

COMPACTING AND FLEXIBLE GROUPING IN LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS'(LSENs) CLASSROOMS: TOWARDS WAYS TO LET STUDENTS “BUY BACK” THE SCHOOL TIME

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ABSTRACT

Special education strategies support Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) in working toward their maximum potential. Among these strategies, curriculum compacting and flexible grouping are considered important differentiation tools. The study aimed to examine parental perceptions and observations of teachers' curriculum compacting and flexible grouping practices for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs). The respondents consisted of 40 parents of LSENs from Manggahan Elementary School. The researcher utilized a descriptive-correlational research design. The statistical tools used were frequency and percentage, weighted mean, Independent Samples t-test, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's HSD post-hoc test, and Pearson correlation coefficient. The findings revealed that the majority of the parent-respondents were between 45 and 49 years old and were predominantly mothers. The results further showed that LSEN teachers were highly capable of addressing behavioral and cognitive manifestations of under-engagement, particularly by preventing student boredom through alternative enrichment activities. The demographic profiles of the respondents significantly influenced their perceptions and assessments of teachers' curriculum compacting practices. The findings also showed that LSEN teachers demonstrated strengths in core differentiation within groups and valued post-instructional student reflection. Significant differences were found in the parent-respondents' assessments of LSEN teachers' flexible grouping practices when grouped according to their profiles. Furthermore, no significant relationship was found between LSEN teachers' practices in curriculum compacting and flexible grouping. The findings highlight the need for LSEN teachers to transition from teacher-centered lesson planning toward the explicit co-construction of visible learning goals and from teacher-led group assignments toward a structured choice model that promotes greater student agency and differentiated learning.

Keywords: *Curriculum compacting, Flexible grouping, Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs), Differentiated instruction, Buy back school time*

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INTRODUCTION

Learners with Special Educational Needs require instructional approaches that recognize differences in abilities, learning styles, readiness, interests, and individual educational needs. Creating an inclusive and positive learning environment therefore requires educators to modify curricula and organize instruction in

ways that provide appropriate opportunities for every learner. The study identifies curriculum compacting and flexible grouping as two differentiated instructional approaches that can be used to address these diverse learning needs.

Curriculum compacting enables teachers to modify or eliminate material that learners have already mastered and replace it with more challenging and productive learning experiences. It can maximize instructional time while respecting learners' prior knowledge and providing opportunities for enrichment and acceleration. While curriculum compacting was originally conceptualized by Reis et al. (1992) as an instructional acceleration model for gifted and high-achieving students, contemporary inclusive frameworks adapt compacting principles for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs). In special education, compacting functions as an individualized efficiency tool: it identifies discrete micro-competencies or prerequisite skills that a learner has already attained, eliminates unnecessary and frustrating repetition, and reallocates instructional time ('buying back school time') toward targeted intervention, functional life skills, or multi-modal enrichment.

Flexible grouping, on the other hand, organizes students in changing configurations according to their needs, readiness, abilities, and interests rather than maintaining static group assignments.

Together, these practices support differentiated instruction and can provide LSENs with meaningful and relevant learning tasks. The study therefore investigated parents' perceptions of teachers' implementation of curriculum compacting and flexible grouping and used the findings as a basis for proposing ways through which students may "buy back" school time.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS

The study investigated the practices of curriculum compacting and flexible grouping in classrooms for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) by addressing several key research objectives. Specifically, it sought to determine the demographic profile of the parent-respondents—including age, sex, and family role—and to examine their assessment of LSEN teachers' practices regarding both curriculum compacting and flexible grouping.

The research also analyzed whether significant differences existed in these assessments when the respondents were grouped according to their profile variables. Furthermore, the study investigated whether a significant relationship exists between the teachers' implementation of curriculum compacting and their use of flexible grouping. Ultimately, the findings were intended to serve as a foundation for proposing effective strategies to help LSENs "buy back" valuable school time.

OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to determine the curriculum compacting and flexible grouping practices in classrooms for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) as a basis for proposing ways to let students "buy back" school time.

Specifically, it aimed to describe the profile of the parent-respondents in terms of age, sex, and role in the family; determine the parents' assessment of LSEN teachers' practices in curriculum compacting and flexible grouping; determine whether significant differences exist in the assessment of curriculum compacting and

flexible grouping when respondents are grouped according to their profiles; determine whether a significant relationship exists between curriculum compacting and flexible grouping; and use the findings as a basis for proposing ways to let students “buy back” school time.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to describe the profile of the parent-respondents and their assessments of LSEN teachers’ curriculum compacting and flexible grouping practices. The correlational component was utilized to determine whether a significant relationship existed between the two instructional practices.

The respondents consisted of 40 parents of LSENs from Manggahan Elementary School, General Trias, Cavite. Purposive sampling was employed because the participants were specifically parents of Learners with Special Educational Needs. Data were collected using a researcher-developed survey questionnaire based on relevant literature and studies. The instrument underwent expert validation and revision based on the recommendations of professors and the research panel.

The survey instrument utilized a four-point Likert scale. The survey captures home-school observations (e.g., individualized homework, student feedback, pacing adjustments communicated to parents, and enrichment activities) rather than direct classroom clinical observation. Frequency count and percentage were employed to analyze the demographic profile of the respondents, while weighted mean was used to assess the degree of LSEN teachers’ practices in curriculum compacting and flexible grouping. To determine significant differences in the respondents’ assessments across profile variables, an Independent Samples t-test was utilized for two-category variables (Sex: Male vs. Female), and a One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Tukey’s HSD post-hoc test was applied for variables with three or more categories (Age and Family Role). Finally, Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine whether a significant relationship exists between curriculum compacting and flexible grouping practices.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

The findings revealed that the majority of the 40 parent-respondents were between 45 and 49 years old, predominantly female, and mostly direct parents of the learners. The parent-respondents assessed LSEN teachers’ curriculum compacting practices with a composite mean of 3.40, interpreted as Somewhat Compacting. Teachers demonstrated particular strength in addressing student boredom through alternative enrichment and replacement activities; however, lower ratings were observed in identifying learning goals and outcomes and conducting pre-assessments for mastery. Significant differences were found in the respondents’ assessments of curriculum compacting when grouped according to age, sex, and family role.

For flexible grouping, the parent-respondents reported a composite mean of 3.37, interpreted as Somewhat Flexible. LSEN teachers demonstrated strengths in differentiating instruction within groups and promoting student reflection and feedback, while student agency and intentional use of temporary and fluid groupings received comparatively lower ratings. Significant differences were also found in the respondents’ assessments of flexible grouping when grouped according to age, sex, and family role. Furthermore, the analysis revealed no significant relationship between curriculum compacting and flexible grouping ($r = 0.003$, $p = .746$), indicating that the two strategies operate independently in LSEN classrooms. Overall, the findings suggest the need to

strengthen pre-assessment, explicit learning goals, student agency, and more dynamic grouping practices to maximize instructional time and provide meaningful differentiated learning experiences for LSENs.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that LSEN teachers demonstrate established but moderate implementation of both curriculum compacting and flexible grouping. Teachers show particular strength in addressing learner boredom through enrichment and replacement activities. However, greater consistency is needed in the foundational components of curriculum compacting, particularly pre-assessment and explicit identification of learning objectives.

In flexible grouping, teachers demonstrate strengths in differentiation and student reflection, but opportunities remain to strengthen student agency and ensure that grouping arrangements are temporary, responsive, and fluid. The significant differences according to age, sex, and family role further indicate that parents and caregivers perceive these instructional practices differently according to their demographic characteristics.

Finally, the absence of a significant relationship between curriculum compacting and flexible grouping indicates that the two strategies function independently. Therefore, effective implementation of one does not necessarily predict effective implementation of the other. The manuscript concludes that professional development should address the two strategies as distinct instructional competencies, with separate training and evaluation approaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the learning experience for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs). To begin, educators should strengthen the identification of learning goals by utilizing visible, learner-friendly tools like “Can-Do” statements and SMART objective boards that respond to diverse communication and learning needs.

It is also crucial to improve diagnostic pre-assessment practices so that teachers can accurately identify previously mastered competencies and determine which content should be compacted, modified, or replaced. Consequently, providing meaningful replacement and enrichment activities for learners who have already mastered specific competencies will help reduce boredom, sustain engagement, and maximize productive instructional time.

Furthermore, schools must strengthen student agency in flexible grouping by offering structured opportunities for learners to select appropriate materials, activities, or partners through tools such as choice boards and menu-based activities. This flexible grouping should be made more dynamic and responsive by regularly monitoring learner performance and allowing students to transition between groups based on their changing readiness, interests, learning profiles, and instructional needs. Because the findings indicate that curriculum compacting and flexible grouping operate independently and require distinct instructional competencies, separate professional development opportunities should be provided for each practice.

Finally, the study recommends adopting and implementing the proposed “Ways to Let Students ‘Buy

Back' the School Time.” These strategies serve as a practical guide for teachers and administrators to maximize instructional time, eliminate the unnecessary repetition of mastered content, provide meaningful enrichment, and create flexible learning arrangements that are highly responsive to the individual needs of LSENs.

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