

Research Article

The Impact of Social Inclusion on the Social Development of Students with a General Learning Difficulty in Postprimary Education in Ireland

Niall King¹ and Barry J. Ryan ²

¹*St Marks Community School, Cookstown Rd., Tallaght, Dublin 24, Ireland*

²*School of Food Science and Environmental Health, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland*

Correspondence should be addressed to Barry J. Ryan; barry.ryan@dit.ie

Received 27 August 2018; Revised 20 November 2018; Accepted 26 November 2018; Published 3 January 2019

Academic Editor: Jose C. Nunez

Copyright © 2019 Niall King and Barry J. Ryan. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Over the past decade, there has been a societal push for social inclusion in Ireland for students with special educational needs (SEN). As a result, the number of dedicated special needs schools has dramatically decreased across the country as students with SEN enrol, instead, in mainstream schools. Dedicated SEN schools provided an environment in which students with a general learning difficulty (GLD) could develop at a pace suited to them. However, this developmental pace is different for GLD students in a mainstream school. This research explores the social development of students with a GLD in a mainstream school in postprimary education in Ireland. Informed by educational policies, both national and international, this research aims to find whether we are, as a society, inclusive of all educational needs in postprimary education, specifically students with GLD. The research question explicitly explores if students with a GLD have enhanced social development as a result of being part of a mainstream school setting. Employing a mixed methods case-study methodology, key emergent themes were observed and, overall, it was concluded that in a suitable environment, both physical and cultural, the social skills of students with a GLD can improve, primarily through increased social interaction with their peers.

1. Introduction

This research focused on the social development of students with a general learning difficulty (GLD) in a mainstream, postprimary school in Ireland. The school was governed by the EPSEN Act 2004 [1], which states that “*a child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs.*” Whilst an inclusive educational environment is critical for the cognitive development of students with a GLD; the over emphasis on inclusion in mainstream classes could be considered an old train of thought. Therefore, this research explored the social environments in which students with a GLD engaged with peers and how these environments assisted GLD students to socially develop.

Typically, students with a GLD lack the communication skills of their peers; however, social learning and human

interactions are considered as key pedagogical underpinnings. Vygotsky highlighted the importance of social play and interaction in the development of atypical students’ communication and behaviour [2]. Building on this framework, this research aims to understand the communication skills learned by GLD students in a mainstream school as “*schooling constitutes a form of collective social activity with specific forms of interpersonal communication*” [3]. In this study, it was hypothesised that the social skills, specifically communication skills, of students with a GLD should develop over time through social inclusion with their peers. This leads to the following research question:

Can being part of a socially inclusive mainstream education setting develop the key social skill of communication in students with GLDs?

In order to ground this research, the scholarly literature surrounding inclusive education was surveyed, as it is known to be extensive and well reported. Regrettably, it is predominantly focused on students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, and visual and physical impairment. As such, the literature review presented here is contextualised, both in terms of the geographical location and GLD categorisation, to support the subsequent research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Students with a General Learning Difficulty. Students diagnosed with a GLD are categorised based on the severity of their condition, from mild, through severe, to profound and are considered to have a significantly below average general intellectual functioning [4, 5]. Students with a GLD find it more difficult to learn and perform the same tasks with students of the same age, which can act as a barrier to inclusion within a mainstream setting. Students who suffer from a GLD experience “*deficits in language development*” [1] which restricts their “*social and personal development*” [6]. In order to effectively compensate for the speech and language difficulties that a GLD student encounters, educators need first to be able to determine the extent of the progress students make.

However, there is a paucity of academic research when it comes to tracking the social progress of students with a GLD in mainstream education. This poses the question, is social inclusion of students with a GLD a tokenistic gesture? In an Irish context, there is no clear aim for the Department of Education in relation to students with a GLD in mainstream education. The inclusivity of education for students with a GLD appears, anecdotally, to go no further than simply having these students placed in a mainstream setting. According to Carter et al. as cited in Downing and Peckham-Hardin [7], this does not constitute a success, as simply physically locating students within a mainstream setting is insufficient. Furthermore, differentiating student social development can be challenging. One way to differentiate students’ social development is through communication skill development. Typically, students with a GLD have a significantly slower social development in comparison to peers their own age and “*experience delay in reaching developing milestones (such as) deficits in language development...inability to live an independent life*” [1]. Social development is differentiated through individual education plans in which students build upon skills in class, or the wider school community, that are then applied in their life. Development of these social skills in an inclusive school environment can be fundamental in the social development of students with a GLD. The literature surrounding the social development of students with a GLD being part of an inclusive education system continues to be elusive. This poses the following question: why has there been very little research done on the social development of students with a GLD in mainstream education, and whether this educational setting is contributing meaningfully to the development of their social skills, and this will be subsequently explored.

2.2. Defining Inclusive Education. Initially, the term “inclusive education” needs to be carefully and clearly defined as currently the definitions are vague and vary across the academic literature. Kershner as cited by Saddler [8] states that an inclusive education is about reducing marginalisation of certain individuals in the education system. In contrast to Kershner’s definition, Dyson and Millard share the view that “*inclusive education involves moving students from special to mainstream contexts*” [9]. These definitions are simplistic, at best, in trying to define what an inclusive education entails. Here, we introduce a more comprehensive, yet understandable, definition of inclusive education. Throughout this paper, inclusive education is defined as the “*inclusion of students with GLDs into mainstream social and educational environments.*” Inclusive education is more than having students physically present within the grounds of a mainstream school environment, oftentimes in geographically separate locations to the main school building, and typically referred to as a “GLD unit.” Our definition focuses more on the environments where GLD students socially interact with mainstream students and the wider community.

Unfortunately, many schools continue to cite the existence of a “unit” within the school that caters for the needs of students with a GLD [10] as proof of social inclusion. However, the term “unit” is paradoxically excluding these students within the confinements of the school. In identifying a special class as a “GLD unit” within a mainstream context, a division within the school is created; indicating that exclusion still exists within mainstream education. Regardless of physical, social, or cognitive development, students are students regardless of ability or labels assigned to them. Defining students with GLD as a “special class” or a “GLD unit” further perpetuates exclusion within mainstream education [11] and the ideology of the “us” and “them” among students within a school. In an attempt to address these issues, SEN (Special Educational Needs) in Ireland has undergone a period of development and transition.

2.3. Rise of Special Educational Needs Provision in Ireland. The origins of SEN provision in Ireland dates back to the 19th century, as the first special educational services were set up to cater for students who were deaf and blind. In 1993, there were forty-eight special classes for “*students with physical, hearing, or visual*” [6]. As a society, we have progressed from an era in which students with severe disabilities were perceived as “*a burden to their teachers, a handicap to other children, and, being unable to keep up with other children*” [12]. In contrast to this rhetoric, the current Irish Minister for Education Richard Bruton noted “*I am keen to ensure...that every child has the opportunity to fulfil their full potential within our education system which highlights the societal push for a more inclusive education system*” [13]. In particular, the past two decades has seen a significant shift in the educational system in Ireland, with policy changes shifting from “*parallel systems*” where special classes or schools catered for the needs of students with SEN

in isolation “*towards provision*” in a mainstream educational setting [14] which cascaded from the Special Education Review Committee Report [6]. This report highlighted the need for a more socially inclusive education system; this research aims to understand if a more socially inclusive education system is having a positive impact, as evidenced by improved communication skills, on GLD students in a typical Irish postprimary school.

3. Research Rationale

The Irish education system has been changing over the past twenty years resulting in a greater social justice for students with SEN [15]. As part of this change process and in the months leading up to this study, the lead researcher had a student with a GLD included in his mainstream class. This catalysed the research rationale to explore the mutual benefit of GLD inclusive classes for both the mainstream student cohort as well as the GLD student. Traditionally, mainstream classes for a GLD student who lacks communication skills typically reduce the frequency of the GLD student practicing communication skills. In comparison, a social setting where students with a GLD can freely engage and where they are not restricted by classroom rigidity was envisaged to be more beneficial for all. This concept underpinned the research design and question for the case study at hand.

4. Research Methodology

In order to achieve a deeper understanding of social inclusion in postprimary education, the research required a mixed methods data collection approach, within the context of an investigative case study [16]. The implementation of a mixed methods research approach enhances and deepens data collected [17]. Qualitative data focused primarily on questionnaires, with known advantages of such a method including anonymity, cost effectiveness, standardisation, and question contextualisation [18]. Conversely, qualitative data were collected through semistructured interviews [19, 20], with the key advantage being a more in-depth analysis on social inclusion in a mainstream environment. In both methods, a purposefully sampled population was used.

4.1. Case Study and Participant Sampling. The school in which the research took place has operated a GLD unit for five years. The GLD unit comprises six students who have different learning difficulties. The abilities and ages of each student vary within this unit; however, all students with a GLD are within the IQ range of 35–50 [6]. Data from mainstream and GLD students were not collected as the ethical approval prevented the gathering of data from minors [21]. Instead, a purposeful sampling approach of teaching staff was taken for both modes of data collection; however, the sample size for research participation varied based on the research method. In the qualitative questionnaire, the sample size for teaching staff was unrestricted ($n = 29$; from a potential population of 75). In contrast, the sample participants for the semistructured interview were considerably smaller and categorised based on gender,

experience, and class type (mainstream teacher with a GLD, GLD teacher, and a special needs assistant). One male and one female teacher were purposefully chosen from each category to be interviewed, yielding six research participants (named Teacher A to Teacher F in the Findings section and detailed in Table 1).

4.2. Research Instruments. A mixed method approach was applied to this case study and comprised two research instruments, namely, questionnaire and semistructured interview. The questionnaire consisted of 7 questions: 6 closed (including Likert scale and yes/no questions) and 1 open. The questionnaire was informed by best practice, including piloting before full data collection [19]. Following piloting and questionnaire redrafting, staff that had contact with students with GLD were invited to anonymously complete the hardcopy questionnaire over the course of one week. Semistructured interviews covered 4 topics, through 8 open-ended questions, and were developed following best practice, again including a piloting and redrafting step [22]. A highly selective, purposeful sampling approach was used to select interviewees, and interviews took place in private, were audio recorded, and took no longer than one hour. These research instruments were chosen and deemed appropriate for this case study, as they provided both a broad understanding of the questionnaire participants’ opinions, as well as a detailed insight into the interviewees’ views. Thus, the data gathered from both research methods could be cross checked, to improve the reliability and validity of the research undertaken [23].

4.3. Data Analysis. Quantitative data were gathered in the form of questionnaires, completed by teaching staff through an online survey, and the data were analysed through the use of descriptive statistics. An inductive strategy was used for the analysis of the qualitative data, whereby thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and report different themes throughout the datasets [24, 25]. Firstly, the interviews were coded, as this identifies a feature of data, which is of interest to the researcher. Secondly, these codes were organised into themes, as some codes can overlap with other codes to create a broader theme. Thirdly, a thematic map was used in order to see the relationship between codes and the difference between themes throughout the interviews as well as subthemes, which were also present within the datasets [25]. This inductive approach allowed key themes to “emerge” [25] to address the research question [26]. Triangulation and data saturation were achieved through the methods of data collection, supplemented by research reflective diaries and the scholarly literature.

4.4. Ethical Considerations. Throughout the research process, there were several ethical considerations that this research adhered to, primarily informed by the British Educational Research Authority [8, 10, 14]. In brief, and in line with best practice, the research ethics included fully informed consent, voluntary participation, ability to

TABLE 1: A synoptic table detailing the gender, background, and years of teaching experience for each of the semistructured interviewees.

Teacher	Gender	Background	Teaching experience (years)
A	F	GLD teacher	3
B	M	GLD teacher	15 (including 8 in SEN)
C	F	SNA in the GLD unit	5
D	M	Teacher with GLD student in mainstream class	12
E	M	SNA in the GLD unit	1
F	F	Teacher with GLD student in mainstream class	16

GLD: general learning difficulty; SEN: special educational needs; SNA: special needs assistant.

withdraw, anonymity, data storage methods, privacy, and access to individual transcript. Additionally, prior to commencing, staff were given an information sheet outlining the purpose and the benefits of the research for the school and its students. The research project was reviewed and approved for ethics by the Hibernia College Research Ethics Committee.

4.5. Limitations. The research carried out focused on a single case-study postprimary school in Ireland; however, the results should encourage educational researchers to delve further into the social development aspect of students with a GLD.

5. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the research aim to address the central research question: can being part of a socially inclusive mainstream education setting develop the key social skill of communication in the students with GLDs? Employing a mixed method research paradigm strongly influenced by thematic analysis, three key, synthesised, themes emerged from the raw, mixed data gathered. These were social inclusion, social exclusion, and social development.

5.1. Social Inclusion vs Social Exclusion. The definition of social inclusion is not always clear cut; however, social inclusion for the purpose of this research is defined as the “inclusion of students with GLDs into mainstream social and educational environments.” The term inclusive education is used broadly and imprecisely in academic literature, defined differently by different stakeholders and in different scenarios. Even within the teaching profession itself, a precise definition continues to be elusive. In this study, Teacher “D” described inclusive education as “every single student...to get involved in a classroom...regardless of their ability.” More simply, while Teacher “C” defined it as “everyone would be included in every class” and chimes with the view shared by Dylson and Willard, cited by Kwan and Cheung [9]. In contrast to these views, Teacher “A” highlighted activities outside of the classroom where students are “included equally not just academically...such as extracurricular activities.” Being an inclusive education system is not simply accepting students of all abilities into mainstream education, but by successfully assimilating them into daily school life.

Teacher “D,” who has had a student with a GLD included in their mainstream class, further discussed the importance

of the physical location in a class for a student with a GLD “I made sure ...the GLD student sat in the middle of class, wasn’t on the side isolated away ... but immersed with their peers.” The student physically situated in the middle of the class allowed the teacher and peers to interact more frequently with this student and most importantly, is equal to their peers. Students learn from one another, regardless of ability, based on shared language capabilities [27]. Similarly, Guralnick realised that mainstream social engagement provided an environment conducive for the development of communication skills due to “imitation of typically developing students” [28]. Teacher “D” found that the more students were exposed to key words of the discipline, the more they learned, understood, and used these words because “I’d use this student...as the student would repeat key words...leaving the students more exposed...which increases their learning.” Teacher “D” reported an increased interaction from the GLD student with the mainstream class simultaneously but also developing the student’s communication and social skills.

Typically students within the GLD unit in this case study have varying abilities [29], yet social inclusion does not have to be limited to the classroom and other academic settings. Due to the varying abilities of the students, some of these students could be overwhelmed in a classroom setting. Some of the GLD students were included as part of the school’s extracurricular activities, and as such, students do not need to be part of a mainstream class to be socially included. Students can thrive in social environments where they can learn mannerisms and use communication skills to function. Teacher “B” noted the GLD students are very much part of the school community as the students “helped ‘x’ and ‘y’ with the football gear...fill water bottles...and even going to the match.” This highlighted the holistic approach taken by the school in this case study, supported by the schools ethos, in order to allow students of all abilities to participate in all aspects of the schools community. Building on this, it was observed by Teachers A to Teacher E that GLD students greatly improved their social skills as the GLD students were “acquiring special and unique skills” [7]. Teacher “B” discussed how GLD students have also taken part in the production of the school anthology. This is a book in which the work of student’s stories and poems is published for the school. Doing so illustrates the schools inclusivity to all educational needs, and that students of all academic abilities, could produce work, which the school published.

However, one form of social exclusion that emerged was the term “GLD unit.” Teacher “A” found the term unit to be “slightly medical” while Teacher “C” said “it’s labelling...it’s

exclusion in a way." Labelling the students, or the class, as a special needs or a special class creates further exclusion [11]. Similarly, Teacher "B" discussed the label of unit, as it *"physically separates them"* and *"once we do it with language, the system follows."* Teacher "B" explained that once labels are applied, it is hard to readjust, as *"L1 doesn't mean anything where as GLD unit does"*. Likewise, Teacher "F" suggested *"it feels like a separate entity, separate school attached to the school"* because of its physical location. This has resulted in less interaction with mainstream students, as *"there is very little footfall"* around the GLD, as it is physically located on the opposite side of the mainstream building. Nevertheless, overall, as indicated in the questionnaire and interviews, the staff within the case-study school found their school to be socially inclusive. Four out of six staff members interviewed observed that the school was socially inclusive. However, all participants said that there were areas in which they felt the school could become more inclusive of students with a GLD. Just under 80% ($n = 23$) of survey respondents considered their school to be socially inclusive.

5.2. Social Development. Students with a GLD take longer to reach developmental milestones than their peers [6]; however, there has been very little research into the correlation between the social development of students suffering with a GLD and their inclusion in mainstream education. The aim of this research was to develop an understanding of the social development of students with a GLD. Unfortunately; there is no quantifiable data to gauge the social development of students with a GLD due to ethical restrictions. However, the expertise of SNAs and class teachers who work with these students proved to be invaluable in evaluating students' social development. Perceived social development within a mainstream classroom would be indicated by actions, such as the GLD student speaking out confidently in class. Reported instances of this, as collected through the semi-structured interviews, were used to understand the social development of the GLD student. Teacher support, in combination with immersion in the mainstream class, was seen to be key in the development of the GLD student. Teacher "D" mentioned how they prepared a GLD student to read aloud in class by getting the student to *"focus on one line and re-read it...comfortable in reading a loud in class in front of peers."* Teacher "A" discussed a similar scenario with a different student. The student is *"self-conscious but is confident and speaks out in the meetings"* as a result of attending these meetings regularly and becoming comfortable with the mainstream students. This finding is similar to the research carried out by Katz and Miranda [30], where a marked social improvement in a student described as the *"lowest functioning student"* was noted following mainstream immersion. The social skills of the GLD students in this study have developed, according to teacher perception, particularly in their ability to communicate with peers following their immersion in a mainstream environment.

Furthermore, the different people with whom the GLD students engage with over time also help the GLD student to develop accepted social norms and skills. Teacher "B"

highlighted the importance of time, when it comes to allowing students to develop their social skills, emphasising that *"sometimes we forget how much progress they made."* The social development of one student was highlighted, as the student *"could barely sit in a classroom"* and *"all of a sudden someone is talking to you."* In contrast, the research undertaken by Field and colleagues cited in [28] found that there was no "substantial effect" of mainstreaming on students with developmental difficulties. This research has shown that there has been a perceived substantial effect on students' social development as a result of being part of mainstream education. It takes time for social development to occur; however, what is evident is that the more the students are exposed to engagements with their peers, the more they have developed socially.

Developing the social skills of students with a GLD in mainstream classes can have its drawbacks. Teacher "D" discussed the impact the dense curriculum has when it came to the inclusion of a student with a GLD in class. Including this student in class *"did impact the amount of the course I got through...should have gotten through more"*; curriculum pressure is one of the biggest barriers in a classroom when it came to inclusion [14]. This aligns to Teacher "C" concern in which family pressure places on academic goals for their children as *"parents of mainstream...want students focused on grades."* Teacher "B" concurred with this citing that *"due to parental pressures"* it is hard to find space in an *"exam based culture"* for the inclusion of students with a GLD. Similarly, Kwan and Cheung [9] and Katz and Miranda [30] noted these pressures in their case studies in Hong Kong and China, respectively, where curriculum and parental pressure was a factor which restricted inclusivity. For comparative purposes, Ireland's curriculum and assessment methods are similar to that of China [30], one which is characterised by competition. The competition surrounding employment has resulted in a *"highly competitive education tradition"* and can reduce the ability for true social inclusion to take place, due to the strong emphasis placed on individual academic success [29, 31]. Meaningful social inclusion can have a negative impact on typical students' development and emerged as an issue within highly competitive education systems, such as Ireland. Competitive education system can compromise the inclusive aspirations set out by international and national policies, such as EPSEN Act (2004), and results in the continued use of specialised units within mainstream schools for students with GLDs. It seems that in a society where education is seen as a status indicator, parents are for inclusion, but not at the expense of their own child's academic performance.

Interestingly, one teacher felt that the student's social skills failed to improve during the time they had students with a GLD difficulty in class. Teacher "F" highlighted the lack of consistency in attending class being the main reason. The visits *"were few and so erratic"* and that there *"hasn't been a norm established"* for social engagement to occur between mainstream students and the GLD students. The creation of a "norm" is important in increasing inclusivity. Teacher "E" shared the same sentiment, as *"familiarity, breeds a bond"* in which mainstream and GLD students feel

“comfortable” in the presence of one another. Once students are comfortable with one another, relationships, interaction, and social development become organic.

6. Conclusion

The primary aim of the research was to investigate if students with a GLD benefited from immersion in a mainstream school. The findings of this case study show, in the main, that students with a GLD achieved an observable level of social development as a direct result of being included in mainstream education. The research found there were shared commonalities with international research and the same challenges remain to achieve meaningful social inclusion [14]. In contrast, the findings have demonstrated a perceived social development of GLD students within a mainstream education system can be achieved. However, social exclusion did emerge as a key theme, primarily focused around labelling, and the term “unit.” Both the school staff and the academic literature found the term “unit” to be exclusionary of students with a GLD [11]. Overall, the school at the centre of this case study developed, over time, an ethos around inclusion and the data gathered found that the staff also believed the school to be an inclusive environment for students with a GLD. This environment, and willingness to engage with genuine and meaningful social inclusion through integrating GLD students in mainstream classes, resulted in the reported social development of students with a GLD. Quite simply, in this case study, the social skills of GLD students developed as a result of being included into mainstream classes and activities.

6.1. Further Research. There is a current paucity of research in relation to the social development of students with a GLD in postprimary education, particularly in Ireland. Irish education policy has focused primarily on the physical inclusion of students with a GLD within a mainstream school setting, without having a goal for these students [1, 32]. “Typical” students have a goal of achieving a good terminal state exam grades, yet GLD students have no such goal. This singular case-study research highlights the impact of social inclusion on the social development of students with a GLD and merits a longitudinal research design. As part of a more detailed study, and in order to gain quantifiable data, future research should focus on GLD students themselves. A longitudinal approach will allow researchers to document and monitor trends of GLD student progression, or regression, over the course of several years. This will further increase the generalizability of the research. Additionally, expanding the scale of the research, in terms of GLD teachers, SNAs and mainstream teachers with a GLD student will further increase the impact of future research. Finally, the current research begins to close a gap that the literature to date fails to address; however, extensive international studies are required.

6.2. Recommendations for Practice

6.2.1. GLD Units. If possible, the term GLD unit should not be used in the school setting. Dedicated GLD units should be

moved to physically locate them in the heart of the school building. If the location of the GLD unit cannot be changed, then an increased awareness of that part of the school needs to be developed. Simple initiatives, such as the implementation of a “buddy program,” where students from mainstream classes join the GLD students at lunch time, would increase social inclusion within the school.

6.2.2. Self-Confidence. Students with a GLD lack basic social skills as they function below the intellectual abilities of students their own age [4, 5]. Improving the self-confidence of the students is paramount, which is why increased engagement with peers their own age will develop their social skills. Creating friendships is vitally important, just as it is between “typical” pupils. Having shared common interests allows students to discuss these interests, but also develops their basic skills such as saying hello, making eye contact, and asking questions.

6.2.3. Awareness. An inclusive education will make students, and society, more aware of the needs of GLD students. However, this will only occur when mainstream students engage and learn with students with a GLD, will we have a fully understanding society.

6.2.4. Student Ranking. In order to enhance the inclusiveness of our education system, society needs to correlate more than intermediate and terminal postprimary state exams against the success of a student’s learning journey. The over emphasis on attaining academic grades results in teachers being time poor and a focus on “teaching to the test.” Currently, the development of GLD students that attend mainstream classes and take part in school activities remains under reported nationally. Students with a GLD deserve accreditation for developing their skills and should be acknowledged by the Departments of Education. Alternative accreditation gives GLD students a sense of achievement, and to their families, who acknowledge the hard work and effort put in by the student and school.

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

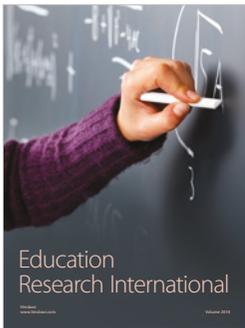
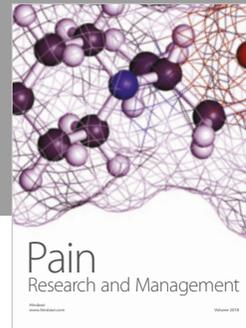
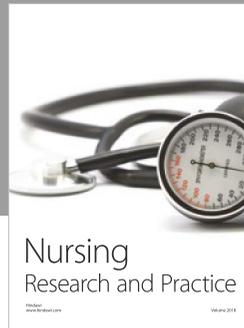
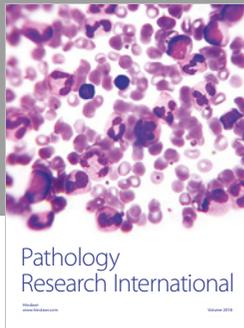
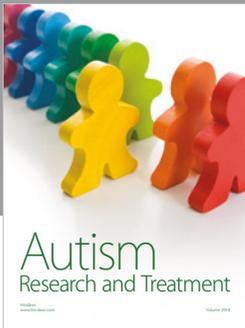
Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the participation by all staff in the school that informed this case study.

References

- [1] Government of Ireland, *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act*, The Stationary Office, Dublin, Ireland, 2004.

- [2] B. Blake and T. Pope, "Developmental psychology: incorporating Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories in classrooms," *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 59–67, 2008.
- [3] H. Daniels, *An Introduction to Vygotsky*, Routledge Ltd., London, UK, 2nd edition, 2005.
- [4] S. Griffin and M. Shevlin, *Responding to Special Educational Needs: An Irish Perspective*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, Ireland, 2nd edition, 2011.
- [5] National Council for Special Education (NCSE), *Research Report on the Role of Special Schools and Classes in Ireland*, NCSE, Dublin, Ireland, 2009.
- [6] Special Education Review Committee, *Report of the Special Education Review Committee*, Department of Education, Dublin, Ireland, 1993.
- [7] J. E. Downing and K. D. Peckham-Hardin, "Inclusive education: what makes it a good education for students with moderate to severe disabilities?," *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 16–30, 2007.
- [8] H. Saddler, "Researching the influence of teaching assistants on the learning of pupils identified with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools: exploring social inclusion," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 145–152, 2013.
- [9] V. Kwan and J. C.-S. Cheung, "Social work initiatives for the inclusion of students with special educational needs," *Practice*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 107–119, 2016.
- [10] N. Humphrey and S. Lewis, "What does "inclusion" mean for pupils on the autistic spectrum in mainstream secondary schools?," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 132–140, 2008.
- [11] J. H. Hansen, "Limits to inclusion," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 89–98, 2012.
- [12] Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, *Third Interim Report*, The Stationery Office, Dublin, Ireland, 2003.
- [13] F. Gael, "Over 1,000 extra SNAs in 2018—Minister Bruton-Fine Gael," 2017, <https://www.finegael.ie/1000-extra-snas-2018-minister-bruton/>.
- [14] M. Shevlin, E. Winter, and P. Flynn, "Developing inclusive practice: teacher perceptions of opportunities and constraints in the Republic of Ireland," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, vol. 17, no. 10, pp. 1119–1133, 2013.
- [15] W. Kinsella and J. Senior, "Developing inclusive schools: a systemic approach," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, vol. 12, no. 5-6, pp. 651–665, 2008.
- [16] P. Sammons and S. Davis, "Mixed methods approaches and their application in educational research," in *The BERA/SAGE Handbook of Educational Research*, W. Dominic, S. Neil, S. Emma, and E. Larry, Eds., p. 477, London, UK, 2017.
- [17] D. J. Todd, "Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: triangulation in action," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 602–611, 1979.
- [18] C. Opie and P. J. Sikes, *Doing Educational Research: A Guide to First-Time Researchers*, SAGE, London, UK, 2004.
- [19] M. D. Gall, J. P. Gall, and W. R. Borg, *Educational Research: An Introduction*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA, USA, 7th edition, 2003.
- [20] P. McNeill and S. Chapman, *Research Methods*, Routledge, London, UK, 3rd edition, 2005.
- [21] BERA, *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, BERA, London, UK, 2011.
- [22] S. Kvale, "Planning an interview study," in *Doing Interviews*, pp. 33–48, SAGE, London, UK, 2007.
- [23] A. Bryman, "Mixed methods research; combining qualitative and quantitative research," in *Social Research Methods*, pp. 627–651, Oxford Press, London, UK, 2012.
- [24] L. Blaxter, C. Hughes, and M. Tight, *How to Research*, Open University Press, McGraw Hill, Maidenhead, UK, 4th edition, 2010.
- [25] V. Braun and V. Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 77–101, 2006.
- [26] J. Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Sage, London, UK, 2009.
- [27] J. Leach and B. Moon, *The Power of Pedagogy: 1. Publ*, SAGE, Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2008.
- [28] G. Laws, M. Taylor, S. Bennie, and S. Buckley, "Classroom behaviour, language competence, and the acceptance of children with Down syndrome by their mainstream peers," *Down Syndrome Research and Practice*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 100–109, 1996.
- [29] F. Drudy and M. O'Donnell, "Post primary inclusive education for students with moderate general learning disabilities: perspectives of teachers and support personnel," in *Special and Inclusive Education: A Research Persect*, T. Day and J. Travers, Eds., pp. 103–109, Peter Land AG, Oxford, UK, 2012.
- [30] J. Katz and P. Mirenda, "Including students with developmental disabilities in general education classrooms: educational benefits," *International Journal of Special Education*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 14–23, 2002.
- [31] M. Deng and X. Zhu, "Special education reform towards inclusive education: blurring or expanding boundaries of special and regular education in China," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, vol. 16, no. S1, pp. 994–998, 2016.
- [32] Department of Education & Skills, *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs Post-Primary Guidelines*, Brunswick Press, Dublin, Ireland, 2015.



Hindawi

Submit your manuscripts at
www.hindawi.com

