

An Exploration of Teaching Assistants' Experiences of Working in a Mainstream Secondary School in London

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The number of teaching assistants (TAs) in England has been constantly increasing for the past decade and they have become frontline practitioners to support pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream settings. However, there is a paucity of research on TAs' experiences of working in mainstream schools, especially in secondary phase. Based on this underrepresentation of TAs' voices of working in the field, this study aims to acknowledge and explore TAs' lived experiences of providing support in one mainstream secondary school in London.

In order to acquire deeper and more holistic understanding of the research topic, qualitative approach was adopted. Empirical phenomenology was utilised as the methodological framework to explore TAs' lived experiences and personal perspectives. Four TAs, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the head of inclusion at the randomly chosen research school were involved in the semi-structured interview, the specific method used to acquire the research data.

Four key themes emerged from the study. Firstly, continuity in the deployment of TAs was identified as the guiding principle in utilising the ancillary workforce. Secondly, TAs working as a team where members were supportive and helpful was acknowledged. Thirdly, having prior knowledge of the pupils, the teachers' expectation and the lesson plans was agreed to be the biggest facilitator to TAs' support work. Last but not least, the positive school ethos toward inclusion and TAs was considered to contribute to the effective use of TA workforce.

Key Words: Teaching Assistant (TA); deployment and management; facilitator/barrier