



**A Study On The Roles And Responsibilities Of The Teaching Assistants To  
Promote Inclusive Education In A Mainstream School**

دراسة بشأن أدوار ومسؤوليات لمساعدتي التدريس لتعزيز التعليم الشامل في مدرسة  
التيار الرئيسي

**By**

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APPENDIX C  
DISSERTATION RELEASE FORM

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## **Abstract**

The government in United Arab Emirates recognizes the need to educate students with special needs and make efforts in promoting inclusive education in the country by implementing Federal Law 29/2006. This study researches the effects of having teaching assistants in classrooms to promote inclusive practices in a mainstream school. This qualitative study conducted in a private school in Dubai provides a snapshot on the roles, responsibilities, challenges and the effect of teaching assistants in aiding students with needs. Data collection was done by semi-structured interviews of teaching assistants, teachers and director of inclusion to obtain a rich contextual picture of the support provided. Further, it analyses and validates the efforts of the teaching assistant by conducting lesson observations and analysis of documents. The study reveals they had significant role in supporting students with needs in their varied roles of teaching, managing the classroom and facilitating interactions. However, for greater impact, certain areas need to be addressed in terms of clear role definition, training, collaboration and a system to monitor the quality of the support staff that paves way for student progress. Therefore, this study contributes by presenting information that can be pursued further for future empirical investigations to promote inclusive practices.

**Key words:** Teaching assistants, roles and responsibilities, inclusive education.

## ملخص

تقر الحكومة في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة عن حاجتها إلى تعليم الطلاب ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة وبذل جهود في تعزيز التعليم الشامل في البلاد بتنفيذ القانون الاتحادي 2006/29 التي يتم من خلالها الطلاب المسجلين في المدارس الحكومية بالدولة.

أثارت هذه الدراسة آراء الباحثين عن أهمية تواجد المعلم الإضافي في الفصول الدراسية لتشجيع الممارسات الشاملة. هذه الدراسة النوعية التي أجريت في مدرسة خاصة في دبي يوفر لمحة عن الأدوار والمسؤوليات والتحديات وتأثير المعيدين في مساعدة الطلاب ذوي الاحتياجات. وقد تم جمع البيانات عن طريق المقابلات شبه منظمة من المعيدين والمدرسين ورئيس الإدراج للحصول على صورة السياق الغنية من الدعم الذي يقدمونه. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإنه يحل ويؤكد على الجهود التي يبذلها المساعد للتدريس عن طريق إجراء ملاحظات الدرس وتحليل الوثائق. وتكشف الدراسة بأن لهم دور كبير في دعم الطلاب ذوي الاحتياجات في أدوار متنوعة للتعليم، وإدارة الفصول الدراسية وتسهيل التفاعلات. ومع ذلك، التأثير الكبير، تحتاج إلى معالجة من حيث وضوح تعريف دور التدريب وبالتعاون مع بعض المجالات الرئيسية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، نظام لمراقبة الجودة من موظفي الدعم الذي يمهّد الطريق لتقدم الطلاب. لذا، تحاول هذه الدراسة إلى المساهمة من خلال تقديم المعلومات التي يمكن أن تتم عن طريق مواصلة إجراء تحقيقات ميدانية في المستقبل لتعزيز الممارسات الشاملة. الكلمات المفتاحية: المعيدين والأدوار والمسؤوليات، والتعليم الشامل.

## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to my parents who challenged and inspired me to work hard to achieve the goals in my life. I take this opportunity to thank them for believing in me, standing by me in all my hard times and encouraging me to move forward. Additionally, a special thanks to my mother for showing me that patience and love are a virtue every human needs to possess.

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## Abbreviations and Terminologies

**Special educational needs (SEN):** Special educational needs students referred to in this study have different needs due to physical, intellectual or academic impairments. These students may require support additional support due to language barriers, social or cultural disadvantages. However, this study has not considered the students that are disabled due to medical conditions and the gifted and talented students.

**Teaching assistants (TAs):** Teaching assistants (TAs) offer support in a regular classroom. In some contexts, they are referred as learning support assistants (LSAs), para-educators, special needs auxiliary and classroom assistants. Schools have developed a wide variety of job titles for the support staff role. However, here they are always referred to as teaching assistants; they could be supporting an individual student with need or a group of students.

Mainstream school:

**In-class support:** All kinds of support that are offered within the general classroom setting.

**One-to-one session or pull-out-mode:** Withdrawing students from the regular classroom in order to develop the skills required to function in a regular classroom. The sessions referred to here are undertaken by the TAs.

**Ofsted:** This is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in the UK. This body inspects and regulates services that care for children along with providing services for education.

**Individual educational plan (IEP) or Individual learning plan (ILP):** A plan with specific, measurable targets that are time bound are devised to serve the needs of the students identified with SEN. It is prepared in collaboration with all the individuals (special educator, therapists, TA, counsellor, parent) involved to ensure that the student is able to make progress within the mainstream classroom.

**Key Stage:** The National curriculum of England is divided into four key stages that covers from year 1 to year 11. The student achievement are assessed at the end of each key stage.

**Break cards:** Behavioural strategy adopted were the student earns break cards of varying time limits to do a specific activity like stretching, to get up from the seat and walk (Appendix 12.2). It helps the student to stay in control of any undesired behaviour in lessons.

**Talk time:** A similar practice to circle time where students are given an opportunity to talk or share their experience on a given topic (Appendix 12.4).

**Booster Reading Program (BRP):** This is one of the reading programs used by the school to improve the reading levels of students at the primary level and the TAs are involved in imparting this program. (Appendix 12.3)

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UAE:** United Arab Emirates

**MOE:** Ministry of Education

**KHDA:** Knowledge and Human Development Authority

**SENCO:** Special educational needs coordinator

**LRE:** Least restrictive environment.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background: Unfolding the concept of inclusive education**

The field of special education has undergone a tremendous transformation with the initiation of the inclusive movement and is characterised by constant changes and controversies in terms of policy and practice, (Polat & Kisanji, 2009). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for action on Special Educational Needs (UNESCO 1994) brought about a significant movement in the direction of inclusive education. It was designed as a measure for achieving "Education for All," by which every child had the basic right to education. As a result, all participating nations had to adopt the philosophy of inclusive education and develop programs and policies or laws that paved the way for inclusion. Additionally, the statement emphasises that inclusion would ensure human dignity and human rights. Therefore, there is a need to rethink radically and move away from the defective model to a social model as phrased by Mittler (2000). Additionally, Mittler (2000 p.10) observes inclusion as "value based" that requires "radical reforms" because it is a social change and it requires to embrace the diverse population in terms of nationality, race, culture, language, origin and social backgrounds.

Thus, the philosophy of inclusion is based on maximum participation of all and does not advocate any form of discriminatory practices. This is in alignment with Lipsky and Gartner's (1987) principle that children should be educated in the least restrictive environment. Therefore, inclusive education aims to educate all in a mainstream school irrespective of their diverse needs by adopting modifications in teaching approaches, strategies, and curriculum. Integrating students with disability students is the way forward. While perceiving education systems through the eyes of inclusion, the guidelines Developed by UNESCO (2009) observe that there is need to shift our perception from viewing the student as the problem to the education system as the problem. Other researchers also substantiate that there are evident barriers and

challenges in provisions due to ineffectual cultural awareness, learning environment, infrastructure, policy and human resources. This gives rise to the need to have measured indicators to aid the progress made in inclusive practices and evaluates in terms of policy and practice (Polat & Kisanji 2009; Mittler 2000). Acknowledging these factors, this research attempts to scrutinize one of the practices in terms of human resources that help in promoting inclusive practices within the regional context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

## **1.2. Education in UAE**

The education system of the region is relatively young and based on the principles of the Islamic religion and considers it one of the human rights, (Gaad 2010; Bradshaw 2009) and is governed by the Ministry of Education (MOE), which oversees the operation of the public and private schools. However, they play a significant role in the public sector as it funds and offers free education to the citizens of the country, and education up to grade nine is compulsory. Additionally, the ministry is more involved and supervises the infrastructure, curriculum, resources and all developments. With respect to private education, there has been a considerable increase in a number of private schools due to the increase in expatriate population and economic growth of the region. In order to meet the cultural and educational needs of the expats, various curricula are offered, even though the key ones are American, British and Asian. The role of the ministry in private education is limited to licensing and accounting for the essential criteria being met Bradshaw et al. (2004). But with the setting up of Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai by Executive Council Decree No. 11 of 2007, it paved the way for the government's dedication to ensure the quality standards of the private schools. As a part of this process, the KHDA conducts annual inspections, based on certain guidelines outlined in the handbook, to rate a school. One of the key aspects looked into by the KHDA is the Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in schools by examining identification of students with needs, modifications in curriculum, interventions, support framework, feedback and monitoring the progress of students (KHDA 2015). Additionally, the findings after

seven years of inspection published by KHDA reflect that the weakest link is the curriculum modification and support for students with SEN that impedes the learning of students.

### **1.3 Development of inclusive education in UAE**

As a measure of delivering education to students' with needs in mainstream schools, the MOE devised the "resource rooms" that worked on a pull-out-mode, as in the beginning there were no proper regulations. It provided remedial instructions in small groups (Bradshaw et al. 2004). However, it still did not facilitate the requirements of all students, as they could not find a placement in the mainstream school nor in the special need centres; therefore, the responsibility often fell onto the parents. Moreover, Gaad (2010) also observes that the responsibility of educating students with needs falls on three ministries: the MOE, the Ministry of Social affairs and the Ministry of Health, which resulted in separate policies and did not integrate the pupils into society. This need paved the way for the first step towards an inclusive movement, and it found its ground in the passing of Federal Law 29/2006. Additionally, the law was also in response to the signing of the UN Salamanca Statement. Therefore, by law, students with needs had the right to equal opportunities and education. Nevertheless, Gaad (2010) asserted that the law does not affirm that the school is the only setting for achieving education for students with disability that results in some ambiguity as there are centres that help students with disability to get education. Moreover, various researchers acknowledge other factors that hinder the implementation of inclusive education within the region, like the culture and beliefs of the people, the anxiety and attitude of the teachers.

Research by Gaad and Thabet (2009) and later Gaad (2010) in the region accentuates that, although there is an understanding in theory on inclusive education, expanding and transforming the policies into successful inclusive practices "is far from achieved". Additionally, the policies are formulated in response to the changes that happen in a global perspective, and it is like "fire lighting" (Gaad 2010). Although some insight can be obtained in terms of policy and implementation of the law from the "School for

All" document for the public schools, there is a need to closely examine the provisions within the regional context that enhances the inclusive education of students with disabilities that would define procedures into the implementation of the law.

#### **1.4 Research background and rationale for this study**

The studies in the region have examined inclusive practices in schools, including students with special needs and the attitudes of the teacher. However, the study on the role of teaching assistants (TAs) in the region is limited to assessing the impact of training Emirati females teaching to support students with special needs. Not only did the participants find the programme life changing and empowering, it highlights that having a teaching assistant (TA) programme is inevitable. It cannot be considered as a bonus facility to supporting students with needs in a mainstream school (Gaad 2015, p.61). Additionally, the media reports reflect the practice of having TAs or support persons in a regular school helps students with disabilities gain access to education in mainstream schools. The report also sheds light on some other issues: there is a growing demand for their support, but there is an insufficient supply of qualified workforce in the region and it comes at an additional monetary cost (Shankar, 2015). Other evidences on the role of the TA, to promote inclusive education, is indicated in the "School for All" (MOE, 2010) document. Although some reports highlight the need for TAs, others show that teachers need to be trained to handle students with varied disabilities rather than employing a TA that is not appropriately qualified (Nazzal, 2015).

Ainscow et al. (2013) report on the movement from exclusion to inclusion notes that the support of students is achieved by employing a team of TAs. Moreover, the presence of TA in a class has positive effects on learning, the attention of students and student outcomes, especially in small group interventions. However, based on various other studies, the TAs do not have an impact on educational outcomes. Subsequently, the teachers need to understand and be trained on how to capitalize on the support provided by TAs. The teachers need to give more time to students with need in class,

and TAs need adequate training to function appropriately, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of having their support in classrooms.

### **1.5 Research questions**

This qualitative study conducted in one private school seeks to determine the role of support TAs, learning support assistants or paraprofessionals in a mainstream private school that uses inclusive education to support students with disabilities. The study adopts various methods: interview, observations and document analysis to determine the role and responsibilities of the TA in helping students with SEN. Additionally, it also requires aligning with the country's policy as reflected in the "School for All" document (MOE 2010) which was developed by the MOE to promote the inclusive practices in Dubai . Subsequently, these effective practices and strategies of employing support staff in the mainstream school could be adopted into another setting. Therefore, the study aspires to answer the following questions:

1. Determine the percentage of TA staff that have teaching experience, certification or training that aids them in working with SEN students and the criteria for having them employed in the school.
2. What are the primary areas of support offered by the TAs, and how do they promote inclusive education?
3. How do the teachers and directors of inclusion in the school perceive the TAs' role in promoting inclusive education?
4. What are the challenges encountered by the TAs in executing their role?

#### **Secondary level**

1. What are the observable factors that show their effectiveness in terms of the country's and school's policy implementation?
2. What are the key areas that are recommended to ensure that TAs can play an effective role?

### **1.6 Significance of this study**

There have been worthwhile researches conducted in the field of inclusive education in UAE; however, more areas need to be explored and analysed to aid the

implementation of inclusive practices in mainstream schools. Therefore, this study aims to clearly define the current roles and responsibilities of TAs in ensuring students with needs are able to access mainstream school.

On a secondary level, it highlights the areas that require improvement in terms of curriculum transaction and helps to evaluate the interaction between the teacher, student, school management and parent. Subsequently, the study aims to provide recommendations to enhance the roles of TAs in inclusive practices as instigated by other researchers within the school context. Thereby, this study hopes to illustrate a clear picture on utilizing human resources in promoting inclusive education so it can be informative in adopting similar practices in other school settings, however varied the setting may be.

### **1.7 Organization of chapters**

Chapter two provides a review of existing literature.

Chapter three defines the methodology utilized for this research, ethical considerations, sampling, data-collection procedures, analysis of the data and issues during the collection of data.

Chapter four presents the data analysis and findings.

Chapter five is the discussion on the findings of this research and recommendations on helping the support staff become more effective in their roles to promote inclusive education within the school framework.

Chapter six is the conclusion and includes further areas that require research, as this study was conducted on a very small sample.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This literature review aspires to understand the significance of the movement towards inclusive education and examine the current context and backdrop of the inclusive education setting in UAE in order to explore the inclusive practices in general that promote SEN student achievement. It also discusses the roles and responsibilities of the TAs, the challenges in their roles and how TAs impact student's learning by developing interaction and providing individual attention. While considering the 'Index of Inclusion' conceived by Booth and Ainscow (2011), the TAs forms an integral part of developing inclusive practices. This study also explores on the recommendations of the other researchers conducted to improve the effectiveness of TAs, as it is one of the practices that is funded by governments in countries like the UK and US to promote inclusive education.

#### **2.1 From a segregated setting to inclusive setting**

There is evidence to show that students with needs were educated as early as the 1800s; however, as Frederickson and Cline (2002, p. 66) indicate, they were primarily educated in segregated or special schools and students were considered to be different or have a defect that resulted in a separate system of education to meet their needs. This model is referred to as the "medical" model and led to the setting up of various special schools in the early twentieth century. This was followed by an integrated approach, wherein the students with need (SEN) had an opportunity to be educated in a mainstream school, but it was physical in nature. In this approach as Polat and Kisanji (2009) explained, integration was done in various ways, such as having special classes in a mainstream school and segregated group activities at times even outside the school. This form of education is not an inclusive policy in principle, as argued by Mittler (2000) and Lipsky and Gartner (1997). Subsequently, referring to integration as inclusive is a misperception, and the terms cannot be used

interchangeably. Inclusive education is characterized by change in policy, value, practice, attitude and educational setting. Furthermore, as Friend and Bursuck (2002) explained, a student transferred from a regular classroom to receive assistance puts focus on the students' disabilities and makes them dependent.

The transformation of disabled students into mainstream schooling began with Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and researchers like Polat & Kisanji (2009), Frederickson & Cline (2002) have stated that it was obligatory to provide all children the right to free and compulsory elementary education. This was then followed by various key reforms such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for action on Special Educational Needs (UNESCO 1994), the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO 2000) and the Convention of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2006). Subsequently, nations like the US and Britain began to endorse the inclusive movement by passing various acts. For example in Britain the 'Education Act of 1970' allowed students with disabilities to access the public schools and in the US the "Education for All Handicapped Act of 1975" laid importance to the least restrictive environment (LRE) and the 'zero rejection' policy; thereby, ensuring all students had access to public school as cited in Friend & Bursuck (2002); Frederickson & Cline (2009). It also paved way for the individualized education plan (IEP) to meet the needs of SEN students and non-discriminatory evaluation procedures.

The term *inclusion* referred to here is as defined by Friend and Bursuck (2002): students educated full time in the general education classroom with their needs being met most of the time. Inclusion encompasses physical, social and instructional integration by providing an environment where student's rights are ensured; students are placed alongside non-disabled students and interact with peer groups, and the students with special needs achieves their maximum potential not with a pre-set curriculum but with teaching based on their need. Frederickson and Cline (2009) recognized that the inclusion model adopted by the national curriculum in UK schools requires learning objectives that are suitable to the student, meet the needs of the student, identify the barriers and minimize its effect to promote learning.

## **2.2 Effects of inclusive education**

UNESCO's (2009) inclusive policy guideline states that inclusive education is justified due to its educational, social and economic benefit. By educating students in an inclusive environment, they develop a change in attitude that lays foundation for a non-discriminatory society and the education system developed will respond to all the learning needs of the diverse student population. It can be more cost effective for the nations; as there is no need to have separate facilities to educate students with disabilities and it produces educated individuals, which translates to better earnings and lifestyle and there . On the other hand, the social and financial costs the nation will have to incur in terms of health, child welfare and social security to support individuals that have fewer skills will be high as they are unable to contribute effectively in society. Additionally, giving children an early education is critical, as it is essential for acquiring necessary cognitive skills. The report also highlights that many cost-effective measures can be adopted to promote inclusion, like a multi-grade, multi-age and multi-ability classroom; thereby, there is an effective usage of the available resources. The report also stresses the student drop out of education in some countries, resulting in poor skills and unemployment, which has a negative impact on the nation. Therefore, quality education is not based on the cost, rather on the learning outcomes of the education provided.

Secondly, there are other studies that prove that including students with disabilities in mainstream schools has helped improve their academic achievement, although it may be dependent on certain other factors. Dessemontet, Bless, and Morin's (2013) investigation into progress of students with intellectual disabilities, enrolled in regular school setting, acquired more development in academic areas. Other studies referred to in the same article were Laws et al. (2000) on academic achievement of students with Down syndrome, and it divulges that students in mainstream classrooms made significant progress in their literacy skills. Mostly in the areas of vocabulary, reading, grammar and comprehension. Another concern that needs to be addressed when placing students with SEN in a mainstream school is the effect on their peers' standard of achievement. Kalambouka et al. (2007) reviewed the literature in the past

two decades' policy and practices in inclusion and reiterated that there are no adverse effects; in fact, the outcomes were better or neutral. Additionally, the positive effects were more on academic areas rather than on social ones. Though most of the studies were based in the US, it can be concluded that having SEN students in mainstream school is not a hindrance but rather has a positive effect. Therefore, it stresses the need to move towards an inclusive education and that is the way forward, though there are challenges in terms of policy and practices. On examining within the regional context similar evidences of challenges can be seen in adopting an inclusive education.

### **2.3 Challenges in adopting inclusive education in UAE**

The initiation of Federal Law 29/2006 set the course for inclusion by the development of 'The Committee Specialized in the Education of people with Special Needs' under the guidance of the MOE. The committee, headed by the undersecretary, was responsible for various initiatives, such as creating policies for rehabilitation, developing educational program plans and structure, providing resources and offering advice and technical assistance. Gaad (2010) also observed that articles 13, 14 and 15 were designed to meet the educational needs of students with the disability. However, the voices of all the key participants were not considered, and the absence of clear procedures to execute inclusive education is evident, as stated by (Gaad2010). As a result, the practices in government and private schools varied, and these practices existed in isolation; moreover, often the integration of students with need was termed as inclusion. Gaad (2010) argues it is in conflict with the ideology of inclusion as integration of SEN students was done only in the physical sense because they attended the mainstream school but had special classes designed to meet their needs with minimal contact with their peers. Further research conducted by Alborn and Gaad (2014) draws attention towards the initiative of "School for All" that aimed to achieve social inclusion of students with needs. In order to endorse the rights of pupils with needs, it represented the goals of the government, general rules and regulations, along with the procedure to identify the needs of students and the provisions viable to these students in mainstream school. It clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the

participants associated with the students. However, as Alborn and Gaad (2014) observed, there are no clear procedures to evaluate the inclusive system; therefore, the law proved to be ineffective in the implementation phase, resulting in various hindrances for learners in becoming a part of the mainstream school. Additionally, the absence of an official or central information centre results in ambiguity for the parent or any participant seeking information, as it has a diverse population comprising of various nationalities.

The ideology of inclusion revolves around embracing diverse learners; therefore, Gaad (2005/2006) observes that teachers need to be responsive to the diverse culture that is prevalent in the classrooms in UAE. However, research reveals that there is conflict of interest, as often participants do not appear to be sensitive and tolerant. Moreover, depending on the nature of the disability, the perception towards inclusion seems to show a discrepancy. Therefore, as many researchers, such as Anati (2012), Khan and Gaad (2007) and Algazo and Gaad (2004), delve more into the enrolment of students with SEN, it is revealed that provisions and perception of inclusion is often influenced by the knowledge and awareness of the head teachers. Therefore, the head teacher plays a vital role and in influencing the teachers in adopting the inclusive policy. Other noticeable factors were that students with mild disabilities or learning difficulties often were accepted compared to students with behavioural problems. Another practice that came to light was that students were given a provisional admission on try-out mode, and in case of school unable to provide necessary provisions to meet the needs of the student then they were moved to specialized special need centres (Alborn & Gaad 2014).

This evidence points at the educators, as they have a significant role in promoting the inclusive education of the region. Bradshaw et al. (2004) commented that the classroom teachers were perceived to be in a "management stage" and the methods of having rote memorization and tests using a common technique do not facilitate inclusive practice. In this practice, the student is viewed as the problem, but the principle of inclusion is established by perceiving the education system as the problem rather than the student (UNESCO, 2009). Later studies by Khan and Gaad

(2007) also show that teachers need to adopt differentiated teaching methods and resources and incorporate technology. Additionally, they had to be aware of the IEP and the needs of the student. Often, teachers were not confident enough to meet the needs that led them to have the approach that segregated setting would be a better alternative to educating students with disabilities in a regular school. Subsequently, there is a need to address teacher anxiety in the classroom and have a responsive curriculum that meets the needs of the learner. The only type of curriculum modification that research studies have laid out is the “para-curriculum”(Arif & Gaad2008), wherein the modification was done by deleting some content that helped students with disability to access the curriculum. The concerns raised were that it was not scientifically done, moreover it was not effective in relation to teaching, student progress and assessment. The focus is on the students’ disabilities and the education system views them as defective rather than looking into what the curriculum and teachers have to offer. The process of focusing on the student disability is referred to as the ‘medical model’ and the student is required to fit into the education system

Therefore, as Arif and Gaad (2008) reiterate, teacher training programs have to be designed at different levels. This also sets pace for having collaboration between the teachers and the other participants. These factors would help to bring a transformation in the attitude and utilization of all available resources. Thus, having TAs by empowering the Emirati female workforce (Gaad2015) into supporting students with SEN is a positive approach. This program had aimed at training regular females that were not employed in any form of occupation to work with SEN students.

## **2.4 The concept of teaching assistants**

The job title for the additional adult support to meet the needs of the SEN student in the mainstream classroom varies from region to region and also within the school depending on the kind of support offered to the student's (Giangreco, 2013). Nevertheless, the most common roles are special needs auxiliary, classroom assistants, paraprofessionals, learning support assistants, teacher aides, instructional assistants or teaching assistants. Regardless of their title, various studies by Farrell et al. (1999),

Downing et al. (2000), Farrell and Ainscow (2002), Webster et al. (2011), Tarry (2011), Blatchford et al. (2011) shows the utilization of an adult support to aid students with SEN. Within the 'Index for Inclusion' Booth and Ainscow (2000), one of the dimensions that is measured in evolving inclusive practices in relation to learning that has a direct reference to the TA is the TA's support and ability to incorporate participation of students. Farrell et al. (1999) suggested that practice of having TAs became a focus point after the integration of pupils into mainstream school. Additionally, as (Fisher and Pleasants 2012) and (Giangreco 2013) explains, TAs have become significant in the provision of inclusive education and are now considered as a necessity to inclusive practices by many, which has resulted in it becoming "the way instead of a way "to support students, especially for students with severe disabilities. As a result, researchers observe that the number of TAs employed in the recent years has increased especially in the primary stages. TAs prove to be effective when they build more independent learning opportunities for the students (Farrell et al. 1999), and in order to achieve this, good management and skills are required to find the balance between two adults present in the classroom, which is explored in this study.

This is evident from the approach adopted in the UK, as (Farrell et al. 2010) states that government in UK recognizes the valuable supportive role of TAs and put forward programs to support the employment of TAs, such as induction training material for the TAs and occupational standards for TAs. It was believed that the TAs could help achieve the objective of raising student achievement in mainstream schools. Additionally, the Ofsted report of 2000 reflected that teaching improved in lessons where TAs were employed. However, later studies by Blatchford (2009) commented that head teachers had difficulty proving the impact of TAs on student achievement, behaviour and attitudes, resulting in an uncertainty and anxiety among teachers and researchers. Another aspect, as Farrell et al.'s (1999) study divulges, is that the TAs were not appointed due to their academic qualifications or experiences but rather on their personal qualities, like their ability to work in a team and have patience. In addition, some experience in working with children is beneficial, as other researchers have shown most of the TAs appointed were parents and that working hours suited

them. They do not have any prior teaching background or any form of training while, some began to work on a voluntary basis and later took a formal role. Farrell and Ainscow (2002 p. 48) reiterated that TAs, inspite of adverse conditions, are highly "committed and dedicated" to inclusive education, and classroom teachers from all studies indicated that they valued and acknowledged the assistance provided by TAs.

## **2.5 Roles and responsibilities of the teaching assistant**

The TA's role has evolved as researchers such as: Saddler (2013), Downing et al. (2000), Minondo, Meyer and Xin (2001) acknowledge that TAs from just doing administrative and personal activities to having a significant role as a support person in classrooms, engaging in instruction, helping with classroom management by intervening and managing behaviour. Often they provide individual student support through adaptive materials, and assist the classroom teacher by aiding in other tasks involving all the students. Moreover, (Mackenzie 2011) noted that there is no clarity about the TA's role and it often moves towards assuming the role of the classroom teacher. Secondly, as (Minondo, Meyer and Xin 2001) remarked, clearly defined evidence on the roles and responsibilities of TAs is minimal and it is based on the best practices of inclusion. Later studies also do not give an exact description of the roles TAs perform, and as shown by (Tarry 2011), the TAs have a diverse role that is dependent on the context of the school, but they need to be capable of understanding and supporting the specific needs of the student. (Webster et al. 2011) affirms based on previous studies that their role is ambiguous in terms of aiding the teachers and supporting students to promote inclusive education. Additionally, the role of TAs, as Mittler (2000, p.125) deduced, has expanded beyond the special schools that educate students with disabilities. In order to educate SEN students in a mainstream classroom, the adults have shared responsibilities to meet the needs of these students. The commonly adopted strategy is to work with a group of students while the main classroom teacher works with other students, or the role could be vice versa. Based on the different studies conducted to determine the roles and responsibilities of TAs, the common themes are behavioural support, emotional support in motivating the students,



monitoring students, being part of specific intervention programs to develop skills in students, adapting and modifying the curriculum, materials and activities to suit the needs of the student they are assigned to, providing personal care and facilitating interaction between the peers and parents at times. In addition, TAs are often involved in general school duties, clerical duties and active duty for the various activities and programs organised in the school and being part of the staff development programs. To conclude, (Tarry 2011) states the TA's have role is in supporting the teacher, pupil, curriculum and school. Moreover, (Frederickson and Cline 2009) from other research deduces that TAs ensure more individualized attention, promote interaction and ensures student were on task and reduced behavioural incidents. Therefore the additional adult support have a key role in the classroom and there is a need to promote their effectiveness in their role.

(Giangreco 2013) suggests making the role of TAs effective by adopting these practices: instructions given by the TAs are to enhance the classroom teacher's instruction and TAs work based on pre-prepared plans developed by the special educator or the teachers that is evidence based; therefore, no pedagogical decision is made by the TA at any point of time. The TAs are required to be trained to be able to deliver these plans and manage the challenging behaviours and needs that arise while implementing the plans and instruction. Finally, there needs to be an ongoing monitoring system that can also be a part of the non-instructional roles. Although this is the most desirable and rational approach, often this is not observed, resulting in challenges for the TAs.

## **2.6 Challenges in the roles and responsibilities of the teaching assistant**

The method of support given to the SEN student is often disputable, as in cases where the TA is working only individually with a student, which Farrell and Ainscow (2002, p. 47) termed as the "Velcro model". The adverse effect of this is that the student has no interaction with peers, resulting in segregation. Therefore, there is a need to find a balance in the support provided to the SEN student and be sensitive to the needs. The lack of training and a below-average pay does not contribute effectively to their role in

supporting SEN students or the inclusive education movement. As (Fletcher and Lowe's 2011) review of the pay scale of the TAs indicates, they are underpaid for the responsibilities given to them. The variation in roles and the way they are treated from one classroom to another varies. In addition, their efforts are not often recognized and they have a low status, as (Emira 2011) argues, due to their lack of formal qualification, training and clarity of their role as support staff. Additionally, (Fisher and Pleasants 2012) asserts that there is a need for TAs to voice their opinions, as they are in direct contact with the students. (Emira 2011) expresses that a democratic workplace promotes a better learning and development opportunities for the employees. (Tarry 2011) also implies that there are less development opportunities for the TA which could result in frustration, moreover lack of clarity in their role, along with the additional demands to support the diverse classroom are of great concern that needs to be addressed.

Another practical problem, as (Giangreco 2013) highlighted, is the heavy dependence on TAs to provide support in academic and social areas for students with disabilities. The SEN students have complex needs, and they are supported by the least-trained personnel. This could be attributed to the fact that the number of trained professionals is limited, resulting in the TAs spending more time in instructional roles. (Tarry and Cox 2014) confirms that the TAs often work with students individually requiring additional support highlighting the need for a specific training. At times, the expectations from the SEN student were unrealistic, which resulted in tension between the staff. However, the TAs can be effective if trained to support in an academic and social role, which would in turn result in positive student outcomes Giangreco (2013). Barensten and Watt (2014) noted from the interviews with the TAs their skills are often unrecognized and failed to capitalize on their experiences from various areas they were previously employed in. Additionally, (Fletcher and Lowe 2011) argues that the TAs role is going to continue as they are willing, passionate and gain experience by working with the SEN students.

## **2.7 The influence of teaching assistants on student achievement.**

How to measure the effectiveness of teaching assistants is surrounded with some ambiguity. Generally it is viewed that the teaching assistants' employment helped to improve student achievement and the teachers' workload decreased. However, an extensive study (Blatchford et al. 2010) reflect that the presence of TA did not have any measurable effect on student achievements, but on teacher workloads, it showed positive aspects. (Frederickson and Cline 2009) summarises on the impact of the TAs from various studies, observe that there is strong evidence of positive student participation in lessons, however there are no reliable data to show that having TAs to support student with disability helps to make better progress. Student with more needs were side-lined by current classroom practices, as it relied heavily on teaching assistants to provide the instructional role for these students. As a result, it helped the classroom teacher work with other students, but the adverse effect is that students with the most need got less from the teacher, which made students make less progress.

An additional concern was that the teaching assistants were focused on task completion, which did not help in developing student understanding. Subsequently, this gave rise to another failing that the teachers were not aware of: the effective methods of using the adult support. (Webster 2010) further denotes that the teaching assistants' qualifications and experiences are often lower than that of classroom teachers.

Moreover, Blatchford et al. (2010) views that more support for individual pupils does not itself guarantee improved academic progress. In fact, they found there was a consistent trend for those with the most support to make less academic progress than similar pupils who received less support. Farrell et al. (2010) affirmed that the academic achievements of primary-aged pupils with identified difficulties in learning, typically in literacy, improve significantly following a period of targeted intervention from TAs. Therefore, (Blatchford et al. 2009) and (Fedrickson and Cline 2009, p. 98) suggest that the school heads and policy makers need to have a clear objective, as it was evident in their study that the TAs did not have an impact on the achievement of all students. However, the teachers welcome their support, and their work has become

easier with the advent of TAs and their support is of value. Consequently, there is a need to evaluate if the TAs are appointed as general support to the teachers or to aid the students with SEN.

## **2.8 The way forward as shown in other studies**

Giangreco (2013) stated that TAs are not to be blamed for the current predicament. Reducing their numbers is also not an effective solution; rather, there is a need to review the whole practice in terms of service delivery, and it is a collective responsibility of the policy makers, schools, head teachers, teachers and special educators. Therefore, first and foremost from the assessment of TAs effect on student achievement from numerous research depict there is a need to review the expectations of TAs and their role in working collaboratively with the teacher. (Mittler 2000) believes there needs to be good collaboration and planning between the teacher and the TA. However, the obstacles in this process are the lack of time and the ever-changing role. (Moran and Abbot 2010) emphasised that teachers need the ability to manage the support staff. Furthermore, (Barensten and Watt 2014) highlighted planning and cooperation between the teachers and the TAs in areas of teaching, learning and evaluation, which would give them the recognition they seek. This in turn would make them a part of the team. Therefore, it is argued that before educators and policymakers can envision reforms in a mainstream classroom, they need to review the expectation of TAs and the role they have in working with teachers to support learning and involvement of students by aiding in preparation of lesson plans and materials, evaluating student outcomes and working in other school-related activities. At a management level, we see a need for clear guidance, policy and conditions for employing TAs to cultivate a learning environment for students with needs. In the absence of clarity and expectations, it results in an inadequate environment for learning and dilutes the effectiveness of the available resources (Giangreco et al., 2010). By devoting time for more planning, organisation of work, co-operation and evaluation of the work it helps the TAs gain recognition for the work and respect from the teacher and parents.

Secondly, (Balshaw et al. 2011) and (Farrell et al. 2013) regard the necessity for appropriate training for the TAs to use the techniques, have specific tasks designed to meet the need of the SEN students. Additionally, the TA's require to be monitored to ensure that they are effective in their role. Therefore, a need for pre-service training and in-service training arises for the TAs, while the classroom teachers are educated on how to work with additional adult help in order to develop effective teamwork. Subsequently, the teachers should have a mentoring role to play for the TAs to see that the pupils in the class are successful. In addition to this, there is a need to identify the strengths and skills of the TAs so that it can be used to the advantage of the student in need. (Moran and Abbott 2010) refer to specific training programs designed for the TAs, such as "The Specialist Teacher Assistant Certificate" through the open University, that equip them to support teaching in English, math, science and information technology in primary or special schools. This program focuses on developing TAs' knowledge and skill in six key areas, mainly in curriculum support in learning, assessing, reporting to teachers and inculcating a stimulating classroom environment, which are major concerns.

Thirdly, research requires to examine the wider impact TAs have on primary and secondary students in terms of curriculum transaction and supporting behavioural problems. (Blatchford et al. (2009) emphasis the need to examine TAs' impact in aiding students with disabilities such as autism and Down syndrome, because no statistical evidence proves their effectiveness.

A positive step towards engaging the TAs into an appropriate role can be achieved by employing Giangreco and Broer's (2007) tool to screen the over-dependence on TAs based on sixteen indicators. It is designed specific for schools, and the indicators are rated at three levels. After doing a field study, the tool was found to be effective and helped the team members to share their perspectives on the various issues that prepare them to focus their attention on areas that were ignored. Thus, the researchers argue addressing these areas and developing an action plan brings about a positive effect on all the stakeholders involved in the process. Therefore, (Blatchford et al. 2009) remarks that there is a need to address the root cause in the general education system before

addressing the challenges related to employing teaching assistants. There is a need to develop an integrated delivery model to meet the academic and social needs of the diverse student population. (Radford et al. 2015) argues that if TAs are involved in the instructional role, they need to be familiar with theories of learning and develop a three-dimensional model that involves repairing, supporting and following heuristic methods. Strategies in each phase are developed by the teacher and the TAs copy the model. With regular sharing of information, they work collaboratively and slowly transform the students into independent learners.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

Diverse methods are utilized to understand the movement towards inclusive education because of the constant evolvement in this field. This research utilizes the qualitative method as it provides an opportunity to explore a single phenomenon, wherein the participants provide answers, so the study portrays an exact picture of the phenomenon in the context that it is observed (Creswell 2008). A qualitative study is a subjective reality that can be interpreted differently by individuals and contributes meaningfully to a general body of data. However, the quantitative study deals with key concepts that are measured on a numerical scale through surveys followed by a statistical analysis, which proves the reliability of the concept. Education is multi-layered, therefore it needs to be studied in depth to develop a true understanding of the observable and non-observable phenomena (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p. 219). A naturalistic study, as in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 221) defines the characteristics and consequences of a phenomenon in its natural setting by observing the environment, interactions, behaviour and activities of the participants. Additionally, it can be considered a retrospective study, as termed in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 222) because it unearths the roles and responsibilities of the support staff as it recounts their part in promoting inclusive education from their point of view. Further, it also investigates the viewpoint of classroom teachers and team leader on their perception of having TA in class. Therefore, this is a single case study, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) states; it inspects real people in the situation and helps understand an idea better rather than just examining it in principle. Adelman et al. p.289 in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) rationalizes that case studies are a "instance in action", which is relevant here, as the insights study can be interpreted for the further benefit of the TAs' role in the school under study, and Yin (2009) suggests that it answers the 'how' and 'why' research questions. Moreover, case studies enables to understand how the ideas and principles fit together in actual situation. Therefore,

the case study method is suitable for this study as the research question aims to answer how the TAs try to promote inclusive education by helping students with SEN in regular classroom. Additionally, during data analysis, it looked for the common themes that unravel over time or across sites or cases. The guidelines for conducting this research on the TA were based on other studies conducted in international context by Downing et al. (2000), Minondo, Meyer and Xin (2001) and Giangreco (2013).

Further, the data collected from the various modes allowed the triangulation of the data, and the common themes emerged to answer the research questions, increasing the reliability and validity of the data Creswell (2008). However, this study does not generalise to all private schools in Dubai but explores the initiative of employing teaching assistants to support inclusive education in a private school in Dubai. This would further allow practitioners to judge and make informed choices, as directed by Ryan et al. (2007) and Creswell(2008).

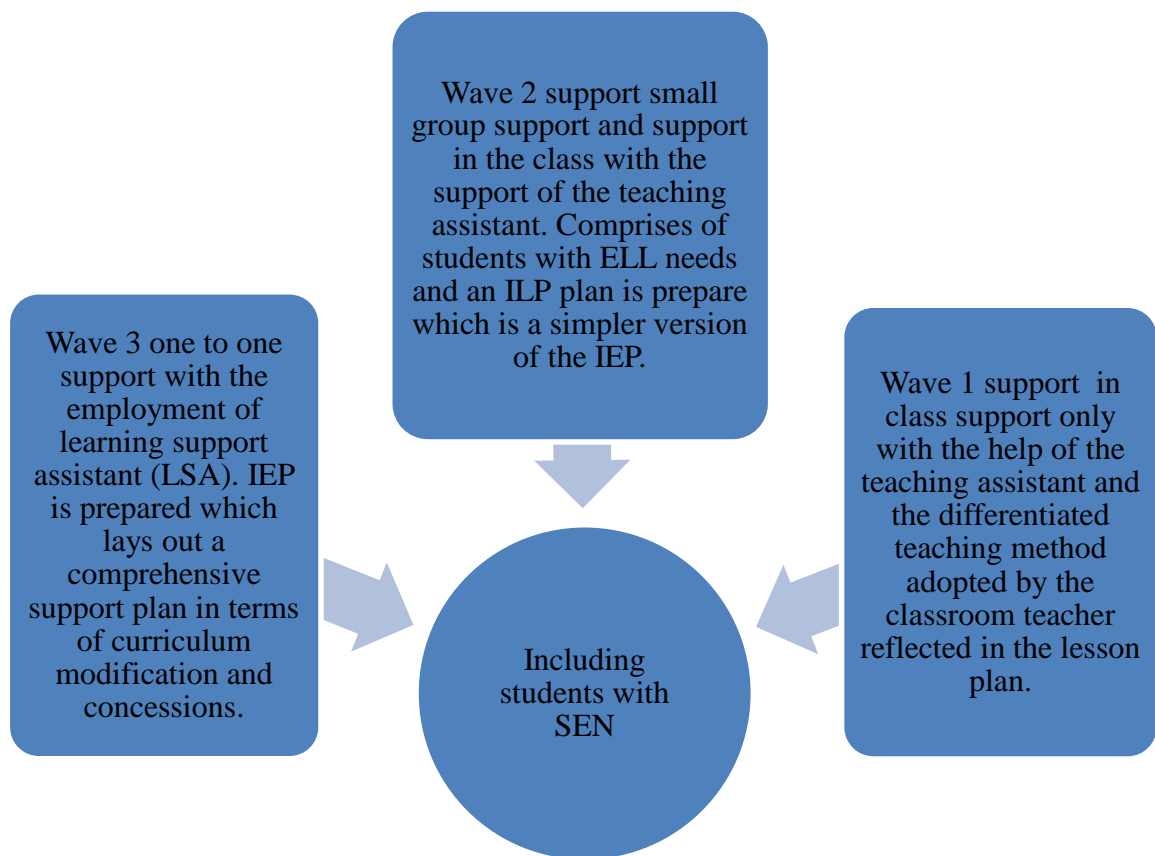
### **3.1 Site selection**

The site chosen for research was a private British curriculum school in Dubai that exhibited favourable reports in the KHDA inspection (2014) for providing support for students with disabilities. The school employed a considerable number of teaching assistants to support students with SEN from the foundation stage to Year 13; therefore, it demonstrated a good venue to examine to conduct this study support staff to promote inclusion. Thus as Creswell (2008) the study employs purposeful sampling in order to understand the phenomena of utilizing TAs in supporting students with SEN. Additionally, the study took place in the school the researcher was employed at, which provided convenience and accesses to information. The student population of 4000 was multicultural, with 108 nationalities, it was co-educational and had identified students with needs on the SEN register. An examination of the SEN register (Appendix 11.2) divulges that there were varied categories of SEN and these students were supported by the TAs; employing TAs is a practice that is adopted by the school as a part of the SEN policy (Appendix 11.1). Additionally, the school had a proper system to identify the need of the student using a CAT test at the time of admission. There was a three-



tier system of support depending on the nature of the need, from mild to multiple needs for students in order to be able to access the curriculum. The system was classified as "wave 1", "wave 2" and "wave 3". As described in the figure 3.1 and explained in appendix 11.1 "wave 1" student requires minimal support to wave 3 student that has a full time TA under the name of "learning support assistant" assigned to the student.

**Figure 3.1.: Including students with SEN**



### **3.2 Data-collection techniques**

In case studies such as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), multilevel interviews were conducted to obtain a real, comprehensive, contextual picture of the roles and responsibilities of the TAs, as the study comprised interviews of the TAs, the classroom teacher, the SEN teacher and the director of inclusion that supervised the

support provision in school. Additionally, the observation of the TAs' functioning in the classroom setting and one-to-one session helped to substantiate the roles undertaken by them in an actual scenario. Further, it aided in marking out the common areas of support offered by the TAs. In the data analysis phase, it helped to triangulate the data collected from interviews, observation and document analysis based on the common areas of support in relation to classroom management, curriculum transactions and interactions with supervisors, teachers, students and parents offered by the TAs.

**Table 3.2 Teaching Assistant Participant demographics**

Participants/ Description of students worked with	TA/ LSA	Sex F/ M	Age group	Level of education	Certified as teacher	Years of experience in School	Years of experience with SEN students	Hours worked with students	One to one session s/week	Previous Employment	Association with school	Languages known
Rachis/ Primary 3,4	TA	F	30 - 35	Graduate	No	4.5	4.5 Current school	18/week	1/week	Trading in Bank	Spouse works in School	English
Jenny/ Year 2 English Intervention	TA	F	30-35	Graduate	No	2	2 years Current school	23/week	23/ week	Fashion designer	Child in School	English, French
Anyia/Year 6 Cerebral Palsy	LSA	F	30-35	Graduate	No	5	5 months Current school	20/week	4.5/ week	Marketing Manager	Child in School	English, Arabic
Ali/Year 5,6 Learning difficulty	LSA	M	40-45	Diploma	Yes	14	14 4months Current school	26/week	4/week	Teaching Assistant	N.A.	English
Sheri/Year 4 Asperger's Syndrome	LSA	F	40-45	Graduate	No	4 months	4 months Current school	21/week	5/week	Optometrist	Child in School	English, Danish German
Bennie/ Year 7 to 11 ELL	TA	F	30-35	Graduate	Yes	1.5	1.5 Current school	20/week	7/week	Trainer	Child in school	English Mandarin Japanese
Romi/ Year 7- 11Math	TA	M	30-35	Post Graduate	Yes	8	2 Current school	28/ week	8/ week	Teacher	N.A.	English Afrikaans
Kerri/Yr 7to 11English	TA	F	40-45	Graduate	No	2.5	2.5 Current school	24/week	4/week	Nurse	Child in School	English
Alexi/ Year 7 to 11 Science	TA	F	40-45	Post Graduate	Yes	16	5 months Current school	22/week	4/week	Teacher	Child in School	English, Spanish Portuguese
Ann/Year 8 Developmental Delay	LSA	F	25-30	Post Graduate	No	1.5	1.5 Current school	28/week	4/week	System analyst	N.A	English Hindi
Mai/Year 11 Dyslexia Dysgraphia ASD	LSA	F	35-40	Graduate	No	5 months	5 months Current school	28/week	3/ week	Pharmacist	Child in School	English Arabic French
Suzy/Yr 12 ASD	LSA	F	45-50	Post Graduate	Yes	6	5 months Current school	20/week	4/week	Managerial role in educational institute	N.A	English, French Spanish

### **3.2. 1 Participants**

To establish the role of the TA, purposive sampling was adopted and as Creswell (2008) suggests one of the strategy adopted as a part of it was to bring in some variation in the characteristics of the sample thereby different aspects can be examined. In this study variation was achieved by interviewing the twelve TAs that supported various year groups, students with various SEN and support indifferent subjects which is shown in Table 3.2. While the TAs termed as learning support assistants (LSAs') supported students with various disabilities such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism and developmental delay. Consequently, it gives a wholesome picture across various grades and the different kinds of supportive schemes in place within the school setting, as it provides a rich source of information in qualitative studies. Additionally, three classroom teachers, and the director of inclusion were interviewed. An informed consent was obtained from all the participants, and a timeline was drawn for the interviews. Additionally, the TAs had to fill in a personal detail form as a part of their consent, which was utilized to prepare demographics table (Table 3.2).

### **3.2.2 Semi-structured interview**

The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis as standardized open-ended interviews because asking the same questions helps to increase the comparability of the responses, reduces the effect of the interviewer and aids in organizing and analyzing the data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison2011). However, it took the path of a semi-structured interview as at times there had to be follow-up questions and prompts to get a more in depth on the functioning of the TA. Brief notes were also taken Creswell (2008). The interview questions (Appendix 4) were designed to understand their perception of inclusive education and the tasks undertaken by the TAs to support the SEN students in relation to skills required, strategies adopted, planning and transaction of lesson content, behavior management, motivating students, personal needs and interacting with teachers, peers and supervisors. Thereby, providing answers to the research question on their roles and responsibilities and how do they support SEN students. Additionally it also reveals the challenges they face in executing their

roles effectively. Moreover, to outline the support given to the TAs by the school that would aid them to be successful in their job.

Classroom teachers were only questioned on their perception of the role of the TA and the challenges they encounter due to an extra adult support in the classroom, while the director of inclusion provided insight on the support system in school, the process of identifying the type of support and the criteria for employment of the TAs and defined the role and responsibilities of the TA as per the school policy. The interviews with the classroom teachers and director of inclusion would help to triangulate the data between all the participants.

### **3.2.3 Observations**

The role adopted by the researcher was a non-participant observer, as the main aim was to record the strategies adopted by the TAs to aid the SEN students' learning experience, and field notes were made. Some reflective notes were added to make sense of the situation and analyse the role of the TA. The observation was based on the Ofsted guidelines utilized in one of the regions in UK: type of support, interaction between the teacher and the support staff, strategies adopted in general and in relation to the subject (appendix 5). The observation was conducted in the general classroom in the core subjects: English, math and science for the entire learning block. During observation the TAs' role in the class environment, aiding in the accommodations and modifications of the curriculum was noted along with the frequency on the number of strategies adopted by the TA during the lesson was recorded in the comments column. The observed practices in the lessons were then, triangulated with the documents such as lesson plans, IEP of the student and recommended strategies. The one-to-one sessions and samples of student work were obtained. One of the in-service training observed was on the apps 'read write gold' a software program that was intended to mainly address the dyslexic students that have difficulty in spelling, reading and writing (appendix 10.6).

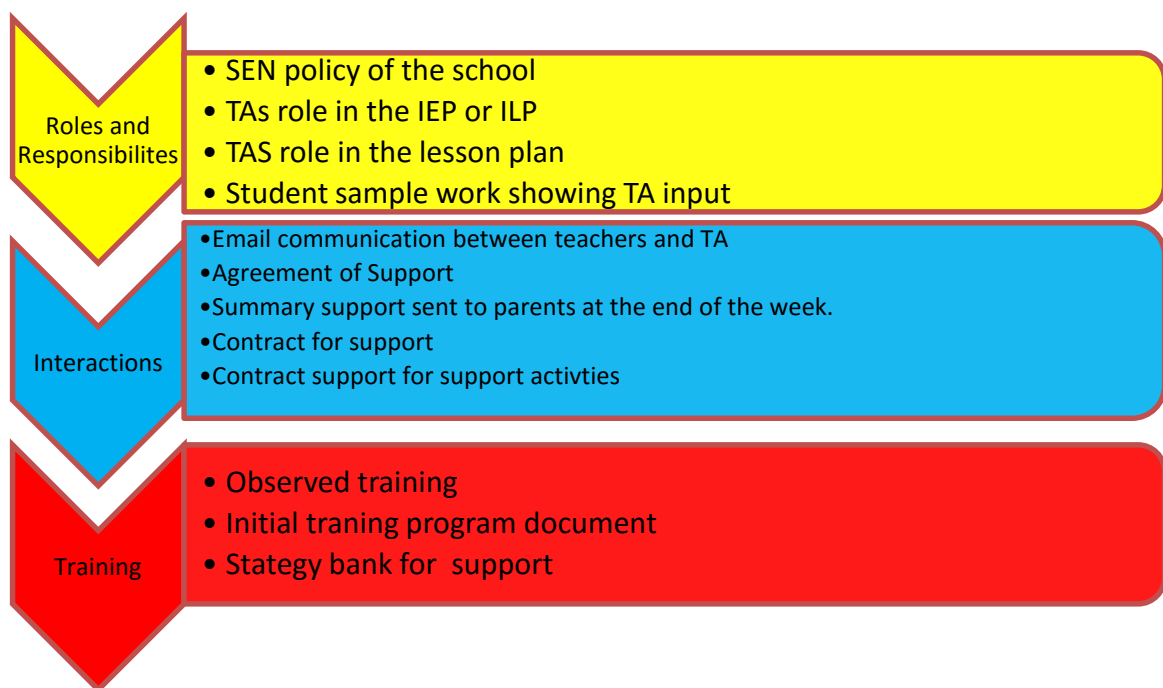
### **3.2.4 Document analysis**

Creswell (2008) considers documents as the important source of information in understanding the phenomena, it can be readily analyzed. It comprises of public

(records in public domain) and private documents (e-mails). In this study documents were examined on three levels: research studies based on the TAs in an international context to promote inclusive practices, regional context and school based. The documents such as: articles from prominent local newspapers," School for All" the guideline for supporting inclusive practices in the region and research studies based on the schools in UAE were examined.

On the school level the documents were examined that helped to validate the observed practices of employing the TA to aid students with SEN as well as the documents related to SEN practices to help the students with SEN access the curriculum and other school facilities. Figure 3.3 exhibits the documents that were procured as a part of the study and analyzed.

**Figure 3.3 School level document Analysis**



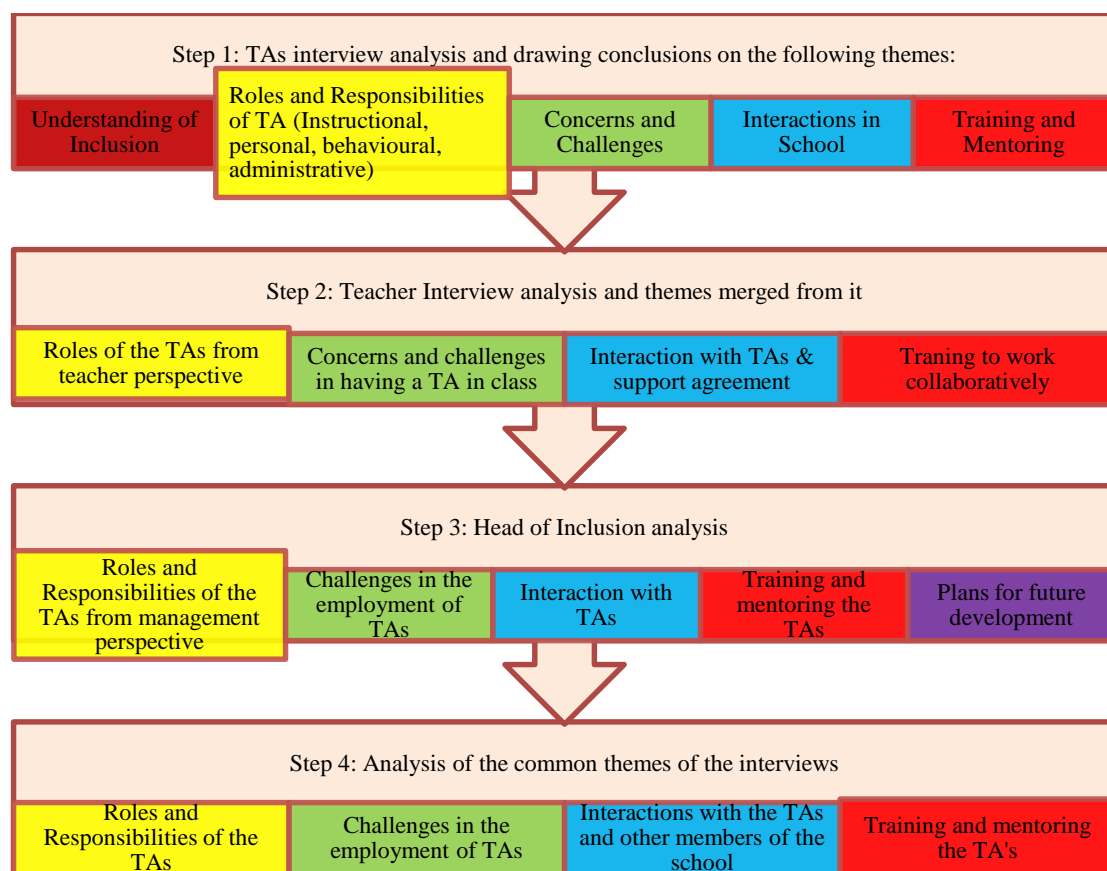
### **3.3 Data analysis procedures**

Creswell (2008) states that analysing and data collection is often a simultaneous process, as it is interpretive research based on the researcher's assessment of the situation examined. The data analysis and representation of the data was done in steps by sorting the data into key areas.

First a participant demographics was created to aid the narrative discussion Creating participant demographics in a table form will enable to answer the first research question that examines the criteria for employing the TAs.

All the interviews were transcribed and the five common themes were highlighted using colours as shown in figure 3.4 depicts the visual representation of analysing the data. Specific quotes were selected to support the themes and multiple perspectives from the teacher and the director of inclusion on the same themes were analyzed. Summary of the interview transcripts were returned to the participants to check if the essence and their views have been appropriately maintained. Finally, the information collected is all represented in a table form that compares the point of view of the TAs, teachers and director of inclusion as suggested by Creswell (2008). Additionally, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) states by constant comparison the newly acquired data is compared with the existing data which helps to obtain a perfect match and the negative data is eliminated.

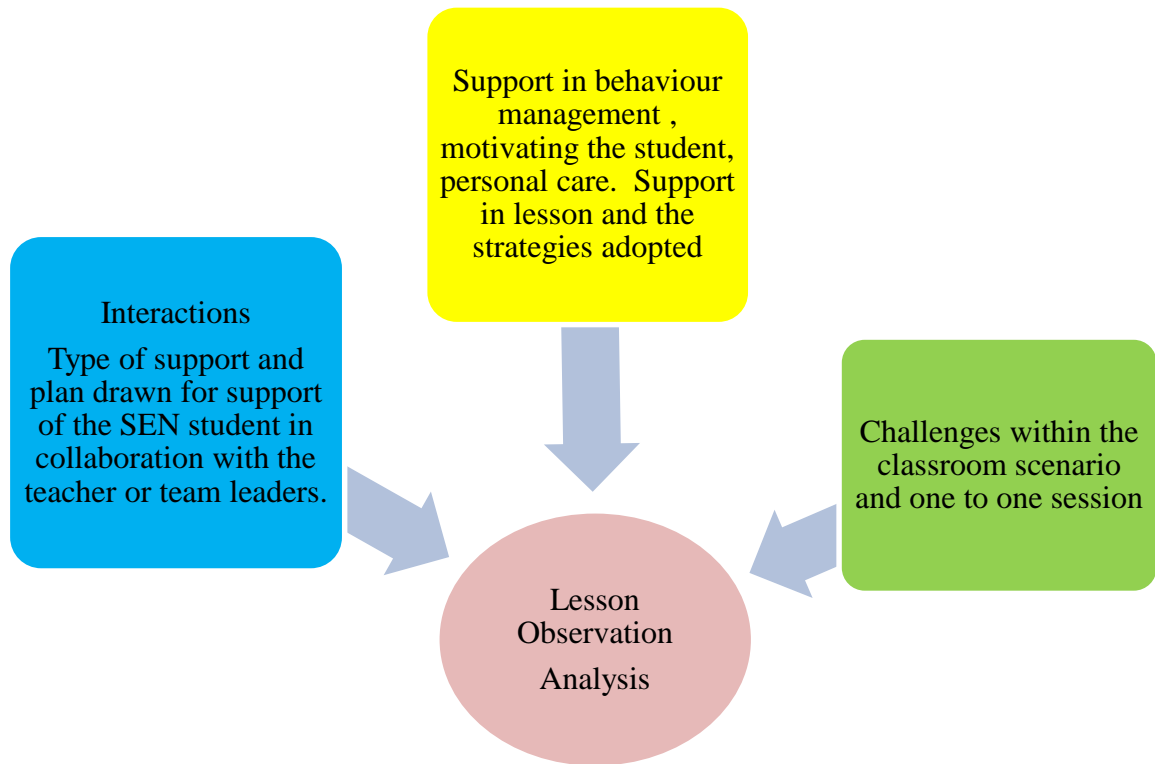
**Figure 3.4 Steps involved in interview analysis**



The lesson observation focused on the TA and looked for events that were used to support the SEN student and the frequency in which it was observed in the entire two hour learning block. This event sampling method as recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) helped to formulate the most commonly observed practices and quantify them. This in turn aids to promote the validity of the observed behaviour. Finally, the responses given in the interviews to support students with SEN are then matched to practices observed in lessons. Additionally the documental evidences were collected to help the triangulation of the data.



**Figure 3.5 Steps involved in lesson observation analysis**



The data collected from the semi structured interviews, lesson observation and document analysis were organised into mainly three themes such as: roles and responsibilities of the TA, challenges and concerns, interactions of the TA with team leaders, teachers and parents. Another interrelated theme looked into are the training programs for the TA and their understanding of inclusion. All the information was tabulated into tables as in appendix 8, 9, 10. To reduce the data the commonly occurring themes in the interview response and lesson observation was tabulated. To report the findings, a narrative discussion as proposed in Creswell (2008) is adopted here that enables the researcher to summarize the findings of the support provided by the TAs within the landscape of the school and interpret the findings by incorporating past literature and research studies. The discussion was structured on the basis of the research questions.

### **3.4 Validity and reliability**

By collecting data from various sources and multiple methods of data collection, triangulation of the data was possible. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) observe that using the triangulation technique helps to explain the complex dimensions of the human behaviour from more than one point of view. By using varied methods such as interviews and observation the researcher can be confident of their findings. The method adopted for this study can be referred to as methodological triangulation, where the object of study, was to understand the concept of TAs supporting SEN students, were the same but various methods were adopted. The initial step was to triangulate "within methods". This was achieved by finding the common themes that emerged from the interviews and then compared to the most frequent practices observed in the lessons. To increase the validity of the interview data "member checking" practice was adopted, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) and Creswell (2008) wherein the interview transcripts were shared with the participants to ensure that the data interpretation was not distorted, and the final report on the findings was submitted to the school. Additionally, a peer debriefing was done to examine if the research questions were adequately answered and the cross examination of the data was valid.

Reliability in qualitative research can be defined as what the researcher has recorded and what happens in the natural setting (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011). It does not aim for uniformity and is looking for multiple interpretations. In order to increase validity in interviews and reduce the bias, a structured interview was adopted and leading questions were limited to clarify their roles, and multiple participants were involved in the interview. The observational data is more structured, as it enters data into specific categories and is based on the guidelines followed by schools in the UK. Another concern is that participants may modify their behaviour, exhibit anxiety and the researcher might miss an event that took place. Therefore, additional methods are required to make inferences thereby increasing the reliability. In this study the document procured such as: lesson plans, resources used, student sample work were used to corroborate and triangulate the practices observed in the lesson. Ryan et al.

(2007) advocates that there has to be "rigour" in the qualitative research process for credibility and integrity. Additionally, the "ethical" area is addressed by maintaining the confidentiality issues, 'procedural' area by reducing bias and misinterpretation and documentation which shows a good co-relation between the research and study conducted.

### **3.5 Ethical consideration**

The parameters as guided by the British University in Dubai (BUID) were retained during the entire period of study, and an approval from the ethics committee was sought, due to the direct involvement with people as a part of the data collection for this qualitative study (Appendix 3) (Creswell 2008). Consent from the school was obtained prior to the study, which outlined the research proposal and methodology adopted for the study in the request letter (Appendix 2). Appointments were then scheduled with the participants for the interview on a voluntary basis at their convenience. It was also made clear that the school would have the responsibility of informing the parents and participants involved in the study about the nature of the study. Anonymity of the participants was maintained at all times by using pseudonyms of the school and participants. Access to the participants was unproblematic, as the researcher was a part of the organization. However, an area of concern here is the participants feared that details of the interview would be disclosed or some kind of data verification would take place. To overcome this issue, the research purpose and the process of data analysis was clearly explained through emails and emphasising that at no point would there be reference to the participant. Blanking out any possible identifiers from the documents was strictly adhered to. It was also ensured by the director of inclusion that participation for the study had no effect on their job security; rather, it would be utilized for the purpose of professional development and an email to this effect was sent by the director of inclusion. (Appendix 7)

### **3.6 Methodological challenges**

**Limiting bias:** The challenge while reporting was the researcher's knowledge about the field of SEN and provisions for inclusive education due to the experience of working in the same discipline. The data was examined and consolidated by observing the common themes that emerged by using a matrix form of data analysis. Additionally, the study was conducted in the researcher's workplace; therefore all findings from the study were supported by other research studies to avoid the influence of the researcher's own practices and viewpoints.

**Interviews:** The interview questions at times had to be explained, which resulted in the interviews exceeding the expected time limit. Additionally often to explain the strategies used, they often provided with examples and made reference to their specific roles. In order to be able to do a proper data analysis while conducting the interview, there was a need to generalize the practices adopted by the TAs. Therefore, some editing was required to meet the requirement of the data collection.

**Time Constraint:** Some of the interviews had to be rescheduled as the participants were engaged in other duties. Therefore the two-week study was extended.

**Data Analysis:** The volume of data that had to be accounted for was significant; therefore, to obtain a comprehensive view, participants from various year groups were chosen, and in the secondary level, at least one TA from all the core subjects was interviewed.

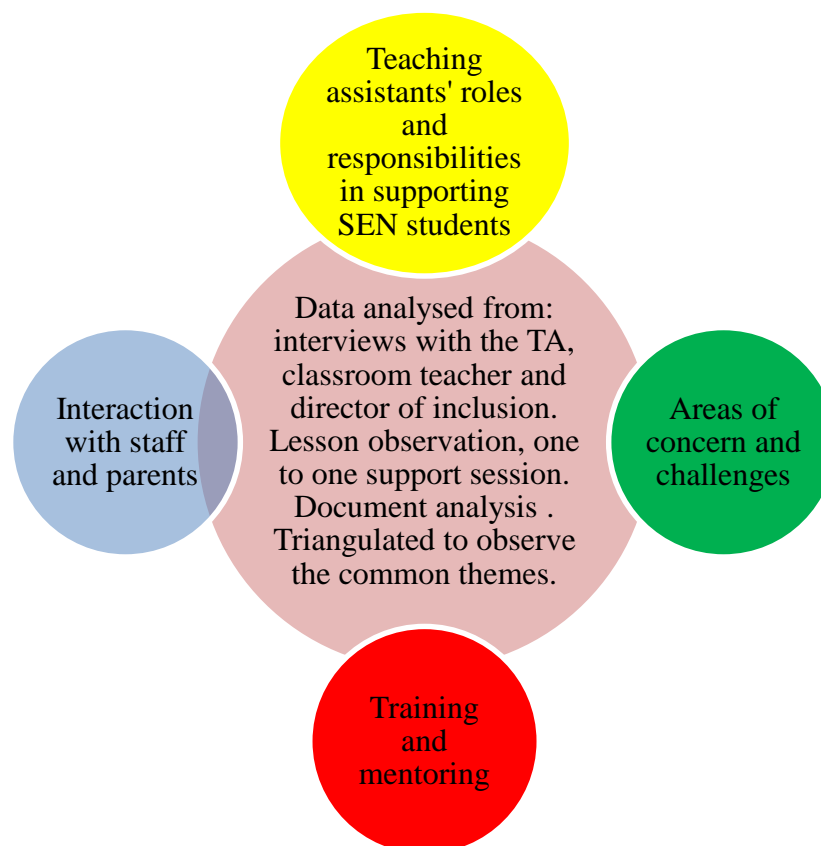
**Access:** Obtaining access to all the documents for the study required approval from the director of inclusion due to the sensitivity of some of the data present in the documents only a few sample copies could be attached as appendix.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The study aims to explore the role of the teaching assistant (TA) in supporting students with SEN to promote inclusive education within the context of the school by exploring the following domains: the key areas of support provided by the TAs based on interviews, the role of the TA as defined by the classroom teachers and director of inclusion, support provided by the TA during classroom observation and analysis of the documents that exhibit evidence of support provided. In order to arrive at a conclusive role of TAs in supporting students with SEN, which is the main aim of the study, a cross-analysis of the interviews, classroom observation and documents were conducted. Based on the data collected, this study discusses the challenges of the TAs in executing their role, the interaction of TAs with other staff members and parents in order to aid their functioning in the school, and the training and mentoring programs conducted in the school to improve the efficiency of the TAs. Finally, the study explores the role of the TA as it relates to United Arab Emirate's (UAE's) inclusive policy.

**Figure 4.1 Interpreting the data and reporting the study findings**



### **Study Findings as per the research questions**

- 1. In the sample study, percentage of TAs that have teaching experience, certification or training that aids them in working with SEN students and the criteria for having them employed in the school.*

Of the twelve TAs interviewed, six were from primary school and six were from secondary school. The participants had various roles, such as subject TA, English language learner (ELL) assistant, learning support assistant (LSA) work with a specific student, and intervention TA. Additionally, they had various nationalities and spoke various languages, in contrast to the main teaching staff, who were mostly from the UK and recruited from overseas, as is evident from the school website (appendix 11.2). In the participant sample, almost all the TAs were graduates in some field and employed in various sectors; however, less than 50% of them had a teacher training or some kind of teaching experience. Additionally, only one participant had prior experience

working with SEN students. All the other participants revealed that this was their first experience with SEN students and that they had become more aware of the students' needs. However, they all showed a good understanding of inclusive education, as they believed every student needs to be given equal opportunity for education in a mainstream school and that student needs are to be met through modification and concession of the curriculum and environment. Additionally, the TAs became more equipped with strategies that would help them to support SEN students in the classroom, as the following statements from the TAs prove:

*“Though I have been teaching for long from here, I have learnt to differentiate topics, tasks, and instructions – teaching techniques/approaches to learning easily like short cuts to calculate easily and this is then taught to students.” (Romi)*

*“Substantial subject knowledge to enable concise explanations and to be able to “reteach” after the initial teacher input. My years of experience with this school has helped built this knowledge base.” (Rachis)*

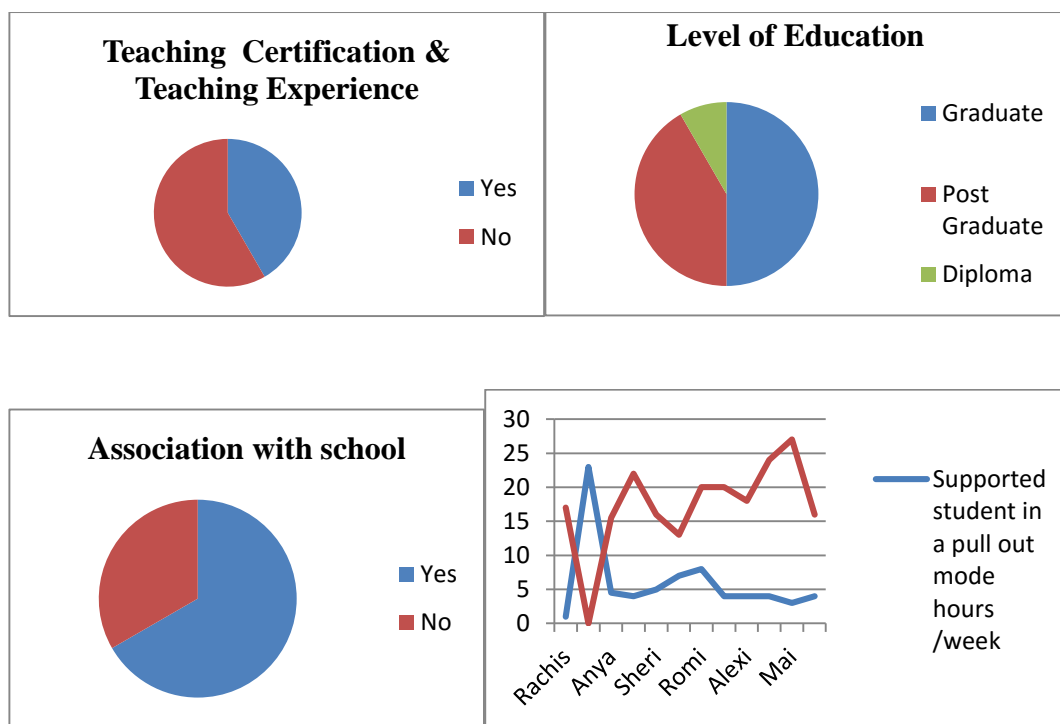
*“The behavioural training was very helpful and after the practical session with the external agency that conducts the training in our school, I am more confident to handle issues.” (Sheri)*

About 65% of TAs had some form of association with the school, such as a child studying in the school or a spouse employed with the school, prior to being employed as TA. The director of inclusion also revealed that based on the provision map (appendix 11.4), the need for support staff is determined and the vacancies are advertised on websites. All recruitment happen locally, and many parents that often volunteered with the school are aware of these vacancies. The director of inclusion agreed on the finding that often parents apply for the position and get selected (appendix 9.3, p.121)

The support staff supported in the general classroom and had individual one-on-one support sessions with students, which was mostly less than five hours per week. The only support staff that did not associate with the classroom were the intervention

assistants, as it was always on a pull-out mode. The intervention assistant worked on a specific reading program known as Better Reading Partnership (Appendix 12.3) to achieve the target set in the individual education plan (IEP) of the student and worked in collaboration with the director of inclusion and the SEN teacher.

**Figure 4.2 Findings from the participant demographics**



*2. The primary areas of support offered by the TAs and how they promote inclusive education.*

The key function of the TAs is to support SEN students by keeping them on task and monitoring for any form of disruptive behaviours in the classroom. Additionally, they have a teaching role, where in they are required to simplify the task for better understanding, provide writing templates, assist in note-taking or direct the students to use the guidelines and prepare them for presentation. In order to support the students in general classroom lessons the TAs are provided with the necessary resources, and the expectations of the lesson are conveyed at the beginning of lesson most of the time. The TAs are often required to adapt the lessons (appendix 10.1) to



meet the needs of the student. In order to achieve this a prior interaction with the teacher ensures that the student has a differentiated task and target to achieve along with a quiet space to work if necessary under the direction of the teacher. However, during observation it was evident that, it is not essential for there to be coordination between the teacher and the support staff. During the one-to-one session observed (appendix 10.4), where the student was required to complete a practice sheet given by the teacher in their math lesson, the work was modified by the LSA, and the teacher was only sent an email informing them that the student was struggling. The teacher's response was that the LSA had free reign to modify the worksheet as deemed necessary. Additionally, the LSA explained:

*"It was purely my initiative as my student would totally blank out if she starts struggling within the few minutes. So we first attempt the lower level and moved upward based on the difficulty. Some of the questions were omitted completely that were of level 6."* (appendix 10.4)

Most of the interaction with the teacher occurs through email (appendix 10.1); therefore, they need to maintain proper communication with the teachers. However, at times some additional need may occur during the lesson and the TAs serve as a link to the main classroom teacher. As one of the ELL support staff said:

*"I am the go between person to communicate for these students as they are new to everything in school the language, the education system and curriculum"*

The English TA also had a similar view:

*"The role can bridge a gap in educational need as classrooms are large in size and one teacher does not have the capacity to meet all the necessary modifications and interventions of children with special needs."*

Another form of teaching the TAs engage in is during one-on-one sessions that involve developing the skills of the SEN students in various areas such as spelling, reading and comprehension based on their IEP targets that would help them function

better in regular classroom lessons. During these sessions, various strategies are introduced in a step-by-step manner or the strategies introduced in class are reinforced to help the student develop the skill to a proficient level, which enables them to transfer the skill into regular lessons. To achieve this, the TAs are required to develop a plan and all the required resources; further, the progress is communicated in the weekly summaries (appendix 11.6) that are communicated to the parents. The final progress is then reported to the SEN teacher and director of inclusion in the End-of-term review of the IEP, which is later shared with the teacher. One noticeable factor, is the TA that conducts intervention reading program (BRP) to improve the reading level of students had received specific training enabling to implement the program. The TA reflected on the process that enabled to become confident in conducting the program

*“the intervention program I was trained by the SEN teacher on how to plan and conduct these sessions. She had mentored me in the initial sessions so I had a feedback on what went well and where I had to improve.” (Jenny)*

The subject TA’s support sessions are on an as-needed basis, as evident in the literacy lesson observation, where the TA worked with an adapted version of the text in small groups and later worked in the regular lesson for the comprehension tasks based on the lesson (appendix 10.1).

To develop interaction between the SEN students and other students, often the TAs are involved in various enrichment, talk time and lunch programs. However, their role is minimal, as the main aim is to develop the students’ independence; therefore, they support in organising the materials required for the task, motivating them to complete the task or just supervising the activity.

In addition to the various roles they have involving the students, the TAs often assist teachers in clerical roles such as photocopying and preparing classroom displays. Some form of additional administrative responsibility within the inclusion department is assigned to a few of the support staff that have been associated with the school over

a year, like timetabling of the support staff, coordinating the training programs and assisting in maintaining the records of the SEN students. The TAs are at times involved in some form of ongoing school programs; for example, the English TA at the secondary level stated that she was a part of the reading program and helped in keeping record of the progress of students (appendix 9.1).

*3. The viewpoint of teachers and directors of inclusion on the TAs role in promoting inclusive education.*

Both the teachers and the director of inclusion acknowledged the support provided by the TAs. The teachers were of the opinion that having additional support helped them to work with specific groups, especially the lower-ability students; it reduced behavioural incidents in the classroom. They were able to give attention to non-disabled students while the support staff worked on the differentiated task planned for the SEN student. The additional help received while monitoring the students to stay on task during group activities helped to promote a good class control and to oversee the areas of improvement that needed to be incorporated in the next lesson while planning. A joint effort has helped to lessen the burden on the teachers, and the director of inclusion also maintained that additional support helped them meet the needs of the SEN student in class or it would not be possible for some of the SEN students to be enrolled in mainstream school, as they have varied needs which at times require individual attention. The opinion was voiced by the director of inclusion:

*“In general having the support staff in lesson has helped to ensure that the teacher has an additional form of resource that promote differentiation to meet the varied needs in class and keep the students engaged. Currently depending on the teacher the TA helps in modifying tasks supervising, managing behaviour so on.” (appendix 9.3, p.122)*

*4. The challenges encountered by the TAs in executing their role*

One major concern of the TAs were although they knew about inclusion and the role was briefed to them as a part of the orientation at the beginning of the academic year, it often proved inadequate, as they find their expectations evolve as the lessons or

teachers change. During lesson observation, the TAs moved to the background, as they had no active role to play; this happens when new concepts are introduced. Their active involvement was mostly when students were given tasks to accomplish; therefore, there are times in lessons when the TA has no role. However, as the TAs worked around a standard timetable, they stayed in lesson. Additionally, the LSAs only supported the student assigned to them. In the observation, it was noted that they sat next to the student and did not show any form of involvement unless the particular student assigned to them was part of the group work. This raises the issue of their effective usage, as voiced by the math teacher (appendix 9.2):

*“It would be nice if the LSA would support other student, but it never happens as they are directed only to support the student assigned to them.”*

Both the teachers and TAs shared the same view, that the interaction between them was mostly only through emails or informal discussions, which was insufficient. There is a need to bring in standard practices, structure and good teamwork between the support staff and the classroom to develop an efficient system of interaction between all the staff members and the parents involved in the development of the SEN student. This was voiced in various ways by the TAs, teachers and director of inclusion

An English intervention TA stated:

*“I feel the more interest and involvement the parents can give and the more they are willing to work with the teachers, and the support staff resulting in more successful the inclusion of students.” (Jenny)*

A primary LSA stated about collaboration:

*“I have been in the field of special education for some time and feel that there needs to be a good partnership between the teacher, support staff and the parent to see a progress in the child.” (Ali)*

The director of inclusion voiced:

*“currently we are looking in for having support agreement between the teacher and the support staff as we are growing and they need to be effectively employed and at times we are not able to meet the needs.”*

Appropriate planning and interaction would promote the utilization of the support staff to the maximum, as every individual involved clearly knows their expectation, which is not always evident. Additionally, the TAs felt that having a complete update or some form of training for specific disabilities or knowing about the needs of the student assigned to them would help them to develop a proper strategy. The current practice is for support staff to gather all materials and at times come up with solutions. Usually this involves behavior where they are required to have a hands-on strategy, and at times they are required to come up with strategies on the spot and deal with the situation, which often results in dilemmas, as the recommended strategy might not have worked or there may be some additional need. According to the TAs this results in wasting time and available resources along with creating some form of uncertainty. Neither the handbook nor the SEN policy cover all the roles and responsibilities the TAs have in school, which results in the support staff not knowing their expectations. There have to be clear stated boundaries, and the teachers must be aware of the support staff's role as it was raised as concern.

The primary English TA's view was as follows:

*"I would like more teachers to be aware of what we do as a department such as lunchtime clubs, form time withdrawal etc. So they can recommend more students who would benefit from this. Additionally the teachers are not aware of our roles and know what to expect from us."* (Rachis)

*5. The factors that show the effectiveness of the TA in terms of the country's and school's policy implementation?*

On examining the "School for All" (MOE 2010) document that serves as the guideline for the UAE's SEN education, the minimum qualification to appoint a TA is a university degree or school certificate with appropriate training. Additionally, they are required to undergo regular training and upgrade their skills, which is in accordance with international practices to meet the needs of the SEN students. The role of the support staff as directed in the guidelines are to assist the teacher in including the SEN student in the classroom by developing resources to meet the

needs of the student, direct support to achieve the IEP targets, monitor students for task completion, follow up with student progress and implement programs that develop students skills. On reviewing the study findings, it can be concluded that practices followed in this school are in alignment with the policies of the country and the support staff work in accordance with the SEN policy (appendix 11.1). However, as stated by the director of inclusion, there is a need to review the roles and responsibilities of the support staff to improve the efficiency of the staff.

*“In the SEN policy there is a general guideline and we are now developing a handbook with the contribution from the TAs and LSAs and a support agreement contract to make their role more clearly to the teacher, parent and the support staff.”*

Currently, no policies or practices are in place to measure the effectiveness of support staff to support the SEN student. However, from the interviews and lesson observations, it can be concluded that they do aid the SEN students to become a part of the mainstream school.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

The data collected and the study findings that are accounted in the previous chapters of this study are drawn together to find its context in the current research studies of employing teaching assistants to support the SEN students. In qualitative analysis, it is essential that the phenomena explored finds the meaning in terms of the general understanding of the concept. This can be achieved by comparing the themes evolved out of the study and published research (Creswell 2009). Consequently, this chapter draws comparisons between the study findings in this school and the practices observed in other studies in relation to the roles and responsibilities of the TA.

#### **Discussion**

Similar to other studies, the TAs in this study all worked in the general classroom to support the student. They were involved in intervention sessions, had varied work experience prior to being employed as TA and very few had some form of training in teaching or even involvement with the SEN students. However, some of them had an association with the school, as their child was studying in the same school or they volunteered at the school. Despite variations in job titles, the TAs had common traits in their roles (Barensten & Watt 2014). In this study, the support staff also had different job titles depending upon the type of support they offered, but their roles were very similar.

The roles and responsibilities of the TAs generally revolved around providing support to SEN students or lower ability groups of students within the general classroom and at times helping them in specific skill-development programs. It is commonly agreed that the role of the TA is multifaceted, demanding, and valuable, although it lacks rigid guidelines. This study also draws on a similar view and highlights common practices in other studies (Downing et al. 2000; Moran & Abbot 2002; Fisher & Pleasants 2012) in the areas of managing behaviour, monitoring students, adapting and modifying the materials in the lesson and building the interaction between peers. Additionally, the strategies observed and shared during interviews to manage behaviours had a common pattern, such as giving students

choices and assisting them especially during group work. The support staff were given the freedom to take students out of class for disruptive behaviours. It was also done by using behaviour strategy of earning break cards. Another role they have is in teaching by modifying or adapting the curriculum or study materials provided in the lesson. They assume the primary teaching role only during individual or small-group sessions, and this is usually to develop a particular skill or to reinforce a concept introduced in the lesson. This also helped them to train the students to use certain applications or techniques that would help them overcome difficulties. As they are not assume to role of the teacher roles rather deliver structured and planned intervention programs for which they are trained (Webster et al. 2010). It emphasises the teachers' crucial role here to oversee the support system in class which was observed during the general classroom lessons.

The relationship between the TA and the SEN student is significant (Saddler 2014), as there is a lot of interaction time between them, which helps to build trust and respect, promoting a positive influence in the social inclusion of the student. It was noted in this study that all the TA staff were of the opinion that a friendly, supportive nature is essential, along with developing a good relationship that encourages students to approach them. Moreover, there is variation from class to class depending on the teacher, the type of support and the student's needs. The roles varied and so did the interaction, along with the way the support staff were treated. The English (appendix 9.2) teacher in the interview voiced her opinion:

*“The teacher to decides how to use them in the class and it usually depends on the TAs ability and confidence to handle the situation and the pupil. .... So whenever any new TA is appointed it takes time to get acquainted with them and on how they work. It takes some time to work the partnership.”*

Fletcher and Lowe (2011, p. 81) viewed that teachers feel deeply uneasy working with the support staff, especially due to their evolving roles in the classroom. However, they were all enthusiastic and willing workers. Some contradictions and tensions arise due to the fact that everyone agreed on inclusion as a policy, but in practice there were ambiguities. Moreover, for a successful inclusion, the uncertainty



the TAs feel in their role due to variations in the policy and practices of the school need to be addressed (Mackenzie 2011). Additionally, collaboration between the staff is an essential ingredient, as Barensten and Watt (2014) stated, which can be as minimal as an email or informal discussion, as depicted in this study. The importance of teamwork lies in the fact that it reduces the frustration and tension between the staff and it brings in greater involvement and recognition for the support staff. This can be achieved by planning and evaluating the teaching and learning process in the lessons. However, lack of time is a hindering factor; therefore, it is the responsibility of the school authorities to have planning time in the school schedule. Another factor is the support staff being a part of the review meeting of the IEP which made them feel highly appreciated for the efforts put in for student progress. This was expressed by the LSA:

*“I was involved in the modification of the recent IEP. My opinions and suggestions were valued and accepted. This made me feel very contented and think that I am truly making a difference.” (Ann)*

In addition to this, the TAs are involved in non-academic areas helping in organizing the students' routine in school and developing their personal appearance and hygiene. They also support teachers and the inclusive department in clerical tasks. Webster et al. (2010) views they can help indirectly by assisting the teacher which would promote the teaching in classrooms and Downing et al. (2000) affirms to this that the TAs were usually willing to perform any of the tasks they were asked to do. The TAs were willing to be a part of inclusive education, but it requires clarity of their roles, and they need to have identity of their own (Tarry & Cox 2014). A similar viewpoint was raised by the director of inclusion as they were looking to have new guidelines and support agreement in place (appendix 11.7) to have clear boundaries set. Moreover, there is a need to explore the efficient and engaging ways to deliver the initial trainings and ongoing professional development programs (Carter al. 2009). Another aspect that Gerschel (2005) describes is the role of the special educational needs co-coordinator

(SENCO) as the central force that can bring about change in effective management of the TAs, as the policies, school system and practices need to be in coordination. This will ensure that there is appropriate collaboration between the staff, an allocation of time for planning and review and skill development of the TAs. Additionally, a monitoring system to oversee the SEN student needs are met within the school framework.

### **Recommendation to ensure that TAs play an effective role**

The key area that has come into focus from the data collection is the need to have more clarity on the role of the TAs and the LSAs within the school framework. This would help teachers develop a better understanding of ways to utilize support staff efficiently and promote a better interaction between the adults in the lesson to meet the needs of the SEN student. This can improve the contribution of the support staff in the area of academics. It is argued (Saddler 2014) that social inclusion and academic achievement are interlinked; it can be concluded that by promoting area of social inclusion the academic area can be influenced. Subsequently, if TAs have a positive impact on the social interaction of SEN students it can facilitate the process of academics too.

Secondly, there is a need for more training and mentoring, as most of the support staff recruited did not have any kind of teaching experience or association with SEN students; therefore, the school needs to look into appointing staff that have some form of training or have professional development programs to enable the support staff to improve their efficiency. Radford et al. (2015) asserts that school managers have to make these decisions about the role of the TA, and if they are required to perform pedagogical roles at the stage of recruitment itself, the expectation should be higher. It was noted the areas the TA were trained in like reading program, behaviour support, read write gold app they were more confident to use these strategies with the students. Therefore, (Giangreco et al. 2011) outlines that the TA instructions have to complement the teachers directions and work on a plan developed on the basis of evidences by the teachers

so that no decision are taken by the TA. TO aid the implementation of the plan the TAs are to be trained and regular monitoring and supervision ensures the quality of the service offered by the TA.

Finally, though the above outlined method is logical and there is an agreement that the support staff have a considerable role to play in helping students progress, there are currently no monitoring or observation practices adopted in the school to measure the effectiveness of the role of the TA in lessons. This is very similar to recommendations by Ofsted (2008), who states a need for having measurable indicators to monitor and appraise the success of the support staff in pupil achievement academically and in non-academic areas. Similarly, within the region emphasises on the importance of measuring the impact of the program of trained teaching assistants to support students with SEN. Though, the trained TAs found the program ‘empowering’ and ‘life changing’ as follow up research it is recommended by (Gaad 2015) to conduct research on how the TAs contribute to promote the inclusive policy adopted by the government. Moreover, there needs to be collaborative team-work between team leaders, teachers and the support staff to increase pupil achievement. The training provided needs to be in consistent cycles, thereby ensuring that the knowledge and skill development of the TA matches the needs of the student. Radford et al. 2015 provides a unique framework for supporting SEN students through interactions that can be further adopted and examined. This framework has three key dimensions—repair, support and heuristic—which gives the TA room for flexibility depending on the individual need, type of task and the objective of the lesson. Therefore, it is essential for school management to train and have models set out for the TAs that can be adopted into the environment of the classroom.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

#### **6.1 Overview of this Study**

This research aimed to put together one of the practices adopted in promoting inclusive education by employing TAs to support students with SEN. The purpose of the research was to explore the TA's role and the support offered by them in a mainstream school. However, this research does not attempt to generalise the practice of using the TAs; it only lays a foundation for future researchers to explore one of the upcoming trends in the region to promote inclusive practice of employing TAs, as there are certain ambiguities surrounding this practice.

It is evident in the literature review explored for this study that the role of TAs has evolved in the past two decades, and considerable research is being conducted as the number of the TAs employed have increased. It highlights the practice of having TAs where conceptualized to support students with SEN; however, their impact on achievement has not been positive due to lot of hindering factors. The key factors that have come to light are lack of training, no clear clarity in their roles and responsibilities and lack of collaboration between the teacher and the TAs.

Therefore, a qualitative approach was used in this study the roles and responsibilities of the TA and the extent to which they are trying to promote inclusive practices by conducting observation within the classrooms in which they offer support. In addition, the study examined document and interviews with the classroom teachers and director of inclusion were conducted to obtain multiple perspectives to determine the effect of employing TAs. The data analysis was conducted by triangulating the commonly emerging themes from the multi-level interviews, the lesson observation and the document analysis.

The study summarises the following facts about employment in the current school under study:

- The TAs employed were not all qualified with a teaching degree; however, they were graduates and had an understanding of the inclusive policy of the school.

Additionally, most of them had a close association with the school, as their own children were pupils enrolled in the school.

- It was evident that their help was valued by the teachers and students from the classroom observation and interviews.
- The help offered by the support staff fell into two categories and were termed differently. The learning support assistant(LSA) supported one or two pupils in the class that were assigned to them, and these pupils had multiple needs, while the TAs offered support in the general classroom with students that were identified with needs based on the SEN register of the school and teacher feedback. All the support staff were supervised by the inclusion department of the school.
- The general roles of the TAs and the LSAs were to support the SEN student in the classroom, and the key areas of support identified were classroom management, personal care, curriculum transactions and interacting between the teachers, students, parent and supervisors.
- Often the TAs assumed a pedagogical role as the tasks had to be simplified based on the student need and especially for non-English speaker the TA had to translate the content and the instruction. They were assigned to work with small groups within the classroom based on the lesson objective and to help in the differentiated tasks.
- There was evidence of some in-service training. However, all the TAs interviewed stated that circumstances arise in which they are not efficient to support the student and they had to seek support of other staff members. This was noticed specifically at the secondary level, as the LSAs are assigned to a particular student and they support students in subjects that they have not specialized in. Often this resulted in altering the support system in place. This was done through a mentor appointed during the initial phase of the employment.
- The collaboration between teachers and the support staff varied considerably. It was dependent on the individual teacher, as there was no specific system or

time devoted to review the support plans. The only form of communication was by email, where the teacher would email the TA about the support required for specific lessons, additionally another form of communication was an informal discussion after the lesson.

- The LSAs did communicate with the parents on a weekly basis; however, the TAs did not have any contact with parents. They only communicated with the teachers as feedback on the status of the students' work.

The study recommended the following areas that need to be reviewed by the school to facilitate managing the TAs' roles and responsibilities. As previous studies have shown, a clear defined role with stated boundaries is required for the TAs so that they do not assume the pedagogical role but instead support the SEN student to become an independent learner. Appropriate training and effective mentoring of the TA to improve the efficiency of support in relation to the need of the SEN student is required. A clear standard system of communication between the teachers and TAs that aligns with the policies followed by the school requires to be designed. Additionally the parents also need to be informed about the support provided by the TA in lessons.

## **6.2 Further research avenues.**

Studies have shown that TAs can contribute effectively in developing inclusive practices and they have a great role to play; therefore, it is essential to delve into the different aspects of employing TAs to benefit students with SEN. Therefore, the avenues for future research are listed:

To promote inclusive education, there is a need to investigate the policies established in implementing inclusive education; Federal Law 29/2006 would in turn help promote a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the TAs within the regional context. Additionally while conducting the study; it is imperative to examine the practices adopted both by the government and private schools of the region in order to make a generalization.

To study the impact of the TAs in terms of student achievement and social improvement, a focus group study is required that would help compare the efficiency of employing TAs in terms of students with various SEN.

Explore the factors hindering the effectiveness of the TAs in their role in the inclusive education model in various schools following various curricula. The training programs and in-service available in the region for the TAs to help them work effectively needs to be explored.

The viewpoint of the other stakeholders, mainly head teachers, teachers, special educators, parents and students in employing TAs to aid students with SEN requires to be examined. As research has indicated at times the support comes with an additional cost, there arises a need to examine the cost effectiveness moreover and it contradicts the principle of inclusion.

UAE is a nation with a high expat population; therefore, cultural factors have great influence on the inclusive practices in the region, and another factor is that the region has varied curricula; therefore, it is essential that a common framework be developed in the employment of TAs. This would help establish an effective inclusive practice that can be measured and promoted regardless of the diverse needs that may arise.

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