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Self-Efficacy of Teaching Assistants Working with Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

The current research focused on examining the self-efficacy of personal teaching assistants working with students with disabilities who study in regular schools, comparing to the self-efficacy of in-class teaching assistants working in special education classes in regular schools or in the special education system. The sense of self-efficacy was evaluated referring to four criteria: personal efficacy, academic efficacy, social efficacy, and emotional efficacy.

The main goal of the research was to examine whether there are differences in the sense of self-efficacy between these teaching assistants and to understand the nature of the differences. Furthermore, the correlation between the sense of self-efficacy and background variables of the teaching assistants was examined: age, experience, participation in training and the kind of disability of the students they were working with have. The sample included 291 teaching assistants in both elementary schools and high schools; 110 personal teaching assistants to students with disabilities integrated in regular classes, and 181 in-class assistants in special education. The data was collected using a Gibson & Dembo structured questionnaire (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

The results of the research showed that there are significant differences between the two research groups. On all four self-efficacy parameters the personal teaching assistants reported a higher sense of self-efficacy than the in-class teaching assistants. In reference to the type of disability, we found that personal assistants to students with mental and behavioral disabilities reported a higher level of personal sense of self-efficacy as well as a higher level in the personal and emotional domains than those reported by in-class assistants. A similar result was found according to social efficacy in their work with students with sensory and physical disabilities. The results of the research are important both for theory and practice.

This research is preliminary, exposes us to the function of different types of teaching assistants, and presents the needs for developing systemic awareness for focusing and establishing the assistant's role, and for making it essential to involve the assistants in the education work with children with disabilities.

Keywords: self-efficacy, teaching assistant, students with disabilities, personal assistant, class assistant.