Green, Victoria and Middleton, Tristan ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8111-3856 (2025) The strengths and challenges that impact provision for learners with SEND: Perceptions of teachers and teaching assistants – A case study. Educational Futures, 16 (2). (In Press)

The strengths and challenges that impact provision for learners with SEND: Perceptions of teachers and teaching assistants – A case study

Victoria Green and Tristan Middleton, University of Gloucestershire, UK

Corresponding author: Tristan Middleton
Email: tmiddleton1@glos.ac.uk

Abstract

This article explores the perceptions of teachers and teaching assistants concerning the strengths and challenges encountered in effective provision for learners identified with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Taking a case-study approach within one primary school in the South-West of England, the data were gathered through online questionnaires, drop-in observations and focus groups. Whilst key findings broadly concurred with extant literature, the research highlighted some particular areas of importance, such as high-quality teaching, continuing professional development (CPD), collaboration and communication, and identified the importance of inter-staff relationships in developing provision for all learners. The study emphasises the interconnectedness of these facets, highlighting their collective importance in enhancing provision for learners with SEND and will be of interest to headteachers, SENCos and teachers when considering their own school practices. Moreover, the findings offer important prompts for thinking relating to the way in which national policy needs to focus in order to develop provision.

Keywords

SEND provision, teachers, teaching assistants, inclusion, primary school

Link to article

https://educationstudies.org.uk/?p=33438

Introduction

Learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are often regarded as one of the most vulnerable groups in the educational landscape (Humphrey *et al.,* 2013), with reduced access to high-quality education and more likely to be excluded (Howard, 2023). Reflecting on our experiences as special educational needs and disabilities coordinators (SENCos), the implementation of inclusive provision has also faced multiple challenges (Middleton, 2019), such as limited financial resources due to changes in local authority (LA) funding (Spielman, 2020), a restricted capacity for access to support services (Warnock, 2023) and a governmental focus on standardised assessment (see Parliament, House of Commons, Education Committee, 2021, 10).

Many studies have explored the promotion of inclusion and equity in education and effective provisions for learners with SEND (e.g. Subban *et al.,* 2023; Ainscow, 2020; Florian and Beaton, 2018). However, they have tended to focus on exploring teacher-student research regarding the implementation of inclusive provision. There has also been contemporary research that focuses on primary teachers, but conducted outside of the UK (e.g. Trang Thu *et al.,* 2022). Furthermore, research focused on teachers and support staff in the UK is dated (Kendall, 2019). Considering the current proposed governmental reforms to SEND and AP provision (DfE, 2023), it is essential that decisions are based upon evidence from up-to-date research. The aim of this research was to scrutinise the strengths and challenges impacting effective provision for learners with SEND, addressing school-level concerns and seeking potential solutions through the research question 'What are the perceptions of teachers and TAs of the strengths and challenges that impact provision for learners with SEND?'.

This research considers the case of one two-form-entry primary school located in North Somerset, catering to children aged 3-11. The total student enrolment is 469, with 22 per cent of students on the SEND register. The school shares facilities and resources with a specialised school for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a current and contextually relevant exploration of the challenges and opportunities that

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impact the provision for learners with SEND within the UK educational landscape in a small-scale qualitative study.

Literature review

This review assesses existing research on provision for learners with SEND, specifically examining six key aspects: high-quality teaching, co-teaching, scaffolding, communication, collaboration and continuing professional development (CPD).

High-quality teaching

The discussion about how to provide the best learning experiences for SEND students is long debated. For example, the DfE (2023) and Ofsted (2021) have stated that provision for learners with SEND should be aspirational for every child, high-quality with content designed for learners. This is reflected by Ofsted's (2021) recommendation that prioritises effective curriculum content for learners with SEND to reduce gaps in learning. Researchers have also emphasised that adapting teaching and provision is vital for all learners' academic achievements (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998; Guay *et al.,* 2017). Others, such as NASEN (2022), argue that learners with SEND should not be seen as outliers that need to be accommodated differently. In fact, reducing curriculum content for learners with SEND could increase the equity gap that 'perpetuates inequalities' (Westwood, 2018: 57).

Learners with SEND should receive at least equal amounts of 'high-quality, teacher-led teaching' as their peers (Parker and Webster, 2022: 61). However, concerns have arisen around the amount of time learners with SEND spend away from the classroom and, as a consequence, receive less teacher-led instruction than their peers (Bosanquet *et al.,* 2021). These concerns align with the DISS report, a major government-funded report into the impact of support staff in schools, that found that Teaching Assistant (TA) support made little difference to the academic attainment of pupils (Blatchford *et al*., 2015). In contrast, Fletcher-Campbell (2010: 340) challenge this and highlight the need to encourage 'positive communities of practice' for all and not rely on external academic results to decide if TAs are 'effective' in our classrooms.

Academic viewpoints suggest that for learners with SEND to thrive, a range of provisions should be available for all (Ainscow, 2020; Pantić and Florian, 2015) and

learner's difficulties should be reframed as teachers' professional challenges (Spratt and Florian, 2015). Furthermore, researchers also argue that schools should have a whole school (Subban *et al.,* 2023; Corbett, 2001) 'inclusive pedagogy approach' (Florian and Beaton, 2018: 1) that uses teacher judgement to decide the most appropriate approach for all learners (de Valenzuela, 2007), providing the potential for an equal environment for all learners that is free of discrimination (Shaw, 2017) and segregation (Sirem and Çatal, 2023). However, it should be noted that relying on teacher judgment introduces its own potential disparities in provision between different settings and, indeed, different classes, necessitating careful consideration when implementing such approaches.

There is also contention that schools need to move away from an achievement-based education system (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2021) that labels learners by ability and perceived limitations (Corcoran *et al.*, 2022). However, this approach is not embedded consistently in reality (Connett, 2020) and the education system is still academically failing learners with SEND (DfE, 2022a, cited in Dobson, 2023).

Co-teaching

A collaborative approach to teaching that all learners can benefit from is co-teaching, which comprises multiple educators working with clear roles together as a team (Kokko *et al*., 2021; Van Mieghem *et al.,* 2020) and can be structured in multiple ways with support staff and the teacher (Parker and Webster, 2022). For co-teaching to be effective, teams need to have good relationships and share class responsibilities (Kokko *et al.,* 2021), such as planning and teaching. Using TAs as co-teachers may raise issues when 1:1 TAs are unable to leave their key learners working independently due to their specific needs (Losberg and Zwozdiak-Myers, 2024).

Scaffolding

Learners with SEND desire independence from adult-led support (Prunty *et al*., 2012). To promote independence, educators should support the learner to attain new skills (van de Grift, 2014) through scaffolding and also provide the least amount of adult-led support first (Bosanquet, Radford and Webster 2021). Moreover, for scaffolding to be effective, each learner's needs should be considered (Walsh, 2022), which can be

addressed and reassessed using the Graduated Approach of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle (NASEN, 2022). Critically, scaffolding shifts the focus of TA support from task completion back to learning (Parker and Webster, 2022).

Collaboration and communication

Collaboration between teachers, TAs and specialists is key to effective inclusive learning (Kendall, 2019) as it allows all professionals to come together to meet the needs of learners with SEND (e.g. Castro-Kemp and Samuels, 2022; Losberg and Zwozdiak-Myers, 2024). However, this collaboration should be based on building constructive relationships between the TA and teacher (NASEN, 2022). Central to the success of such collaboration are school leadership teams as they can facilitate time for collaborative work (Bosanquet *et al.*, 2021) and can propagate a culture of change and champion equity for learners with SEND (Trang Thu *et al.,* 2022). The SENCO can be this leader of change (Rosen-Webb, 2011) and ensure that inclusive practices become a part of the culture and community within the school to ensure its success; however, this represents a challenging and major endeavour (Tissot, 2013).

Lack of planning can impact quality of provision for learners with SEND and, although teachers should lead planning for all learners (Parker and Webster, 2022) and ensure the 'curriculum is accessible for all' (Bosanquet *et al.*, 2021: 16), some TAs may be tasked with planning and differentiating for learners with SEND (Alston, 2023). This may impact the quality of provision for learners with SEND and to negate this, teachers and TAs planning together can provide clarity around the needs of their pupils and responsibilities (van Themaat, 2019). However, time constraints of TA working hours can impact working relationships as time to prepare as a team may be limited (Alston, 2023).

CPD

Concerns have been continually raised about the quality, quantity and availability of training for all staff to provide inclusive, high-quality provision for learners with SEND (e.g. Hodkinson, 2023; Laranjeira *et al.,* 2023; Sirem and Çatal, 2023). Moreover, ensuring TAs have access to professional development is a crucial part of furthering their pedagogical role (Alston, 2023) and enables them to provide good quality provision and intervention (Carroll *et al.,* 2017). This training should ideally be subject-

specific (Ofsted, 2021) and take place collaboratively with the teacher so that implementation can be made as a class team. However, funding constraints have not only kept TA pay low but also limited professional development opportunities (Benstead, 2021) and contributed to a perception of their diminished importance. Hornby (2015) crucially suggests that if training levels are increased, educators' confidence in teaching learners with SEND should also increase.

This literature review has highlighted the contested perspectives about effective provision for learners with SEND. The way in which schools focus on achievement from a particular perspective and the implications of this on the systemic organisation of staffing is identified. In particular, the role, input, deployment, and lived experience of TAs is a gap in the research literature.

Methodology

Paradigm

This research stems from involvement in the field and a subjectivist and idealist ontological perspective (Barr Greenfield, 1975) which resonates with Lather's (1986) perspective of the inherent ideological nature of research. The interpretivist approach is rooted in educators' experiences (McGrath and Coles, 2013) and uses several different data collection strategies in order to develop a holistic understanding of the participants' perspectives.

Methodological approach

This study employed a mixed-methods case study method to gather comprehensive data considering the perspectives of those in different roles in the school (McGrath and Coles, 2013; Bryman, 2012). It utilised questionnaires, a focus group and quantitative observations to address the research question. This methodological triangulated approach (Figure 1) served to enhance research reliability and validity of the findings (Denscombe, 2021, 204).
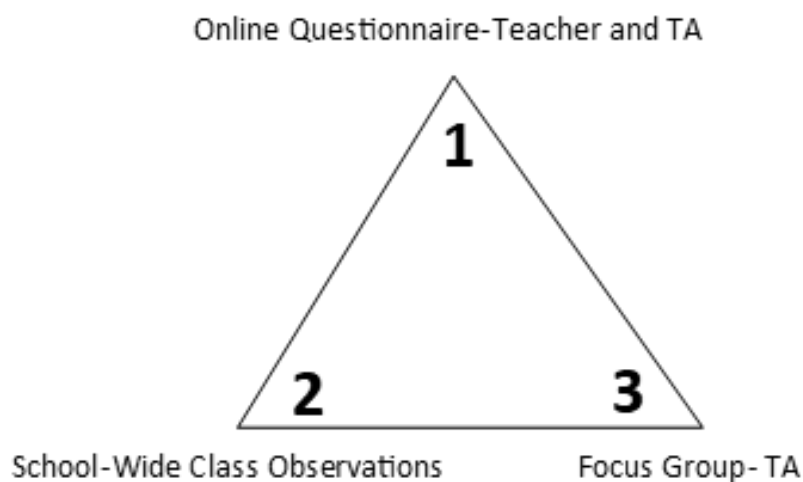
Online Questionnaire-Teacher and TA

School-Wide Class Observations   Focus Group- TA

Figure 1 - Triangulated data

The primary researcher was undertaking the data collection within their own setting as an insider researcher (Coe *et al.,* 2017: 72) who worked within the setting. This position enabled streamlined recruitment processes, a level of rapport and trust to be quickly established, and positive implications for understanding the context of the research (Komalasari *et al.*, 2022). The dynamic nature of the insider positionality (Mason-Bish, 2018) along with careful ethical planning, meant that during the data collection process the influence of the researcher's position was minimised.

Online questionnaire

In order to optimise efficient data gathering, a standardised online questionnaire administered through Google Forms was employed to gather insights from teachers and TAs, using open and closed questions (Grosvenor and Rose, 2013). The questionnaire, with an average completion time of ten minutes, encompassed twenty questions including range, multiple-choice, ranking, select, Likert-scale, matrix and semi-structured questions (Denscombe, 2021) with skip patterns (Rasmussen, 2016: 44) employed where appropriate.

The questionnaire was developed drawing upon previous research in the field to support focus and wording of individual questions. For example, question six within the teachers' questionnaire presented a spectrum of potential adaptations that teachers may have implemented in their classroom for learners with SEND. Options included the use of assistive technology (Atanga *et al.,* 2020), flipped classroom instruction (Altemueller and Lindquist, 2017) behavioural intervention strategies (Savage *et al.*, 2011), and the use of Teaching Assistants (Bosanquet *et al.*, 2021: 16).

It was then then piloted with six teachers from a local school and refined for clarity, accuracy and accessibility (Gray, 2021) prior to being sent out via email. Subsequent reminders were sent to all participants adhering to the sequence of questionnaire administration of Cohen *et al.*, (2018: 472). The online questionnaire was accessible for a month, drawing participation from 16 teachers and 11 Tas.

Class observations

In order to provide quantitative data to ascertain the provisions for learners, nine school-wide observations were conducted over a period of three months, with three observations each month. These comprised dip-in observations during morning lessons and a point-in-time observation of provision/planning, with classrooms from EYFS to Key Stage 2 included. A systematic observation schedule with a checklist (Figure 2) was used for this data collection for consistency and efficiency (Grosvenor and Rose, 2013; Bryman, 2012).

DATE:				
	Times observed			
Observed	**EYFS**	**KS1**	**KS2**	**Total**
Pupil Target Plan (on Edukey)				
Adapted Curriculum Task				
Assistive Technology				
Modified Classroom Environment				
Alternative Seating Arrangements				
Extra Time				
Behavioural Intervention Strategies				
Peer Tutoring				
Pre-teaching Vocabulary				
Hands-on Experiences				
Incorporate Learner Interests				
Providing Choice				
1:1 Teaching from Class Teacher				
Teaching Assistant				
Individual written planning for A learners (2 years or more below expected)				
Notes				

Figure 2 - Observation checklist

Focus group

Three focus groups were conducted on one day, where 18 out of a total of 28 TAs participated voluntarily. This involved a drop-in format, with groups limited to six
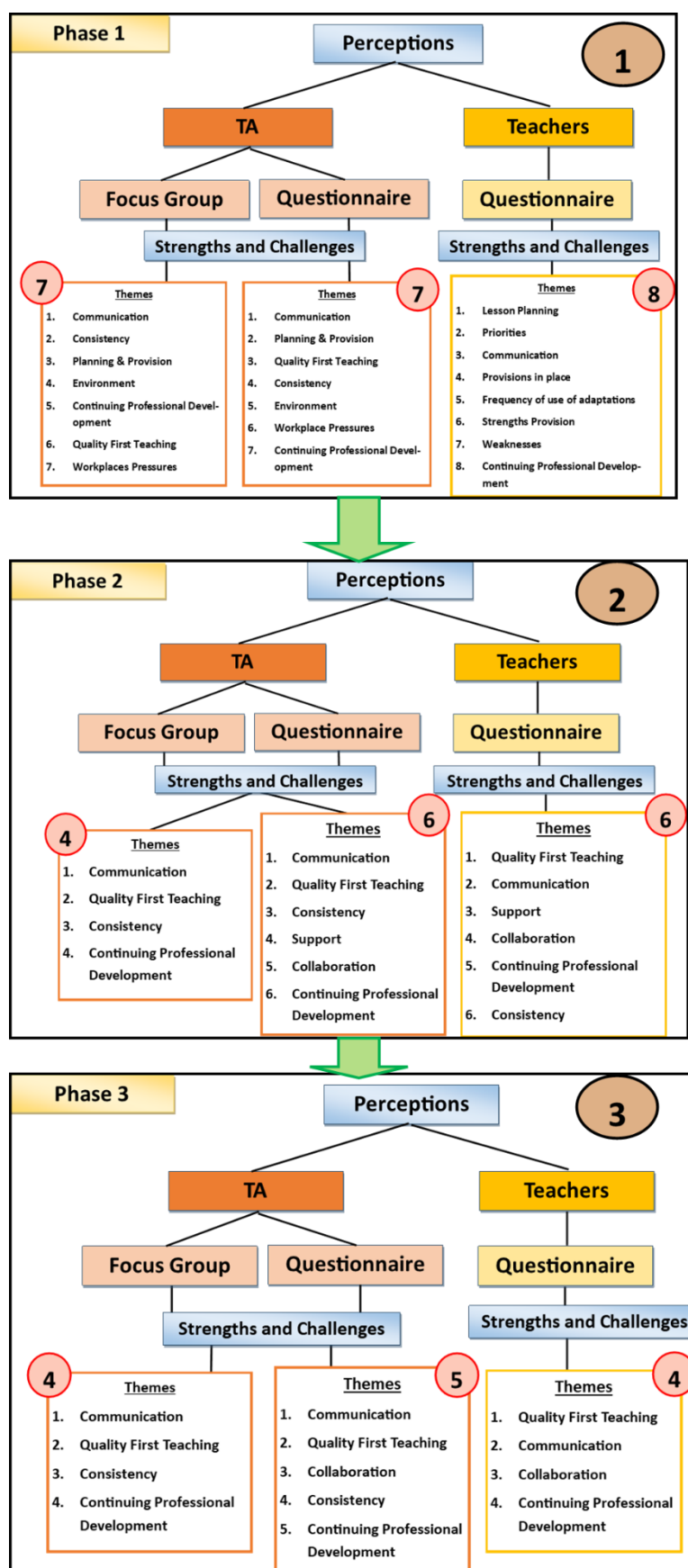
participants at a time. These sessions centred around the planning and provision for pupils with SEND and were audio-recorded and transcribed using Otter.AI for accuracy (Denscombe, 2021), with identifiers, such as names, anonymised prior to uploading. The sessions encouraged participant-driven discussions to obtain a range of rich collaborative views (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013: 70) and these were guided by two overarching questions in order to maintain thematic focus;

- What are the strengths for provision and planning for learners with SEND?

- What are the challenges for provision and planning for learners with SEND?

Data analysis approach

Online questionnaire and focus groups

The data were analysed thematically using NVivo 12. To uphold participant anonymity, individuals were assigned numerical identifiers and grouped into categories of either teacher or TA. The focus group and questionnaire data were analysed thematically, initially creating inductive codes. The focus group and questionnaire data were subsequently refined into thematic categories, prioritising the capture of distinctive features over just code frequency considerations (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2013). This analytical approach unfolded progressively, allowing for a cyclical process of 'immersion, reflection, analysis and reanalysis' (Wellington, 2015). This iterative process moved beyond Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis to involve six distinct phases of analysis, which are described on two pages in Figure 3 (below).
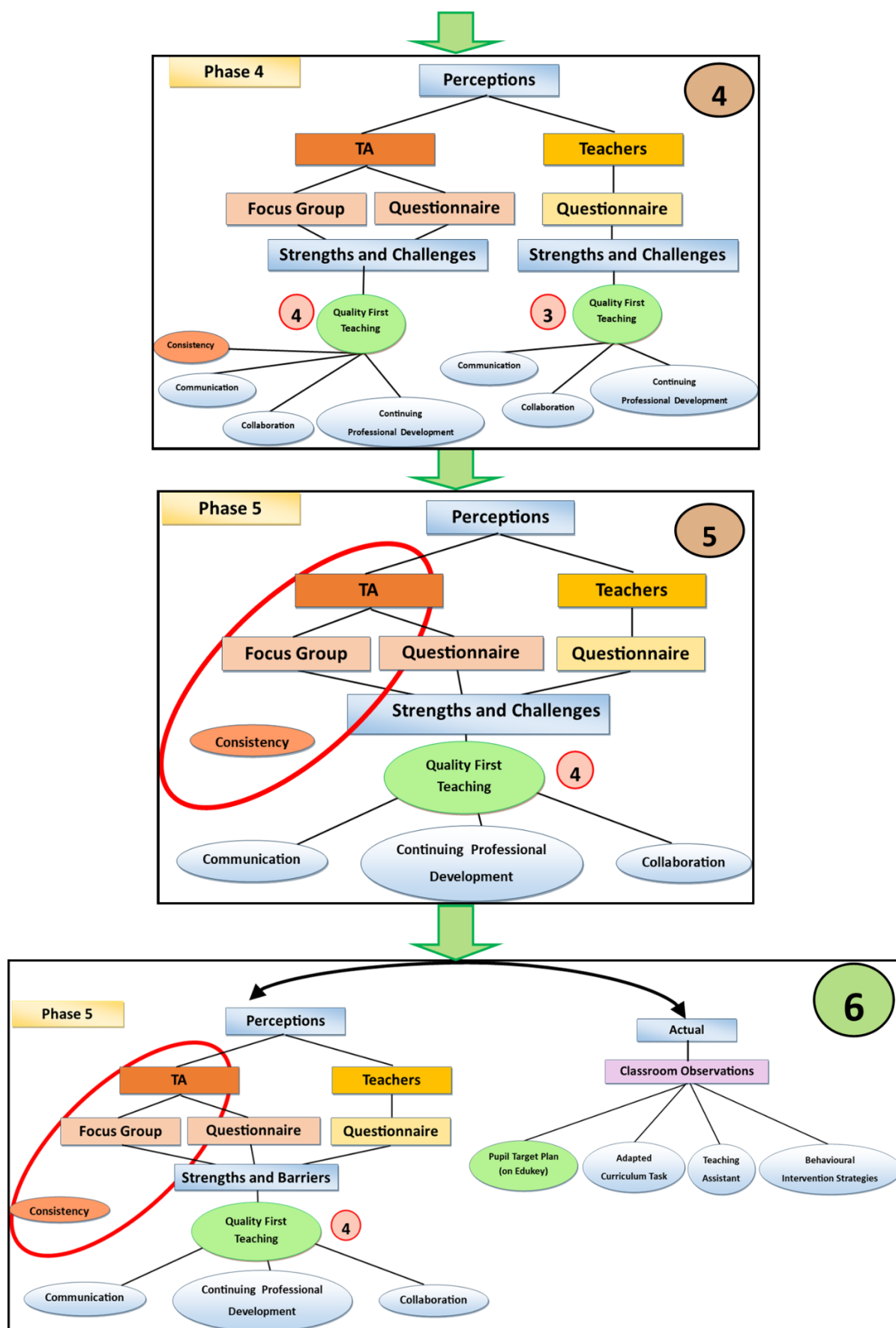
Figure 3 - Data Assimilation Process - Phases 1-6

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Phases 1, 2 and 3

In the initial phase of the study, the encoded thematic elements underwent a meticulous categorisation process, discerning between strengths and challenges. Through a synthesis of data from both focus groups and questionnaires, seven predominant themes emerged as noteworthy by TAs, while teachers identified eight prominent themes. These themes underwent prioritisation based on the frequency of references, considering both the questionnaire and focus group responses for TAs (Figure 4).
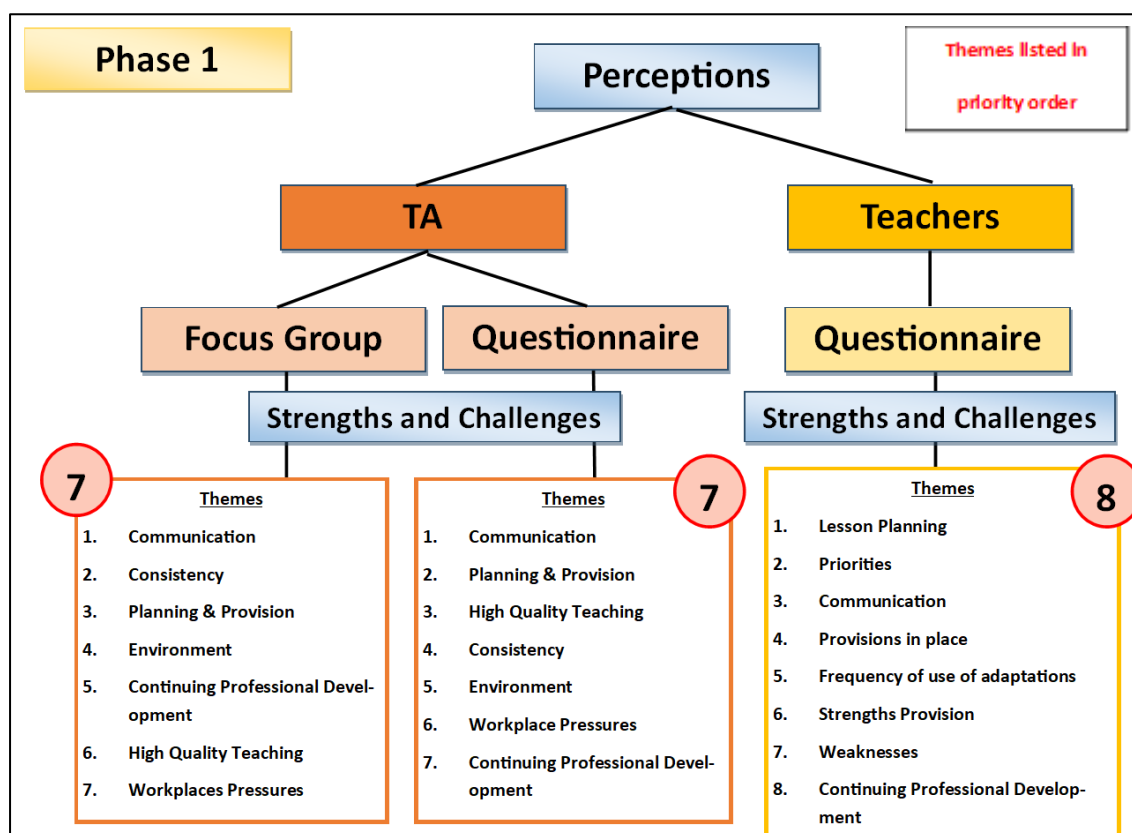
Figure 4 - Phase 1 of data analysis

Subsequently, in phases 2 and 3, a comprehensive reanalysis and regrouping of the themes occurred as interconnections and associations were established between themes.

Phase 4 and 5

The coded themes underwent further refinement (Denscombe, 2021) resulting in the identification of four overarching common themes for both TAs and teachers. Additionally, a theme centred around consistency was predominantly expressed by

TAs. While this theme is featured in the final thematic diagram (Figure 5), its detailed exploration is outside the scope of this study. Nonetheless, aspects of this theme are discussed within the context of communication and collaboration.
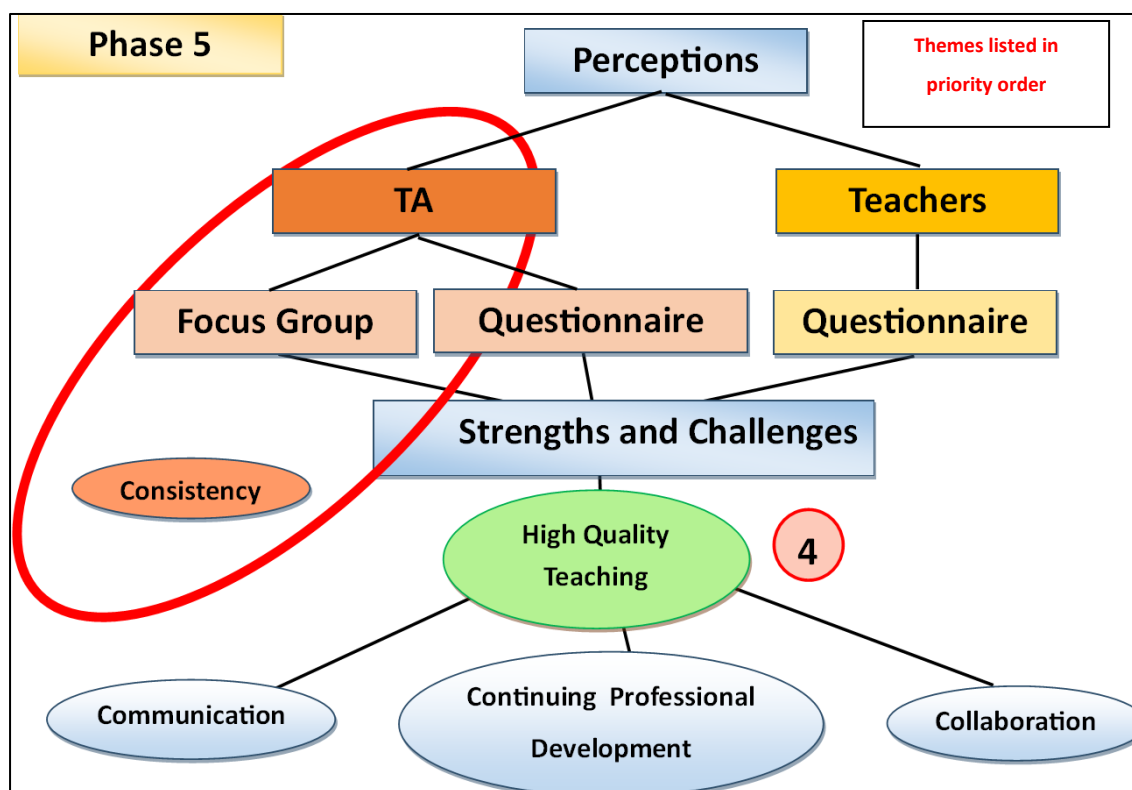
Figure 5 – Phase 5 of study

Observations

A new observation checklist sheet (Figure 2) was employed for each observation. For analysis purposes the sheets were brought together into numerical tables to summarise the frequency of the instances of each provision that was observed in each key stage.

Ethical considerations

The study strictly followed ethical guidelines encompassing BERA's (2024) four principles of respect, confidentiality, scientific value and social responsibility in tandem with the authors' own University of Research Ethics Handbook. Ethical approval was provided by the university School Ethics Committee. Participants provided clear, informed consent emphasising respect for the individuals (Farrimond, 2013) and the option to withdraw was ensured. Anonymity was meticulously upheld through the use

of numeric identifiers (Brooks *et al.*, 2014) and observations were categorised by 'key stage' to safeguard the anonymity of classrooms. In the pursuit of inclusivity and reciprocity, while remaining aware of power dynamics, an optional raffle incentive was extended to encourage participation in the online questionnaire (Zutlevics, 2016) This initiative aimed to emphasise the significance of the participants' contributions to the research without offering a prize that could inadvertently reinforce power imbalances, and therefore the prize was purposely small and consequently easily declinable by the participant (Dockett *et al.,* 2009).

Bias

This qualitative study examines educators' perspectives, and as one author was an insider researcher within the educational setting (McGrath and Coles, 2013) we acknowledge the power dynamics (Hockey, 1993) that this involvement may induce. Teaching assistants may have felt compelled to participate in research and may have perceived their participation as unavoidable, as refraining could disrupt the hierarchical nature of one of the researcher's job (Brooks *et al.*, 2014), however, strong researcher-participant relationships provided candid insights. To further mitigate these factors, a critical analytical approach (McGrath and Coles, 2013) was employed, differing perspectives of the data were explored and the focus group convened in a familiar non-hierarchical setting (Hockey, 1993).

Findings and discussion

The TA focus group transcript and questionnaire responses were categorised based on the final themes and separated into strengths and challenges. These quotes +were further analysed to create a concise table of extracted quotes based on the distilled themes. Finally, these quotes were distilled into quote tables which identified four primary themes:

1. High Quality Teaching

2. Communication

3. Collaboration

4. CPD

High Quality Teaching was the prevailing theme identified by both TAs and teachers, influencing provision for learners with SEND. The three subsequent themes perceived to impact learners with SEND, namely communication, collaboration and CPD, seemed to contribute to Quality First Teaching.

Numerical questionnaire data was depicted through comparative graphs. Word frequency clouds were generated for TA and teacher data emerging from the open questionnaire responses and the focus group transcripts using NVivo 12. The quantitative questionnaire data in the form of comparative graphs aligned with the four themes.

The analysis of the observations revealed four enactments of provision which were the most common (see Figure 6).
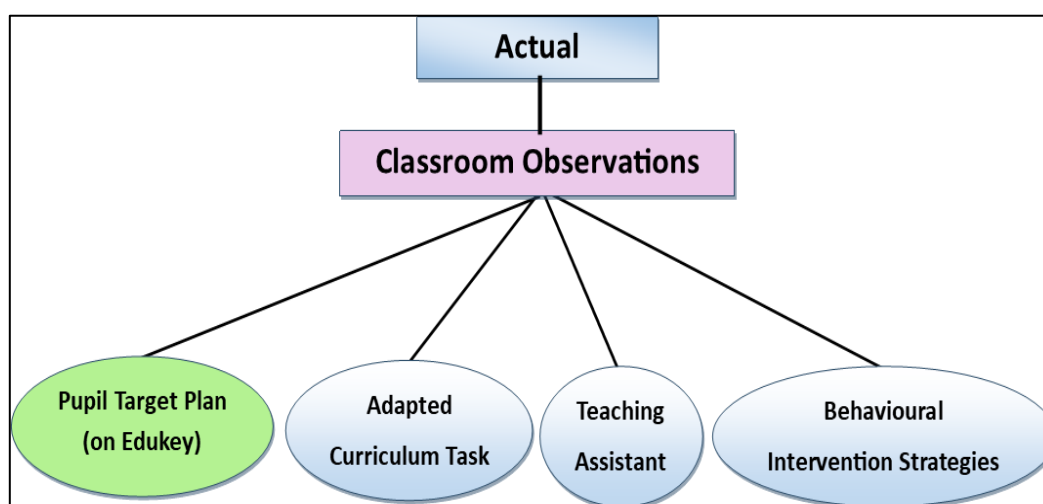
Figure 6 - Observation phase of study with four most common approaches to provision identified

The analysis of the observations revealed a disparity between the participants' perceptions of the provisions in place in the classroom and the actual implementation observed (Figure 7). It became apparent that the participants beliefs regarding the provisions in place did not consistently align with the data gathered in observations and highlighted a discrepancy between the perception and enacted provisions.

High quality teaching

A determination by the majority was made that for High Quality Teaching to occur, the other thematic elements needed to be in place. Notably, while consistency emerged

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as a theme among TAs, it held a different degree of significance among teachers. Within the confines of this research, the considerations concerning consistency will be contextualised concerning communication and collaboration.

Figure 7 -Comparison of findings relating to perceptions and observational data findings

The data suggest that teachers acknowledge the necessity of tailoring the curriculum to accommodate learners with SEND (DfE, 2023; Ofsted, 2021) and many teachers adapted curriculum tasks for learners with SEND. Conversely, TAs indicated that some 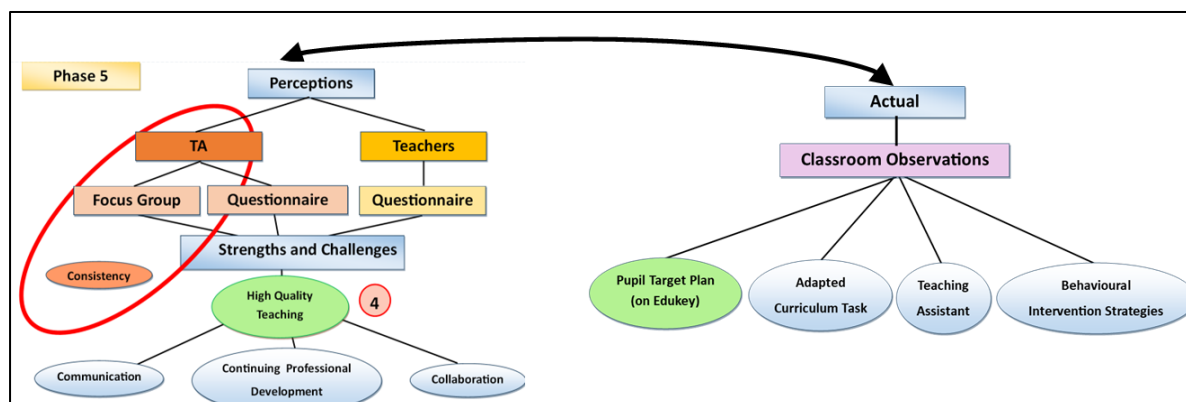learners with SEND were expected to "…do the same work as everybody else" (TA 6). However, it could be determined that teacher's task modifications and curriculum reduction for learners with SEND accentuates them as outliers, as suggested by NASEN (2022) and increases the equity gap (Westwood, 2018); therefore, differentiated tasks may effectively highlight learners' differences and create an 'othering' climate (Stevens, 2024).

The observations identified that individualised planning for learners with SEND was absent in the majority of classes. These findings aligned with some TA's statements that highlighted a need for more structured planning and adaptive teaching for learners with SEND.

> *"Sometimes the expectation is that they are going to do the same work as everybody else that there was no adaptive work." (TA6)*

This observed lack of planning could be a reflection of de Valenzuela's (2007) findings of teachers' perceptions around lack of time to plan as well as lack of confidence in using teacher judgement to plan for and implement provision for learners so they can access every subject:

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"I think some teachers are still wary about planning something completely different for a child if they're working at an 'A' level [2 years or more below age related expectation]. This should be made more clear to allow teachers to use and feel confident using their professional judgement to decide what the children do." (T22)

Ultimately, TAs asserted that when teachers made adaptations, they were accessible to learners with SEND. TAs also indicated that learners with SEND were "…starting to show better social skills and better integration with others." (TA7) and in EYFS, "…the planning always allows time for all SEND learners to be with their peers." (TA3)

The analysis suggests that teachers perceived TAs to be supportive of learners with SEND either 1:1 or through scaffolding (Parker and Webster, 2022). Furthermore, one teacher highlighted insufficient TAs as a challenge to learners with SEND, citing budget constraints as a significant hurdle:

"…but we have no funding so we know that is difficult." (T25)

The call for additional TAs contradicts the promotion of independence from adult-led support, as noted by Prunty *et al.*, (2012). However, teachers recognised the significance of teacher-led 1:1 and small group teaching (Parker and Webster, 2022; Ofsted 2021), expressing a desire to incorporate such methods in the classroom. On the other hand, observations identified that most learners with SEND supported by an adult were outside in the corridor and away from their teacher, which reflected the findings of Bosanquet *et al.* (2021). A collaborative co-teaching approach, such as that suggested by van Mieghem *et al.* (2020) could address this area of contention.

In contrast to an 'inclusive pedagogy approach' (Florian and Beaton, 2018: 1; Spratt and Florian, 2015), which encompasses all learners, TAs noted a perception that teachers delegated learners with SEND to them, driven by pressures related to data-driven achievement. One TA recounted:

> " *…Other teachers say, actually, I'm not interested in them. I'm interested in this- because I've got to get these number of children up to this level, those children are never going to make it so I'm not, you know, that's your job, your that's your role you're one to one with them, you deal with it." (TA 7)*

This perception also concurs with scholars advocating a departure from a data-driven education system (Williams-Brown and Hodkinson, 2021) as labelling by perceived limitations (Corcoran *et al*., 2022; Nilholm, 2021) may cause learners with SEND to be segregated.

Moreover, certain TAs perceived a lack of academic progress among learners with SEND as a challenge, raising apprehensions about these learners' self-esteem as well as inducing a sense of disheartenment among TAs. This theme parallels teachers' aspirations to enhance the prominence of overseeing and securing sustained progress for learners with SEND. Nevertheless, the precise characterisation of the perception surrounding the nature of progress remains ambiguous, encompassing uncertainties about whether it pertains to academic comparison once more.

Collaboration and communication

Both teachers and TAs prioritised teacher-TA communication and collaboration as essential for advancing learners with SEND (Figure 8).

Planning for SEND learners might be successful if the following factors are addressed:
Regular communication and collaboration with the classroom teacher regarding SEND learners' needs and progress
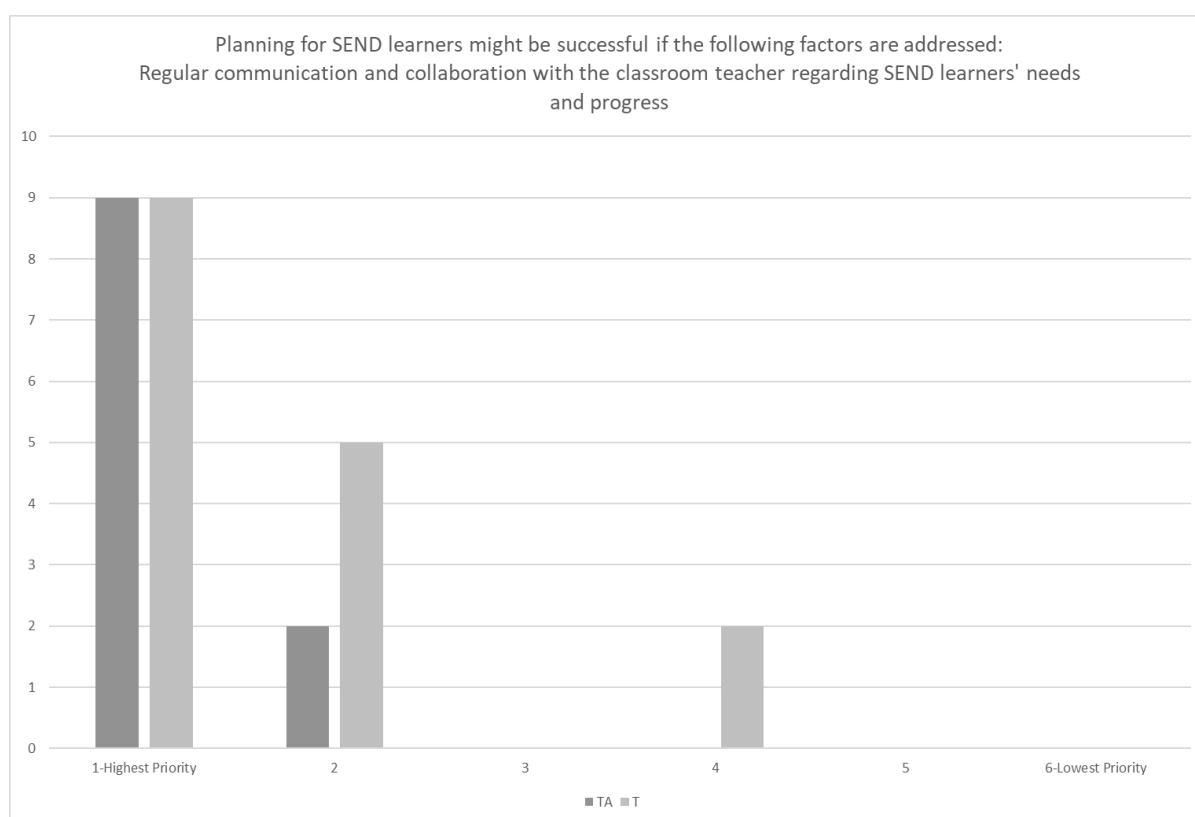
Figure 8 - Planning for SEND learners might be successful if the following factors are addressed: Regular communication and collaboration with the classroom teacher regarding SEND learners' needs and progress

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While teachers regarded collaboration with TAs as proficient and did not identify it as a weakness for planning and provision for learners with SEND, TA perspectives diverged. TAs emphasised insufficient in-person communication with their class teacher, a sentiment in line with Alston's findings (2023). Moreover, TAs reported instances where they sensed being undervalued or treated disrespectfully by teachers. "But they're under pressure. They want things done, but try and get things done really quickly. They don't have time for the niceties." (TA 7). These experiences may influence team dynamics and hinder effective collaboration and communication to address the needs of learners with SEND.

Teachers stated that they regularly met with their TA (Figure 9), the majority identifying that this was a daily meeting.

Question 13: Do you regularly meet with a Teaching Assistant to discuss SEND learners in your class?

Cluster 1: Yes	Cluster 2: No	Cluster 3: Other
14	2	0

Figure 9 - Teacher Questionnaire - Question 13 responses

However, most TAs perceived that they received no communication from their teacher before lessons. Furthermore, the data revealed that TAs would like advanced provision of precise, consistent planning, timetables and resources to target support, in line with the NASEN (2022) guidance. Additionally, they would prefer clear expectations and objectives regarding their anticipated achievements.

> *"if we don't know our children's next steps, we can't help our children meet those goals." (TA5)*

Divergent viewpoints emerged between teachers and TAs regarding planning for learners with SEND (Figure 10).

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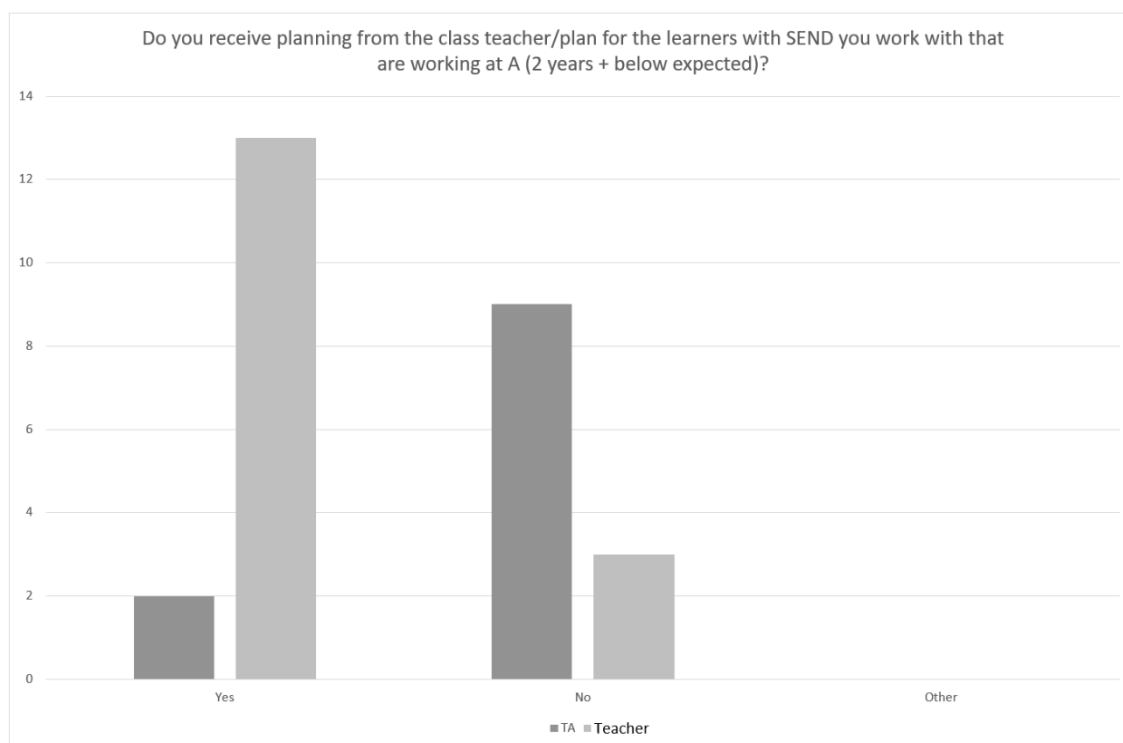Published under Creative Commons Licence (CC BY-NC)

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Figure 10 - Do you receive planning from the class teacher/plan for the learners with SEND you work with that are working at A (2 years + below expected)? Teacher and TAs Questionnaire

with teachers stating that planning was present and many TAs stating that planning was not present for these learners. Observations indicated a need for more clearly defined planning for learners working two years or more below their year group. Additionally, as Alston (2023) and Bosanquet *et al*. (2021) found, some TAs stated that they were exclusively tasked with the provision and planning for learners with SEND, and in some instances these plans were formulated hastily by the TA:

> *"…Sometimes just go into stock cupboard and think right, what can we do for maths today? And I just come up with it on the spot…" (TA 8)*

TAs aspired to participate collaboratively in the planning process for learners with SEND. They expressed a desire for monitoring from leadership to ensure adherence to guidance for these learners, including monitoring of marking. For this purpose to be achieved, TAs emphasised that staff meetings might be a way to facilitate effective communication and to plan forward for learners with SEND:

"As we work as a unit of 60 a lot of the time, it would be useful for time to discuss SEND as a team so that everyone is aware of SEND learners as a whole so they can be supported more effectively." (TA 3)

The above quote referred to working collaboratively as a unit and this aligns with a whole-school (Subban *et al.,* 2023) 'inclusive pedagogy approach' (Florian and Beaton, 2018: 1). However, as noted by Bosanquet *et al*., (2021), this change would need to be led by leadership. The analysis overall highlighted the significance of the guidance by Leadership, SENDCo and the SEND team, which is crucial in facilitating the implementation of whole-school inclusive practices (Rosen-Webb, 2011). These perceptions emphasised the requirement for a top-down approach (Trang Thu *et al.,* 2022) to enhance communication and collaboration between teachers and TAs, ultimately improving the provision for learners with SEND.

CPD

Both teachers and TAs agreed that further CPD would be advantageous for improving provisions for learners with SEND and this aligns with existing literature (e.g. Hodkinson, 2023; Laranjeira *et al.,* 2023). A more significant proportion of teachers than TAs considered their current CPD offerings satisfactory (Figure 11), and this echoes Alston's (2023) findings around TAs having fewer opportunities for CPD than teachers. The consequences stemming from inadequate training for TAs who support learners with SEND are highlighted by the following statement:

"I just feel sometimes he signs [Makaton] and I feel useless. I feel then useless I feel like I can't help him..." (TA 9)

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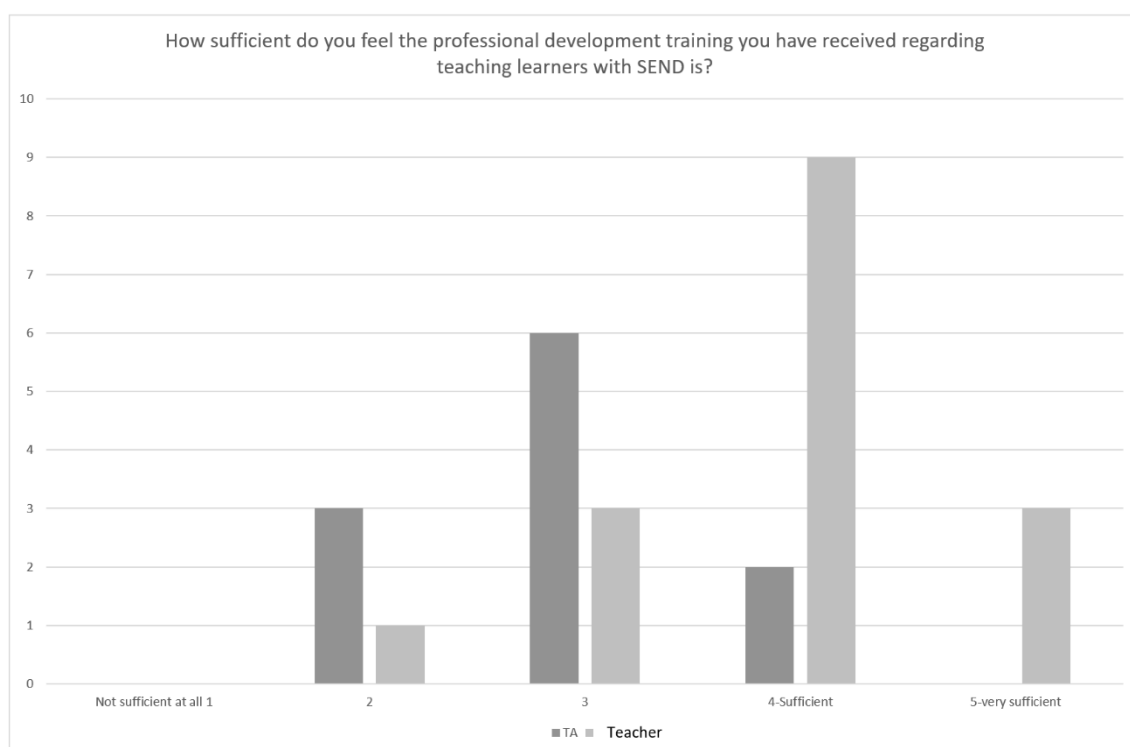Published under Creative Commons Licence (CC BY-NC)

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Figure 11 - How sufficient do you feel the professional development training you have received regarding teaching learners with SEND is? Teacher and TA Questionnaire

Both teachers and TAs expressed a preference for collaborative whole-school approach to CPD. Suggestions included collaboration with the partner special school, accessing high-quality provision, developing school-wide planning using real scenarios and allocating time to engage with the SEND team to: "gather ideas on how to meet the needs of learners" (T18). Furthermore, the need for training in existing provisions was emphasised as a TA stressed the desire to put in place target registers for support staff. This is already a practice widely adopted within the school and therefore highlights this TA's lack of awareness and shows the need for school wide training around the provisions that are already in place in school.

Limitations

This mixed-methods case study is subject to certain methodological limitations, primarily from a relatively small sample size, which raises concerns about the generalisability of findings, as this investigation yielded insights into the perspectives of teachers and TAs within one North Somerset School. Future research should consider multiple case studies across diverse primary schools to capture a more nuanced insight into provision for learners with SEND. Additionally, the participant

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demographic (Table 1 and 2) is skewed towards more experienced individuals, suggesting the necessity for greater diversity in future studies.

Job Title		Number of years working		Key Stage	
Teacher	13	**0-1**	1	**EYFS**	1
Senior Leadership Team	1	**2-4**	2	**KS1**	3
Student Teacher	1	**5-7**	3	**KS2**	11
Higher Level Teaching Assistant	1	**8-10**	0	**All**	1
		11-14	3		
		15+	7		

Table 1-Demographic information of teachers participating in online questionnaire

Job Title		Number of years working		Key Stage	
Teaching Assistant	10	**0-1**	1	**EYFS**	3
Learning Mentor	1	**2-4**	3	**KS1**	1
				KS2	4
				EYFS & KS1	1
		5-7	2	**EYFS, KS1, KS2**	1
		8-10	2	**KS1, & KS2**	1
		11-14	4		
		15+	0		

Table 2-Demographic information of teaching assistants participating in online questionnaire

The study's limited timeframe (summer term) restricted the assessment to a snapshot of perceptions; longitudinal case studies could reveal trends and challenges throughout the school year. Acknowledging potential researcher bias, the study employed data triangulation, reflexivity and an inductive coding approach (Denscombe, 2021) to enhance validity and rigour.

Conclusion

This study offers insights into areas of provision requiring attention to improve the experience of learners with SEND within the case study. In particular, the areas of CPD opportunities for all staff and ensuring space and time for collaboration between teachers and TAs to enhance planning and communication, were identified for focus.

In summary, this qualitative case study identifies four primary themes: high-quality teaching, collaboration, communication, and CPD, as central to understanding the strengths and challenges in the provision for learners with SEND, as perceived by teachers and TAs. Teachers and TAs had differing perspectives on what is enacted and this theme ran through the research with polarised views between practitioners being observed throughout in relation to high-quality teaching, communication and collaboration. Both teachers and TAs views aligned in relation to CPD with both sets of practitioners wanting collaborative CPD and whole-school approach, with time not currently allowing for this. Where practitioners' views diverged was the CPD received, as more TAs in comparison to teachers felt that on the whole, they were not currently receiving sufficient CPD. These challenges may be relevant to a wide range of similar schools and could inform SENCos and Senior Leaders of areas to be aware of in assessing their provision.

Existing literature and research emphasise the crucial role of these themes in delivering quality provision for learners with SEND, a point corroborated by the perspectives of teachers and TAs within this research. The challenges identified from the data has implications for the relationships between teachers and TAs, as issues with collaboration and communication had implications for the ways in which the practitioners perceived each other, in particular how the teachers valued the TAs. The identification of these challenges will be of use to policy- makers a school level, at trust level and at a national level. The findings suggest that the four primary themes not only need to be held high on the agenda, but that the experience of these areas needs to be effectively understood between the hierarchical divide between teachers and TAs.

In a broader context, this research reinforces the calls for transformative changes within the educational system to actively address the equity gap experienced by learners with SEND and move beyond othering and labelling (Sjöström, 2017) with a

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shift in paradigm towards a whole-school, inclusive-pedagogy approach. Such a shift could yield a realisation of 'high-quality, teacher-led teaching' (Parker and Webster, 2022: 61; Ofsted, 2021) for every learner in every classroom. However, educators and policymakers must heed these calls and strive for a more inclusive and equitable education for every learner.

Future research, particularly with a longitudinal focus, could delve deeper into foundational themes impacting SEND provision across the UK, considering the evolving government provision plan (DfE, 2023). Integrating student perspectives could also enrich our understanding of these emerging themes and incorporate an additional dimension into this area of study.

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