



INVESTIGATING THE REASONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' ATTRITION AND RETENTION

Eyup Bayram GUZEL
University of Warwick
Institute of Education Coventry-England
eyupbguzel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the factors that contribute to special education teachers' attrition and retention in public schools. Six special education teachers were interviewed. Initial interview and follow up interviews were implemented in order to obtain data about the perceptions of special education teachers on attrition and retention issues. Results indicated that lack of administrative support, excessive paper work and caseloads responsibilities, the diverse needs of students with special needs in the classrooms, the lack of family involvement, delivery of teaching resources, role conflicts, and age and experience in the field were found to be influential on attrition and retention of special education teachers.

Keywords: Retention, attrition, special education teachers,

INTRODUCTION

Special education teachers' attrition and retention issues have become a critical problem in the last decade and it has been concern of administrators and policymakers in order to keep them in the field (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000). One of the most critical challenges occurs in developing qualified work forces and establishing teaching and learning environments that attract special educators' involvement and commitment (Billingsley, 2003). Special education and science fields have the highest turnover rate compared to other fields and special education teachers are at the top (Ingersoll, 2001). It is crucial to know how many special educators are leaving or staying in the field each year. According to Ingersoll (2001), the United States needed 332,000 special education teachers in 1990. This number of needs had increased to 453,000 at the end of 2000. By the year 2010, he projected that "there will be a need for 611,550 special education teachers" (Ingersoll, 2001, pg. 7). Also, approximately 13.2% of special education teachers (six percent directly leave, 7.2 % transfer to general education) leave the field per year (Ingersoll, 2001). Therefore, he concludes that the retention of special educators has a crucial importance as a part of solving the problem because of the fact that recruiting thousands of new special educators is not going to solve the shortage problem of special educators if many of them leave the field after a few short years (Ingersoll, 2001).

Attrition has a crucial importance in the way of reducing special education teachers' shortage problems. In order to reduce attrition, there should be an understanding of factors that contribute to special educators' attrition which are influenced by complex and varied reasons (Gersten, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that relate to the attrition and retention of special education teachers. In order to investigate these factors, the research questions were (1) what the specific and general factors are for special education teachers that bring attrition and, (2) what should be done in order to retain special education teachers in the field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various definitions of retention and attrition have been reported by researchers. One of the researcher, Billingsley (1993), categorized special education teachers' retention, attrition and transfer in four categories. The first category is "absolute retention", which explains that teachers remain in the same school as the previous year. The second category is "transfers to another special education teaching position", includes special education teachers who stay in the field but transfer to another position in the same or different school. The third one is "transfers to general education teaching", which is an important concern because of the loss for the special education teaching force. The last category is



“exit attrition”, which includes teachers who leave teaching completely such as teachers who retire or take nonteaching positions (e.g., counseling, administration) (Billingsley, 2003). In the light of these categories, Boe, Bobbitt, and Cook (1997) suggested that “the most troublesome component of turnover is exit attrition, because it represents a reduction in the teaching force, requiring a compensating inflow of replacement teachers” (p. 377).

There are several studies investigated special education teachers’ retention and attrition issues. According to Embich’s (2001) investigation, he categorized the four major issues regarding with special education teachers’ attritions which are beyond the control of them: perceived workload, role conflict, principle support, and role ambiguity. In summary, role ambiguity and conflict happens because of the unclear responsibilities, rights, status and goals of special education teachers. The perceived workload causes emotional and physical exhaustion coming from excessive paperwork, planning the students’ individual goals, and extracurricular activities. The principle support affects teaching quality of special education teachers and their motivation in the field (Embich, 2001).

In another study, Kaff (2004) investigated the reasons for why the school systems are unable to retain special education teachers in the field. The lack of administrative support for special education teachers were found the main problem and 50% of the special education teachers voted concern about planning to leave the profession in the next 5 years because of that. The reasons were categorized as student issues, support for personnel, services delivery, resource-management issues, paperwork, and monetary issues (Kaff, 2004).

Gersten, Keating, and Yovanoff (2001) found that the job design of special education teachers has a significant role in order to increase retention among them. In many cases, special education teachers begin teaching by assuming regular teaching conditions and assuming “they are there to teach the children” (pg. 13). However, in reality, they learn that a large amount of paperwork, a significant range in students’ performance levels, and endless school meetings are waiting for them to be studied. Therefore, they might easily become stressed or burnt out. Thus, there must be an urgent job design where they would have the opportunity to share workload and communicate with other teachers and administration in their schools.

Classroom issues are another concern area for special education teachers because of working with students who have diverse special needs and time issues which are spent on the job. According to special education teachers’ reports, it was difficult to meet the diverse needs of each student while they were displaying complex sets of behavioral problems. During teaching, significant amount of time was lost in order to deal with behavioral problems. Besides, the expectation of parents for their children to obtain all the services put pressure and stress on special education teachers. Teachers expressed their concerns about extra time spending at home for school related subjects without receiving additional pay (Kaff, 2004).

The shortage problem might have serious consequences for students with disabilities who are being given inadequate teaching because of the lack of special educators. Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996) analyzed the shortage problem of special educators over their students and found that students were demonstrating less academic, social and competition skills than their peers.

Personal Factors and Teacher Characteristics

Age

Age has been linked to attrition of special education teachers by several studies. These studies stated that special educators who are young are more likely to leave or more intent to leave than special educators who are older (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Cross & Billingsley, 1994).



Earlier, Grissmer and Kirby (1987) found that attrition was high for younger teachers compare to teachers who are in mid-career period. Also, Miller et al. (1999) reported that age and teaching experience are significantly correlated. Therefore, the transfer rate from special education to general education for younger special educators who had less experience was higher than older teachers. Besides, Grissmer and Kirby (1987) suggested that there are some situations where younger teachers might have fewer debt obligations and also they might have less investment than older teachers in a specific location. Therefore, it is difficult for experienced and older teachers to leave the field because they may face retraining costs, the loss of tenure and also an experienced teacher's salary.

Gender

There are a few studies which reflected the relationship between gender and attrition and the findings were mixed. One study by Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al. (1997) did not report any relationship between gender and attrition while Morvant et al. (1995) found that male special education teachers indicated more intention to leave than female special education teachers. On the contrary, singer (1993a) pointed out that young female special educators were more at risk for leaving the field compare to males.

Personal Factors

Billingsley et al. (1995) reported that personal factors are highly related to leave or stay in the field in a study with 99 special education teachers. 37% of teachers left the field because of personal factors such as family or person move, health, retirements, and pregnancy/child-rearing. In another study, Cross and Billingsley (1994) reported that teachers with high education and less experience are more likely to demonstrate intention to leave compare to other teachers who have more experience and less education because of better career and job opportunities and alternatives outside of special education.

Work Environments

Work environments have an important impact on special education teachers' job satisfaction and career decisions. Special educators spend their everyday work lives in school and classroom environments which therefore defines many aspects of their lives. There are some problems come from work environments which were explained by Ingersoll (2001) as "low salaries, inadequate support from the school administration, student discipline problems, and limited faculty input into school decision making all contribute to higher rates of turnover, after controlling for the characteristics of both teachers and schools". (p. 7). The following section addresses work environment variables such as school climate, salary, colleague and administrative support, teacher roles, paper work, and students and case load issues.

Salary

There are several studies examined the relationship between the teacher's salary and attrition and the salary was clearly associate with attrition of special educators. Three studies specifically investigated this relationship. Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al. (1997) found that the more teachers' salaries increased, the more their retention in the field become better. Miller et al. (1999) suggested that special educators with higher-paying were more likely to remain their positions compare to lower-paid special educators. Billingsley et al. (1995) specified that 10% of the reasons given for leaving the field were because of low salaries of special education teachers. By using the consistent findings of these studies, salary can be used as a strategy to increase retention. Henk et al. (1997) suggested that districts and schools which cannot provide or offer sufficient salaries are more likely at risk for retaining teachers. There are some strategies that the schools and districts can increase retention of special education teachers as Carlson and Billingsley, 2001 suggests more than half of the U.S's large school districts use financial incentives as a part of recruitment strategy.



Administrative Support

Administrative support has a crucial importance in terms of special education teachers' attrition and retention in schools as Billingsley (2003) stated that special education teachers who do not receive administrative support are more likely to leave their teaching positions or indicate intent to leave than others who receive administrative support. Boe et al. (1999) suggested that teachers who reported achieving administrative support were four times more likely to stay in the field compare to their colleagues who reported inadequate administrative support. Also, Miller et al. (1999) stated that perceived administrative support was significantly related to attrition of special education teachers. Furthermore, Billingsley and Cross (1992) found that special educators who reported perceiving adequate support were more likely to be less stressed, more committed to their job and more satisfied with their jobs than those perceiving less support.

Administrative support might also influence special educators' intents to leave or stay in the field as Gersten et al.(2001) stated that a higher level of support from principles or administrators can be directly or indirectly associated with special educators professional developments, job satisfactions, stress levels, and commitments.

Administrative support might be defined differently depending on its nature and type (Gold, 1996). In this sense, Littrell (1994) explained that emotional support such as showing appreciation, paying attention to teachers' works, maintaining open communication is considered as crucial to special educators. He additionally reported that emotional and instructional support such as providing needed materials and resources has positive effect in job satisfaction and school commitment of special educators.

Roles problems

There have been several quantitative and qualitative studies that provided convincing evidence that role problem plays crucial role in special educators' attrition and their abilities to be effective in the field (Billingsley, 2003). There might be different types of role problems such as role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity and role dissonance and these problems cause stress and decrease job satisfaction (Gersten et al., 2001). Billingsley et al. (1993) also reported that excessive meetings are another important factor for attrition because special educators might feel confused between their roles and administrative roles.

In order to provide retention and decrease attrition of special educators, their roles should be clearly defined as Westling and Whitten (1996) identified role-related subjects that influence special educators' perceptions about staying or leaving the field. According to his study, special educators' responsibilities should be clearly defined and they should not be enforced to complete tasks that are not defined to be their responsibility. Also, adequate time to complete paper works regarding their job should be provided. Furthermore, for the purpose of improving retention, role designs should be identified carefully as Gersten et al. (2001) asks: "Does the job, with all it entails, make sense? Is it feasible? Is it one that well-trained, interested, special educational professionals can manage in order to accomplish their main objective?" (p. 551).

Paper Work

Paper work has been found as a major contributor to special educators' attrition by several studies (Billingsley et al., 1995; Brownell et al., 1994-1995; George et al., 1995; Morvant et al., 1995). One of the largest study specifically investigating paper work, *Paperwork in Special Education* (SPeNSE, 2002) found that paper work problems have crucial importance regarding special educators' intent to leave the field, after controlling other work condition variables are controlled (Billingsley, 2003). In a research by Schnorr (1995), 71% of special educators expressed that paper work is a major contributor for attrition and deterrent to their teaching. In another study, Billingsley et al. (1995) implemented



open-ended interviews and reported that 60% of special educators stated paper work as a main reason to leave the field and he identified the meaning of excessive paper work as overwhelming, unnecessary, and redundant in order to clearly identify the issue.

The amount of paper work is another contributor to attrition and to the overall manageability of special educators' job (Billingsley, 2003). According to his study, a typical special education teacher spends between four to five hours per week in order to complete necessary forms and administrative paper works. Also, over half of the special educators in his study reported that the time spend on paper work reduces their time and effort to use in teaching.

Different states, districts, and schools may have different practices regarding paper work responsibilities. Billingsley (2003) suggested that in some schools or systems, the school psychologists may help and share the responsibilities for testing and identification in order to help special educators. In another school, some of the special educators might work as a school coordinator and likely to have paper work burden. Also, some special educators may have other effective ways to reduce their paper work burden to a minimum.

Stress

Stress has been found as one of the most powerful predictors of attrition and intent to leave the field by several studies and it was referred to exhaustion and depersonalization by several researchers (Maslach, 1982, Billingsley, 2003, Miller et al., 1999, Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Gersten et al., 2001). In a study by Morvant et al. (1995) found that almost 80% of special education teachers who planned to leave reported a great deal of stress on a daily basis. Also, this study categorized the reasons for stress as the diverse needs of students, bureaucratic requirements and conflicting expectations and directives (Billingsley, 2003).

Additionally, some of the techniques designed to decrease stress and burnout have also been suggested to improve retention such as administrative support and collegial support (Billingsley, 2003). One study by Cooley and Yovanoff (1996) reported important outcomes of a stress management workshop and a peer collaboration program in developing special educators' job satisfaction, organizational commitment and reducing stress level. After teaching stress management strategies, special educators significantly improved their burnout control and organizational commitments.

Job Satisfaction

In order to reduce attrition of special educators, job satisfaction is considered one of the most important ways because of the strong link between job satisfaction and attrition (Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Westling & Whitten, 1996; Whitaker, 2000). Gersten et al. (2001) reported that there is a significant difference between special educators who intent to stay or leave the field.

Singh and Billingsley (1996) suggested that creating supportive and good relationships with teachers, principals and school staffs, clarifying roles, providing adequate resources and building connection with the families of students help special educators to obtain more satisfaction from their work.

Student Variables

There are several studies that identified student variables and diverse needs of students with special needs as sources of special education teachers' attrition (Billingsley & Cross, 1991, George, George, & Grosenick, 1992, Gersten, 2001). Billingsley (1993) reported that because of the diverse needs and individual learning styles of students with special needs, their teachers' experienced high rate of burnout and stress. Eventually, it might have caused attrition. In another study, Singer 1993 found that when teachers had students with emotional and behavioral disorders in self contained classrooms, they had higher attrition and stress than those in other special teachers who are in different categories.



METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that relate to the attrition and retention of special education teachers. Semi-structured method was used by conducting an initial and follow up interviews with six interviewees. After conducting first initial interviews, the data were analyzed and common themes were categorized according to the interviewees' responses. Then follow up interviews were conducted in order to expand the responses that they made in the first interviews. Both interviews were matched and categorized under different themes.

Setting and Participants

The participants were six special education teachers who are currently serving as special education teachers. All of the teachers are obtaining their master's degrees as graduate students in special education program. The teachers' ages range between 26-51 and they have different years of teaching experiences in special education.

Research Design and Questions

A qualitative methodology including the collection of a variety of data from an open-ended interview questionnaire as an empirical instrument and follow up interviews with special education teachers was conducted. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews provide only a few questions to the respondents for the purpose of gathering different kinds of information from different participants, depending on the participants' perspectives on a particular topic (Mertler, 2012). After conducting initial interviews, follow up interviews regarding their responses were conducted in order to reflect deeper understanding of specific issues and factors relating to attrition and retention of special education teachers.

In the light of these interviews, the participants were asked questions about the factors that most likely contribute to the high attrition rate of the special education teachers in schools. Additionally, they were asked the reasons for retention issues of special education teachers' and also their perspectives and recommendations for the schools and the districts to increase special education teachers' retention. The interview questions were:

1. What are the factors that most likely contribute to the high attrition rate of the special education teachers in schools?
2. How would you describe the effect of teacher characteristics and personal factors (gender, race, and other personal factors) on special education teachers' attrition?
3. What would be your recommendation(s) for the school and the district to increase special education teachers' retention in the field?

Data Collection Procedures

The participants were informed by e mail about the interview and subject prior to their meeting. Also, a consent form was e mailed to the participants in order to explain general information about the study. The interviews were recorded and then they were transcribed. The identities of the participants were hidden. The follow up questions were later asked to the participants for identifying some of their responses from their first interviews in order to obtain more detailed data. Pseudo names for participants were used for data analyzing part.

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to analyze the data, pseudo names were used for each participant. Their responses were analyzed in combination with the literature review findings to better understand and identify attrition



and retention issues of special education teachers. Interview questions were separately analyzed in order to better address the issues and responses of the participants.

Interview Question 1

What are the factors that most likely contribute to the high attrition rate of the special education teachers in schools?

Interviewed special education teachers expressed mixed views. All of the teachers (6 of them) reported that the lack of administrative support and excessive paper work responsibilities are two main crucial factors on the special education teachers' attrition. These findings are similar to the findings of Embich's (2001) investigation, when he categorized the four major issues regarding with special education teachers' attritions as: perceived workload, role conflict, principle support, and role ambiguity. Also, according to Kaff (2004) research, the lack of administrative support was found as the main problem and 50% of the special education teachers expressed concerns about intending to leave the profession in the next five years because of the lack of administrative support. In relation with this, the interviewed participant W. Harrison explains that "the biggest obstacle for me is keeping up with the demands of the administration to constantly collect data in a variety of formats" The importance of administrative support was further emphasized by teachers in follow up interviews that K. Belt states "I think that communication is so important to a good working relationship with your principal and department heads. Having a willingness to listen and incorporate what other people have learned into how you approach teaching is very important to developing respectful, open communication with others".

Excessive paperwork and caseload issues were identified as another important reason for attrition by all of the interviewees. B. Babich explains that "there is always a ton of paper work to do and I sometimes feel like there is little time to teach" while W. Harrison says we need the data to make good decisions, but having a more uniform way of going about the collection process from all parties would be very helpful in terms of the time involved and being able to get what you need the first time around. These findings are similar to the findings of one of the largest study specifically investigating paper work, *Paperwork in Special Education* (SPeNSE, 2002). It found that paper work problems are significantly related to the special educators' intent to leave the field, after other work condition variables are controlled (Billingsley, 2003). Excessive paper work might cause stress as one teacher argues that endless paper work interfering with teaching is factors for attrition that she experiences a lot and then special educators become frustrated with the deadlines and not enough time to complete paperwork. Furthermore, in a follow up interview, T. Thomas reports paper work and caseload responsibilities as a big factor for attrition by stating that in the PPCD (pre-school special education) teachers take anecdotal notes on each child. This consisted of observing each child and rating how they do in each category. Once all that is noted than that data is entered into a database. At times it would take up to two and half hours per child to complete the data entry.

Four teachers emphasized that diversity of students with special needs have a crucial effect on special educators' attrition. Billingsley (1993) found that the diverse needs and individual learning styles of students with special needs caused a high rate of burnout and stress for their teachers. In relation with that, W. Harrison claims that "if all your students have significant demands on your time daily, then reaching out to the next level is required in order to meet the requirement of the student's IEP. You can only shuffle so much until the impact begins to affect the student and then you need to reach out for help".

Family involvement and support was considered as a contributor for attrition by teachers which was a different finding and not included in the literature review part. B. Babich explains that "sometimes, it is very hard to get in touch with parents to talk about concerns. Where I teach we have a high mobility



rate so families move, change phone numbers and do not update the school". Therefore, the lack of family involvement may bring stress and frustration to special educators because of the lack of communication environment (Billingsley, 2003).

Four teachers identified that the delivery of teaching resources is a factor for attrition. One teacher summarizes this concern stating "students with special needs is a growing population in our schools but while population grows the resources to educate them has not grown and in many cases in a co-teaching classroom the special educator takes a back seat to the general educator that can be frustrating to the special education teacher." This finding supports the findings of Kaff's (2004) study that the lack of financial support might bring stress and frustration.

Another factor for attrition that has been reported by three teachers is role ambiguity, or unclear roles of special education teachers. B. Babich points out that he always wants to provide the best for all of his students but there are many extra roles for him to play in the class while another teacher emphasizes that they know that every day is going to be a new and different experience and the roles and demands for special educators are going to be changing. These findings support the study of Gersten et al., 2001 that explains the more role conflict and ambiguity that special educators have, the more they become stressed which may lead to attrition.

Interview Question 2

How would you describe the effect of teacher characteristics and personal factors (gender, race, age, experience and other personal factors) on special education teachers' attrition?

Special education teachers demonstrated mixed perceptions for this question. Firstly, in terms of teacher characteristics, two teachers expressed their views as one said "I think characteristics such as listening to the student and being open to their ideas are important" while another explained that if teachers do not have certain characteristics such as organization, it could make teaching harder which may lead to attrition. In terms of personal factors (gender, race, age, experience and other factors), teachers reported different opinions. Gender and race were considered unrelated to special educators' attrition by five teachers. Only one teacher stated that "gender and generally strength are factors for teacher attrition because it is likely that you will have to lift a child or to multiple times a day. If you are unable to do this then you will not be able to do your job". These findings regarding personal factors are similar to the findings of Boe et al. 1997 and Miller et al. 1999 studies where they did not found any relationship between personal factors and attrition.

On the other hand, experience and age were considered significantly important for special education teachers' attrition and retention by five interviewees. One of them emphasized that teachers who have more teaching experience from a cross-section of areas are better able to manage the demands of the students. Their experiences are more tested in other areas which might suggest they are better suited for the demands of a special education teacher. Another teacher stated that "I do think that age and experience weight heavily on the retention of special education teachers. The more experience and maturity a teacher has the better they are in coping with new or challenging situations". Additionally, Y. Martha claims that "I think that older teachers have more experiences, so they are more likely to easily handle with problems than younger teachers". All these findings regarding age and experience are similar to Miller et al. (1999)'s and Gersten et al. (2001)'s findings in which they reported that special educators with young age and less experience are more at risk for leaving and showing more intent to leave the field than their more experienced and older counterparts (Gersten et al., 2001; Miller et al., 1999).

Interview Question 3

What would be your recommendation(s) for the school and the district to increase special education teachers' retention in the field?



One of the mostly recommended areas was improving special education teacher preparation programs as one teacher stated “if new teachers were better prepared in gathering information for IEP, BIP, and preparing for an ARD would help increase special education teachers’ attrition”. Also, W. Harrison reports that “I think the training of special education teachers needs to be more hands on, on-the-job training, which you get in your student teaching semester would be much more useful if you had experience developing an IEP, or an appropriate behavioral plan”. The recommendations of teachers regarding paying more attention to teacher preparation programs supports the findings of Billingsley 2003’s study that the better preparation that special educators receive, the better they perform and more self-confident they become in the field (Billingsley, 2003). Another important recommendation to increase retention was having more administrative and financial support. Five teachers reported this area of concern as important such as one teacher said “increasing resources such as technology and training programs would help reduce the likelihood of special education teachers leaving the field”. Having extra trainings, mentoring system and more assistance were also recommended by five teachers as one teacher stated that “more assistance by the school’s administration should be provided and the number of special educators should be increased to reduce their case loads so more time can be focused on the students”. Also, decreasing paper load of teachers, having more parental involvement and providing good working conditions were other recommended subjects to increase retention of special education teachers in the field. These recommendations for retention were similar to the findings of Ingersoll 2001 that he stated inadequate support from the school and district administrations, excessive paper work load, diverse student problems, limited teacher preparation programs and inadequate support from family and colleagues are factors that special attention should be paid in order to increase retention of special educators (Ingersoll, 2001).

RESULTS

Special education teachers who were interviewed mentioned several themes that contribute to a general understanding of the factors that increase the intent to leave the field of special education or to seek different job opportunities outside of the field. The responses of the participants were summarized according to specific areas which were reported by them. The first theme was administrative support and guidance, this was a concern of all of the participants. Additionally, the lack of administrative knowledge of special education was another emphasized issue regarding administrative support.

The second theme was excessive paper work and case load responsibilities of special educators that were identified by all of the participants as one of the main reasons for attrition. The lack of family and community support was another important theme that contributed attrition. Also, a wide diversity of students’ needs was explained as an important issue, because sometimes it was difficult for special educators to deal with their students’ individual problems.

Another theme was the lack of financial support and limited opportunities to provide input for students. A considerable percentage of participants expressed that the lack of financial support or delivery of teaching resources may limit their teaching and it was difficult to provide adequate input under this circumstance.

The last theme for attrition of special educators was role ambiguity that a significant percentage of the participants reported; this implies that when the roles of special educators are not clearly defined, several conflicts among special educators, general educators and school administrations occur.

In order to increase retention of special educators, the interviewed special education teachers’ responses pointed out that the teacher preparation programs should be better organized in terms of teaching quality. More experimental classes and more financial, administrative, family, and community support should be provided. Also, providing better working conditions, decreasing the



case loads and paper work responsibilities of special educators, increasing their salaries, and clearly defining their roles as special educators were other recommendations for increasing retention of special educators.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated a range of factors that contribute to the attrition of special educators and asked for solutions to increase their retention in the field. This study found that role problems, the lack of administration, family, and community support, excessive paper work and case load issues, the lack of financial support and inadequate teaching resources, personal factors such as age, experience, and gender, as well as diverse student needs can cause a high level of stress, low level of job satisfaction, and some other negative reactions which eventually may lead them to leave the field or transfer to other teaching positions. All these factors are linked to the attrition level of special educators. Additionally, the age and experience of special educators might influence their attrition and retention as the previous researches suggested that special educators who are younger and have less experience are more likely to leave the field than others with more experience (Gersten, 2001). The school districts and policymakers should address the problems of bad working conditions, the lack of administrative, community and financial support, low salaries, and the personal needs of special educators in order to ensure that teaching can be effective in their work environments and their retention is high.

In order to increase retention, there should be a holistic look at creating better working environments where special educators can be better focused on their work and seek ways to provide the best education. One of the most emphasized and recommended issues by participants was the problem of inadequate financial support and delivery of the resources. It was recommended that the school districts should carefully deliver the resources that all schools can benefit from equally, depending on their needs.

Another recommendation was that the excessive paper work and case load responsibilities of special educators should be shared by other professionals in order to reduce the burden on special educators that leads to attrition. A plan for reducing the excessive amount of required paperwork should be prepared for this. It was recommended by participants that paraprofessionals or clerical staffs can be trained to share standard paper work responsibly which may decrease paper work burden of special education teachers. Additionally, role responsibilities of special educators should be clearly defined in order to prevent possible role conflicts and ambiguities.

Limitations of this study was that few data was collected compare to other studies where a number of national data have investigated a large body of evidence regarding attrition and retention issues of special educators. Another limitation is that the participants were six special education teachers from Texas schools. Therefore, the findings are limited to teachers in one state. Consequently, these findings may not be generalized to other populations around the country.

IMPLICATIONS

This study searched the attrition and retention issues of special education teachers in Texas schools. A small simple size data was obtained from special education teachers in one state. The future studies could provide more broad and more representative data of the entire population of special education teachers in the United States. Also, there were no comparison between elementary, middle, and high school special education teachers in terms of their attrition and retention problems. Therefore, the future researches can focus on the possible differences among these groups.



Another important subject that should be carefully considered for the future studies might be to expand their participants to include special education teachers who have recently left the field, who are leaving, or retired from the field. By this way, more detailed data from different perspectives could be gathered.

The findings in this study could help not only to special education teachers in Texas but also other educators and personnel in related positions throughout the U.S.

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