A Cry for Prevention and Intervention: Challenges of Children in Inclusive Classrooms
Strategies for Support

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This month another devastating tragedy invade our hearts with grief and unbearable pain, mass shootings that reflect that there is a lot of mental pain without enough preventative assessment, therapy, and treatment. Past unfinished evaluations left gaps that needed to be filled as the children grow older, became teenagers, and the teenagers, adults.

Background Information

The story did not start this year, nor the past 10 years. We must travel to the middle of this century and see how things were developing. Is there a relation between Mass Shootings caused by young individuals with their mental health management? Between the 1960’s and 1980’s, less of 100 crimes per decade were related to schools or education institutions. However, arriving the 1990’s, the numbers doubled per decade, as if there is a correlation with the use of technology gadgets and the increment in cases. Maghsoodloo, 2019 analyzed the patterns in ten years of mass shootings during the last decade and argued that the weaker access to guns in the US might be the clue of the root cause of the mass shootings. However, I would argue that the root cause of the problem is more deeply, related to the thoughts, emotions or lack of emotions, and mental health of each of the shooters, as the guns are only the tools, but the fear, hate and despair are the trigger of the action of taking arms and take lives. Then, with the arrival of 2020, a terrible lingering pandemic that brought isolation, fear, and despair, and again those numbers increased even more. These numbers include mostly cases related of mass shootings performed sometimes by students, young people, mental affected, bullying victims, trauma victims, or stressed school staff.

The positive effects of implementing an inclusive environment on the education settings came during the middle of the 1970’s with the proposal of the government to give the same education opportunities to all the children with disabilities and individuals with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), now The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 (Mokter, 2012).

However, as it might happen with all the social experiments, it was imminent the need of closer observations, data gathering, and check and balances to prevent what now is a reality. I personally was touched by the pain, and I decided to make it my personal challenge, the one that gave me the opportunity to open my eyes to learn more about the inclusive environment, children’s mental development, and education, social and cultural psychology, diagnosis, and to
begin a research journey to find the support that was needed for my own family for the positive changes to happen and to restart recovery.

The following is the result of my capstone project which I dedicated to answer the question of what the Challenges of Children with ADD/ADHD are, but certainly, those challenges are not limited to only those with ADD/ADHD, but for all the children with or without disabilities, and to the staff and teachers that also need psychological support as their main task as educators and aides is to provide for the children the safe environment that they need to shine on the inclusive environment. I hope this project will serve to provide some direction and light to the preliminary evaluations of solutions and changes in policies, standard procedures and curriculum that are so necessary to prevent further aggressive action on the parts of the victims of the current policies. It is imminent that damage has been done already, not just to the victims and survivors of mass shootings, but also to those victims of the use of seclusion and restraint in the schools in the past, which are forms of abuse of authority, and I recommend also the federal government to provide not just to settle and improve the instructions of the educators, but also to provide and to cover the costs of special services for those children victims, and their affected parents, siblings, or caretakers, in all those expenses related to therapy, medical treatment, transportation during appointment times, and all the related expenses until healing and recovery is evident.

Introduction

The main objective for this Capstone Project is to explore the problem that represents the challenges of social interaction and academic performance of children with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) behaviors in inclusive classrooms. This problem is a prescriptive issue, one that raises further questions about what is not right, or it is not effective, nor functioning (Brown & Keeley, 2018), on the inclusive classrooms that might represent challenges for the children with ADD/ADHD.

Children with ADD/ADHD struggle with attention and focus to stay on tasks, in addition, some of them might experience hyperactivity and sometimes might act impulsively which represents a challenge for them socially and academically when they attend to school and share with the other children. Stoutjesdijk, Scholte, and Swaab (2016) explored the differences in behavior and academic progress between children with ADHD behavior in special schools as well as in inclusive education. They found that when these children do not reach the expectations on positive performance and social experience, they might experience anxiety symptoms that might complicate their school experience. It is important to identify the challenges and identify possible solutions for the improvement of the school experience for the children with ADD/ADHD.

Problem Statement

Children diagnosed with ADD/ADHD struggle with attention and focus, and those with ADHD with impulse behavior (APA, 2013). ADD/ADHD affect their learning experience, and social
interactions, therefore, the special education support team must be prepared to manage and to provide the necessary support for the successful learning experience of all the children that share on an inclusive environment (Stoutjesdijk et al., 2016).

There is a vast amount of research of the ADD/ADHD conditions as they are included in the Neurodevelopmental Disorders section II of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The barriers these children might face every day include cognitive challenges, such as persistent patterns of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning, learning or development (Malenczak & Nemec, 2017). Some children with ADD/ADHD might have other coexistent conditions which represent additional challenges to the individual child, educators, and caregivers (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). On this Capstone Project, we are focusing on the challenges related to the lack of special education training, psychology knowledge, experience, and negative attitudes of teachers, administrators, and special education support specialists towards the inclusion concept or to these children which might result in frustration of these children and caregivers who expect effective education services (Harazni & Alkaissi, 2016).

There are critical considerations that might impact the support and performance of children with ADD/ADHD on the inclusive learning environment in public schools. Ethical factors are related to the management of resources necessary to sustain the services without causing further harm to the children. Also, the approach and strategies for psychological support, use of assistive technology (Alhossein & Abdulaziz, 2017), and special accommodations are affected depending on the financial conditions of the parents. Diversity factors will focus on comparing the support provided by teachers, parents, and special education support team, depending on the cultural group or ethnic origin of the child or the child’s family. This is necessary to identify cultural perceptions that can become a challenge for the child to receive proper special education support (Tegtmejer, 2018). Globalism factors include how the approach and progress on special education on the inclusive classrooms followed on the United States of America (USA) is performed compared with the approach to special education on inclusive classrooms around the World, such as India (Srivastava, de Boer, & Pijl, 2017), and Spain (Estévez & León, 2017), among others. The cases of children diagnosed with ADD/ADHD are common with prevalence in most cultures in about 5%. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Social change factors include the identification of the social challenges that these children experience with the other children and people who interact with them. When these children do not reach the expectations on positive performance and social experience, they might experience other negative effects, such as anxiety or depression symptoms that might complicate their mental health (Meinzer et al., 2018). It is important to identify better education strategies, psychological support, and social services solutions for the improvement of the school experience for the children with ADD/ADHD (Srivastava et al., 2017).

Literature Review
There is a vast research body on the topic of ADD and ADHD as these behavioral and learning conditions phenomena are present globally, affecting children as well as adults of all the countries of the World. According to Tegtmejer (2018) there is an increase in the number of children diagnosed with ADD/ADHD since the publication of the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), and this situation is alarming for the governments and communities that need to search, and/or prepare effective strategies to provide education support to these children. The education systems must provide effective inclusive education that guarantees that these individuals be prepared to perform as employees or self-employees with the same potential of self-sustenance during adulthood as the rest of the population. Likewise, the education system, who is the first system that is offering an inclusive environment to the citizens, need to be prepared and qualified to receive these children and to provide the necessary support at school to succeed in the goal of teaching these children who have differences in behavior and learning skills.

Harazni and Alkaissi, (2016) studied the narratives of four mothers of four children diagnosed with ADHD and their teachers in one of the Middle East countries, Palestine. The method used included interviews for the assessments using the Giordi’s phenomenological psychology method. From the mother’s perspective, the results gathered three major themes, or issues, and ten sub-themes which includes the inadequate support from the families, communities, and schools; the disturbances of the child’s behavior caused by the hyperactivity, inattention, impulsivity, and hostility, and how these issues cause feelings of caregiver burden on the mothers. From the teacher’s perspectives, the results gathered five major themes or issues, and thirteen sub-themes. The major issues include lack of knowledge regarding the condition, student health, and follow-up, lack of knowledge on how to manage the child’s behavior (Harazni & Alkaissi, 2016). The sub-themes include the disruptive child’s behavior that sometimes include the inability to follow class instructions, inattention and impulsivity, use of verbal and physical abuse, the lack of resources such as time, materials and professional experts, lack of support from the Ministry of Education, school team, parental support, the burden of having the child on the classroom because of safety issues, lack of emotional support to calm the child and other students in certain situations (Harazni & Alkaissi, 2016). This study basically reflects the list of weaknesses encountered in unprepared inclusive school classrooms. The focus was on the challenges of the mothers and teachers who are expecting that these children respond like the other children to the learning environment, resulting in the lack of effective services and support from both the parents and the school system (Harazni & Alkaissi, 2016). The lack of knowledge on understanding the condition from the scientific, medical, and neuro-psychological perspective and then how and why these children behave in certain ways depending on the stimuli that they perceived it is the root cause of the lack of proper management and support from their parents, communities, school teachers and support teams (Harazni & Alkaissi, 2016). Therefore, the lack of knowledge of the caregivers and school support system is the main cause of an ineffective inclusive system which becomes the first challenge that children with ADD/ADHD condition faced every day. As a solution, Harazni and Alkaissi (2016) mentioned that the lack of knowledge might heal itself with the preparation and
implementation of learning plans including frequent training and conferences for the teachers and school academic and behavioral support team.

Srivastava et al. (2017) described different tools for measuring attitudes and lack of knowledge regarding inclusive teaching methods. They used assessments that measured attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education, and furthermore, measured knowledge about inclusive teaching methods in India. They developed questionnaires for their assessments and found that the teachers lacked competencies especially in resources management and assessments, and the current training programs and assessments were inadequate for measuring attitudes, knowledge of disabilities, and teaching methods. The results of their study revealed that although those teachers in India have a neutral attitude towards inclusive education, they lacked enough knowledge about the disabilities of conditions such as ADHD and show no knowledge of other important and common conditions such as dyslexia and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Srivastava et al., 2017) which sometimes are present on some children as coexistent conditions with ADHD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Tegtmejer (2018) sociocultural study of the disruptive behavior of children with ADHD in Denmark serves the purpose of adding more information on how and why of the behaviors of these children might be interpreted. In an example, his observations included that sometimes when these children are creating disturbances, seems like they are doing it on purpose, to be accepted on the community of peers, because of the natural social need (Tegtmejer, 2018). However, it is possible that the way they are trying to satisfy that social need is inappropriate, and intervention is needed, like an orientation about that there are times for working and times for socialization and that not necessarily it might happen at the same time as the classwork. Tegtmejer (2018) highlighted the importance of how the environment stimulus affected the behavior of the children with ADHD, which created serious challenges for these children to focus, concentrate, and keep up with the tasks assigned. Not all the disruptions are originated by the ADHD children. If the teacher lack of organization and group control, the level of noise also disrupts the ADHD children activating the hyper-activity attitudes that also comes with some impulsive behavior (Tegtmejer, 2018). Makes sense that if the teachers lack knowledge or experience working with the inclusive environment and more importantly lack of knowledge of the features of ADHD, the teacher will not be successful in the task of providing a productive environment for these children.

Estévez and León (2017) studied the resources of organization and curriculum used by the teachers in inclusive schools. They based their study on a survey with seventy-eight items that were completed by 283 teachers, (162 woman, and 121 males) in Spain and concluded that the teachers are directed by the existent organizational and curricular conditions to adjust the educational needs of the children with ADHD. If the school system is not including exceptions that reflect the inclusive environment with a list of proper accommodations for children with ADHD, and they are just trying to adapt these children to their typical curriculum, the question is how effective or positive that strategy is for the children with ADHD, knowing that they need specialized strategies to succeed behaviorally and academically. However, in their study, Estévez and León (2017) explained that the teachers adapted the organization and curriculum to the inclusive environment, adding effective strategies to support these population. For
instance, they mentioned some effective accommodations within the inclusive environment. They found that there are classrooms with spaces that allow movement, and favor attention. Those who loss attention are seated near the teacher, and the materials are organized, they used school agendas to support their attention, organization and planning skills. The teachers prepared the environment that enhanced behavioral and cognitive self-regulation. The teachers are constantly aware of the challenges that these children have regarding attention, focus, and executive functions, and they provide tools that help these children to have a better performance, an example, providing exam calendars, and visible reminders of important tasks and instructions. They also established rules on the classrooms to address the lack of self-control and impulsivity with rewards to positive behavior and good decisions. They also concluded that the inclusive teachers profile included those who, at the time of the study were also trained in managing diverse students (Estévez & León, 2017).

Critical Analysis

The following discussion includes the causes and effects evaluated for the problem that I selected which is related to the challenges of social interaction and academic performance of children with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in inclusive classrooms.

The first cause for this problem include the lack of knowledge of the teachers and special education support team in the psychological features and medical treatment of ADD/ADHD condition and other coexistent condition and how to provide the special accommodations depending on the learning abilities of the child that has these conditions (Harazni & Alkaissi, 2016). For instance, a child with ADD/ADHD cognitive and behavioral characteristics might have less focus and/or attention span than those without the ADD/ADHD condition, therefore the child might need special accommodations that will include control of the distractions of the classroom while providing support for him to stay on task until the child complete the task satisfactorily (Tegtmejer, 2018).

The effect of lack of knowledge of the teachers and special education support team in how to provide the special accommodations it would negatively affect the children performance because probably the child will be easily distracted, off task, and will lose the time that he needs to complete the task, therefore, would probably fail on his academic performance regarding the task on hand during that period. (Estévez & León, 2017). The knowledge that the teachers and special education support team need shall include the understanding of the features of the conditions, how the condition(s) affect cognition, behavior, and learning, how severity impacts the student’s ability to learn, how the medications used for medical treatment work, their side effects, and also, how to use effective alternatives that facilitates providing the specific special accommodation that the child needs to stay on task and have a better school and social experience (Malenczak & Nemec, 2017). Srivastava et al. (2017) studied the knowledge about disabilities on 89 teachers from 18 different schools that provide inclusive education services and found significant lack of knowledge about several disabilities, such as ADHD, dyslexia, intellectual disability, and ASD.
The second cause of the problem is stress due to the lack of positive emotional or psychological support that the child needs inside the classroom. Stoutjesdijk, et al. (2016), stated that positive behavior reinforcement while using pedagogical strategies and emotional support contributes to behavioral adaptation.

The effects of stress due to lack of positive emotional psychological support that the child needs inside the classroom will be reflected in different forms. The child might start having different feelings which strongly interfere with his thoughts, focus and concentration (Malenczak & Nemec, 2017). Feelings of frustration, negative stress, shame in front of peers, feelings of anxiety, sadness or depression might cause that the child starts crying, or yelling, acting aggressively or completely down and depressive. For instance, when the child realizes that is failing his grades, he or she might develop feelings of anxiety and/or depression which if it is not prevented might become severe during adolescence (Meinzer et al., 2018).

The third cause of the problem is the lack of control the teacher has on how the students interact with each other and the teacher inside the inclusive environment (Stoutjesdijk et al., 2016). The inclusive environment includes “typical” children or children without known disabilities, children with consistent behaviors that affect their interaction with others and academic performance who are not yet evaluated, and children who were evaluated previously, and have been diagnosed with IEPs in place. The teacher needs to constantly insist on good, positive values, behavior, and respect their learning differences that contribute to the healthy social interaction between peers (Tegtmejer, 2018).

The effects of not teaching the children good values and to respect the learning differences among them might cause that some children might feel confused with the behavior or some of their peers, some might start negatively criticizing others, or some might start imitating negative and disrupting behaviors instead of focusing on the academic tasks (Tegtmejer, 2018). This lack of understanding by the students can cause conflicts between them, and for those who are more emotionally sensitive than others, these conflicts might represent a huge psychological challenge.

The fourth cause of the problem is not providing pedagogical strategies that includes an appropriate environment of the classroom (Malenczak & Nemec, 2017), how the position of the desks and chairs, the decoration of the walls, the temperature and humidity of the classroom, the lighting, and noises will positively affect the student to stay on track or negatively contributes to distract the student.

The effects of not providing a pedagogical strategy that includes appropriate environment inside the classroom cause that the children with ADD/ADHD might get distracted more easily (Stoutjesdijk et al., 2016). Some children are more or less sensitive to the brightness of the classrooms, others are more sensitive to the intensity of noises, smells, temperature, and humidity. Some children are also affected by the personality of other students, therefore the position of the desks and chairs and the assignation of students depending on their personality
and behavior is also a factor that might affect the performance of the children (Stoutjesdijk et al., 2016).

Problem Resolution

Many children with ADD/ADHD behaviors have special talents or become engrossed in certain tasks that they find interesting (Murphy, 2014). However, they have persistent problems to sustain attention, some have excessive motor activity or impulsivity, and become disruptive (Stoutjesdijk et al., 2016). For these children to succeed in their school and social activities, it is necessary to prevent additional challenges that they might experience if they do not receive the proper academic and psychological support (Malenczak & Nemec, 2017) due to the lack of knowledge of the teachers, and school support team to provide positive emotional support, and effective pedagogical accommodations.

The knowledge that the teachers and special education support team need shall include the understanding of the features of the conditions, how the condition(s) affect cognition, behavior, and learning, how severity impacts the student’s ability to learn, how the medications used for medical treatment work, their side effects, and also, how to use effective alternatives that facilitates providing the specific special accommodation that the child needs to stay on task and have a better school and social experience (Malenczak & Nemec, 2017).

The advantages that come with implementing a plan for training and re-training the teachers and special education support team shall include that the knowledge acquired and refreshed will provide the tools that they need to identify the presentation and identification of symptoms or behaviors (Srivastava et al., 2017) and how to manage and prevent situations that might affect the learning environment of the whole group inside the classrooms.

The disadvantages that come with implementing a plan for training includes the cost related to the resources, time and materials needed for the training, however, an effective training plan will assure the improvement of the services, and the academic and psychological success of these children and their service providers (Estévez & León, 2017).

Challenges and Barriers to Implementing the Resolution

There are several challenges and barriers to implementing this resolution which include: When the support team and teachers rely only on the use of medications to control the behavior of the children without knowing that medications have side effects which might cause other problems on the child and are not as effective for the child to stay on task (Estévez & León, 2017).

When teachers think that they do not need more training because they already have special education courses and resist to update their knowledge (Harazni & Alkaissi, 2016), however, it is crucial that the teachers are strong in their knowledge and competencies about learning disabilities (Srivastava et al., 2017).
When the support team and teachers believe that if the child is taking therapies outside the school and assumed that those therapies are enough for the child to automatically improve their behavior assuming the child does not need to receive more support (Estévez & León, 2017).

When teachers, school psychologists and support team do not have a clear understanding of their roles on the inclusive education, it is then reflected on their neutral attitudes toward the inclusive education (Mohangi & Archer, 2015). If they assume that the child is 100% accountable for their own behavior “as 100% is the child’s fault” they might start mistreating the child in front of peers, which might create other psychological problems with the child and promotes bullying in the classroom environment. Then using this rationale to justify and document on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) reports that they are doing an effective service but is not their fault if the child does not respond positively to the “services”.

Conclusion

It is essential that the teachers and special education support team assume their responsibilities to keep current with knowledge, prepare, adapt, and design their curriculums in a way that it can be easily used for the task of teaching students with learning disabilities (Estévez & León, 2017). The teacher and special education support team must provide a positive behavior reinforcement approach for all the children while using pedagogical strategies and emotional support which contributes to behavioral adaptation (Stoutjesdijk et al., 2016). As a result, the teacher will act as a role model who maintains and sustains the positive control and good values of respect among the students inside the classroom providing a healthy social environment in the inclusive environment (Murphy, 2014).

This Capstone Project has helped me to practice how to become a scholar-practitioner performing critical analysis. During these weeks reading the studies performed around the World regarding the challenges, resolutions, and positive approaches to the problem, I also learned about how to understand the children with this condition, because there are many variables that we need to consider, many of these kids are brilliant in certain areas, and it is important that the schools identify their talents and strengths, help them to use them, and provide for their weaknesses. The education system needs to be able to adapt the methods of teaching considering the learning differences, while appropriately nurture the children without harming their self-esteem.

In order to affect positive social change, we need to share the research knowledge with all the public and private schools, and surrounding communities. Most importantly, the training must be extended to the families which are the core institution of the society. The access to this knowledge will create a positive impact that will guarantee that everyone will understand these conditions, breaking the stigma of mental disorders, and stereotypes, and to facilitate the integration of the children with ADD/ADHD and other behavioral related conditions. It is a teamwork effort where teachers, school administrators, psychologists, counselors, families, communicators, and communities need to work together.
References


Additional References


