboards. The findings from the documentation mirrored what the informants stated in their interviews about their resource requirements.

Discussion

This study addressed RRTs' professional needs. The analysis results of informants' data, and documentation revealed that RRTs' professional needs were evident in two emerging themes: (a) Professional Development, and (b); Resources.

Professional Development

The current study revealed that RRTs participated in different training courses that dealt with lesson procedures, formulating objectives, assessment mechanisms, learning disabilities, teaching strategies, students with special needs, designing worksheets, and creating teaching aids. However, RRTs still need continuous in-service training and professional development in

various special education issues, including various teaching strategies, the different categories of students with special needs, designing teaching aids, differentiation instruction, creating objectives, creating worksheets, using technology, and online schooling. These findings are in line with past studies on similar topics. In a study by Eniceia et al. (2015), it was found that RRTs require ongoing professional training to provide students with a quality education that enables them to involve in the learning process effectively. Ozaydin et al. (2017) found that RRTs need on-the-job training courses to enhance their teaching skills, in addition to improving their knowledge of teaching approaches and implementation. Past studies indicated that RRTs require further professional training to identify and assess learners with special needs as well as to determine the suitable academic level for learners with learning difficulties and provide them with appropriate assistance in the resource room (Al-Mamari 2017; Mendes & D Affonseca, 2014). In the same context, past research recommended that special educators should receive professional training courses covering the concept of diagnosis, evaluation, and learning disabilities, which would enable them to offer special needs children appropriate instruction and support. (Al-Ahmadi & El Keshky, 2019; Almedlij & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2018). Other past studies emphasized that RRTs should receive in-service training regarding teaching methodologies for learners with learning disabilities as well as the use of educational instruments within the resource room setting (Al-Mamari, 2017; Al-Zoubi, 2016; Tams, 2019). In a study by Theeb et al. (2015), it was found that RRTs need professional training regarding personal competencies, communication with families, use of technology, instructional learning plan, assessment, and diagnosis.

On the other hand, it has been found that informants benefitted from the reciprocal visits with other experienced colleagues. Therefore, they need more exchange visits to share experiences with other competent special educators from different schools. This is consistent with the findings of past studies on similar topics. For example, in a study by Cooc (2019), it was found that educators learn new teaching techniques from other educators by exchanging experiences. Similarly, Collins et al. (2018) pointed out that special educators should exchange experiences with other colleagues to benefit students with special needs in various learning settings. This is supported by past studies indicating that collaboration and experience sharing among educators enable them to learn new concepts, techniques, and skills that support their professional development goals. This is viewed as a logical progression from professional growth (Biggsby & Firestone, 2017; Robinson, 2017).

Resources

Special educators employed many resources in the resource room to do their job correctly. These resources included references, stationery, devices, and specific furniture. Therefore, participants asserted they require a lot of raw materials and paper to create teaching aids regularly. Their requirements also included references, smart boards, laptops, and LCD screens, in addition to electronic tools to be used for videos and online classes to teach online effectively. These findings are consistent with past studies on similar subjects. Past studies pointed out that special educators require logistical tools, including textbooks, to support and guide them when teaching in the resource room (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Siuty et al., 2018). Billingsley et al. (2020) indicated that RRTs depend on logistical support, including educational resources such as supplies and curriculum. Similarly, Fowler et al. (2019) found that resources were special educators' top priority to work effectively with special needs students. In a study by Chao et al. (2016), it was found that many schools required additional supplies, furnishing, equipment, and competent special educators to successfully integrate

students into their classrooms. Pemik (2017) also noted that due to a lack of curriculum, educational plans, poor physical conditions, and inadequate materials, RRTs required help executing resource room programs. In the same context, Stelitano et al. (2019) found that 66% of RRTs had complete access to the resources required to perform their duties. Although computers and other technology such as a projector, TV, laptop, DVD player, and other devices were available in the resource rooms, there were few to prevent maintenance and sustainability issues.

On the other hand, participants explained that public schools need more financial support to encourage administrators to allocate a budget for resource rooms, making it challenging to obtain resource room requirements. This is consistent with past studies indicating that school administrators must offer administrative assistance to special educators, including logistical resources and demands. They should take into account special educators' requirements and the necessary curricular resources when requesting materials to save time locating or creating materials (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019), in addition to ensuring that special educators have curricular resources and other resources for remediated interventions needed to help special needs students (Bettini et al., 2020).

Limitations and Future Research

This study interviewed a small sample of RRTs in Bethlehem City, Palestine. So, the small sample size is the main limitation of this study. The findings could not be generalized to other RRTs in other regions of Palestine, where the results might differ depending on the experiences and qualifications of the special educators in other resource rooms. Another drawback was the lack of empirical studies about PRTs working with special needs primary children in Palestine. Therefore, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and reviewed documents to substantiate the need for the research. This research was also limited by the participants' objectivity and readiness to respond to the researcher's questions. Future research could benefit from mixed-methods research that yields both quantitative and qualitative data to add more detail to the results of this study. Because the sample was quite constrained in scope, a similar study with a more significant sample of RRTs and school districts would boost the validity of the results. An extension of this research would be to look into measures to enhance resource room services in Palestine.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study aimed to explore the professional needs of Palestinian RRTs. The professional needs were evident in two emerging themes: professional development, and resources. The results showed that RRTs were unsure about the types of pupils receiving support in the resource room. Therefore, it is essential to provide them with diagnostic tools and skills that enable them to select RRS appropriately. RRTs also require continuous in-service training and professional development in various special education issues, including various teaching strategies, designing teaching aids, differentiation instruction, creating objectives, creating worksheets, using technology, and online schooling. In addition, providing teachers with modern teaching aids including the smart board, projectors, and LCD, enable them to accomplish more of the academic goals listed in each learner's IEP. Resource rooms also need to be furnished with unique tables and chairs. Moreover, this study seeks authentic information about Palestinian resource rooms and RRTs. It will be the first qualitative study that explores this topic using method triangulation: interviews and documentation. It will be a new addition and scientific enrichment in special education about resource rooms and special

educators. Through this qualitative study, the researcher hopes to fill the gap in the literature as the first study in Palestine in this field. On the other hand, the researcher hopes that the findings of this study will inspire policymakers to re-evaluate the special education program and services offered to special educators, who serve as the primary advocates for children with special needs; any support they receive will benefit the students greatly and support their academic success.

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