



Exploring paraprofessional and classroom factors affecting teacher supervision

Dwight W. Irvin^{a,*}, Paul Ingram^b, Jonathan Huffman^a, Rose Mason^c, Howard Wills^a

^a Juniper Gardens Children's Project, University of Kansas, 444 Minnesota Avenue Ste. 300, Kansas City, KS 66101, United States

^b Texas Tech University, Department of Psychological Sciences, Box 42051, Lubbock, TX 79409-2051, United States

^c Purdue University, College of Education, 100 N. University St., West Lafayette, IN 47907, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Number of reviews completed is 2.

Keywords:

Teacher supervision

Paraprofessional competence

Elementary school children with disabilities

ABSTRACT

Background: Paraprofessionals serve a primary role in supporting students with disabilities in the classroom, which necessitates teachers' supervision as a means to improve their practice. Yet, little is known regarding what factors affect teacher supervision.

Aims: We sought to identify how paraprofessional competence and classroom type affected the levels of teacher direction.

Methods and procedures: We administered an adapted version of the Paraprofessional Needs, Knowledge & Tasks Survey and the Survey for Teachers Supervising Paraprofessionals to teachers supervising paraprofessionals in elementary schools. Structured Equation Modeling was used to examine the link between paraprofessional competence and classroom factors affecting the level of teacher supervision.

Outcomes and results: Our results indicated that when teachers perceived paraprofessionals as being more skilled, they provided more supervision, and when more supervision was provided the less they thought paraprofessionals should be doing their assigned tasks. Additionally, paraprofessionals working in classrooms with more students with mild disabilities received less supervision than paraprofessionals working in classrooms with more students with moderate-to-severe disabilities. Those paraprofessionals in classrooms serving mostly children with mild disabilities were also perceived as having lower levels of skill competence than those serving in classrooms with students with more moderate-to-severe disabilities.

Conclusion and implications: By understanding the factors that affect teacher supervision, policy and professional development opportunities can be refined/developed to better support both supervising teachers and paraprofessionals and, in turn, improve the outcomes of children with disabilities.

What this paper adds: The number of paraprofessionals in a more active educational support role in today's schools continues to rise. With paraprofessionals often lacking adequate training to provide more direct support to children with disabilities and professional development opportunities lacking, supervising teachers are often the primary source of the on-the-job training for paraprofessionals. Alarming, teachers often do not receive sufficient pre- or in-service training on how to best supervise paraprofessionals. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine paraprofessional and classroom factors thought to affect teacher supervision. By obtaining a better understanding of the factors linked to supervision that teachers provide, administrators and policy-makers can make more informed choices about professional development efforts they choose/fund. Further, this knowledge can be used by researchers to design/refine professional

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dwirvin@ku.edu (D.W. Irvin).

development opportunities to support teachers and paraprofessionals in ways that improve teacher-paraprofessional relationships and student outcomes.

1. Introduction

The number and role of paraprofessionals in the workforce has changed dramatically. In the 1960s there were approximately 10,000 paraprofessionals employed (Green & Barnes, 1989), whereas a current estimate suggests there are roughly 1,308,100, a number that is only expected to grow at the national average rate of 8% by 2026 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Of those paraprofessionals employed in the '60s, the majority performed office tasks and were infrequently involved in providing direct student care (Pickett, 1999; Wallace, 2003). Now, paraprofessionals serve a more active educational support role in today's schools, directly engaged in the instruction and behavior management of students with disabilities (Howley, Howley, & Telfer, 2017; Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003).

While there has been growth in the number of paraprofessionals and their responsibilities, the number of special education teachers has decreased to the degree that there is a shortage of certified special educators across the United States (American Association for Employment in Education, 2016; Payne, 2005; Vittek, 2015). The high attrition rate for special education teachers within the field is considered to be a major factor in the teacher shortage (Leko & Smith, 2010), affecting states nationwide (Cross, 2016). Arguably, educators lack of preparation in directing paraprofessionals (Maggin, Wehby, Moore-Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2009; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001) is in part contributing to burnout and, in turn, propagating the high attrition rates (Washburn-Moses, 2009). As the number of paraprofessionals increase and the number of special education teachers continues to decrease, the lack of supervision for paraprofessionals will in all likelihood become a more prominent issue, given many paraprofessionals lack the training needed to provide adequate educational support (Howley et al., 2017).

Inadequate paraprofessional supervision has not gone unnoticed by policy-makers and leaders in the field of special education. More specifically, legislators (Pickett et al., 2003) as well as professional organizations (e.g., The Council for Exceptional Children, 2011) have pointed to the need for effective strategies for training, managing, and supporting paraprofessionals in teacher training programs. However, the majority of universities have not implemented coursework to prepare future teachers to supervise paraprofessionals (Breton, 2010; Carnahan et al., 2009), perhaps in part because the training content often lacks an evidence base. This often results in teachers reporting they are expected to oversee the work of paraprofessionals despite a lack of training on how to effectively accomplish this task (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001; Wallace et al., 2001).

In addition to a lack of formal training, teachers have reported inadequate in-service training related to the supervision of paraprofessionals (French, 2001; Wallace et al., 2001). Specifically, teachers are rarely prepared through in-service training to work with paraprofessionals in a way that improves student outcomes (French & Pickett, 1997; Maggin et al., 2009). Previous job experiences then becomes the foundation for their supervision practices (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016). In one of few studies examining this issue, it was noted that 89.7% of teachers reported their real life experience as the primary way in which they have acquired knowledge for supervising paraprofessionals – not college courses or in-service training (French, 2001). As a result, when teachers do attempt to provide supervision it is often inadequate (French, 2004; Giangreco & Broer, 2005). With the existing responsibilities teachers shoulder, coupled with a lack of training on effective methods for supervising paraprofessionals, it should not be surprising that they report only dedicating 2% of their time to supervising these staff (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Alarming, one study noted that 25% of the teachers reported never meeting with their paraprofessional within one year's time (French, 2001). Taken together, teacher education programs and available in-service training are not adequately preparing teachers for supervising paraprofessionals.

Undoubtedly, adequate supervision of paraprofessionals is essential to the success of each student, teacher, and district as a whole. It is vital for paraprofessionals to be involved and aware of each individual child's Individualized Education Program, given they assist with such tasks as providing instruction, supporting self-care, collecting data, and managing behavior (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006) and teacher supervision is integral to the effectiveness of these tasks (Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001). With a majority of paraprofessionals having reported taking no relevant college coursework to prepare them for a career in education related to their role as a paraprofessional (Downs, Downs, & Rau, 2008), the need for proper supervision and guidance is unquestionable (Howley et al., 2017). Because supervising teachers largely determine a paraprofessional's role in the classroom, they can create learning opportunities to grow professionally (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2017; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1999). By increasing paraprofessionals' ability to provide educational support, better student learning and social outcomes will likely result (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2016; Rispoli et al., 2017). Alternatively, an absence of a collaborative relationship between teacher and paraprofessional can have a negative impact on social and academic growth of students with disabilities (Douglas et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, we have little information regarding the factors that impact the supervision that teachers provide to their paraprofessionals, limiting our understanding of this dynamic. It stands to reason that those paraprofessionals that are perceived as less competent would receive more supervision and training from their supervising teacher. We also hypothesize that teacher supervision: (1) should positively affect the teacher's perception of the paraprofessional's ability to carry out tasks, given they are the ones assigning paraprofessional tasks; and (2) would be affected by classroom type (i.e., ratio of children with mild disabilities [MD], such as a learning disabilities, vs. those with moderate-to-severe disabilities [MSD], such as autism, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities), in that paraprofessionals serving children with more moderate-to-severe disabilities should receive more supervision.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6848266>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6848266>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)