An investigation of the role of teacher aides in primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand

by

Rafia Kalsum

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in Education

Unitec Institute of Technology

2014
Declaration
Abstract

The aim of this research is to interpret, from multiple perspectives, the role of the teacher aide in New Zealand primary schools. It is based on the rationale that the role of teacher aides in primary schools around the world has become increasingly complex. Over the years this role has changed from largely clerical duties to primarily instructional roles. Today teacher aides are supporting students in their learning as well as aiding the class teachers. Research and literature on teacher aides in education is currently limited which has left the role of teacher aides largely unaccounted for.

The methods used in this qualitative research involved both questionnaires and interviews. This included 14 interviews with three teachers, three teacher aides and a teacher aides’ supervisor from two primary schools, and 35 completed questionnaires from three teachers, three teacher aides and a teacher aides’ supervisor from five primary schools. In total seven Auckland primary schools participated in this study. The results of this study have revealed that teacher aides are playing multiple roles in primary schools and they require professional development including better pre-service and in-service job training, clearer instructions from teachers and more opportunities for staff members to communicate. Through this research it has been suggested that teacher aides can play their role effectively if they are given clear tasks, are involved in planning students’ learning, and if their practice is monitored and regular constructive feedback is provided.

This research highlights the need for the Ministry of Education and other educational stake holders in New Zealand to acknowledge the contribution of teacher aides as agents of transformation in the learning and experiences of young people, and to provide teacher aides with sufficient support. Also, an adequate teacher aide system is needed for effectively guiding the teachers and teacher aides for their roles in New Zealand primary schools.
**Key Words:** Teacher aides, roles, responsibilities, primary school, learning difficulties, training, professional development, challenges, communication, relationship.
Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks must be extended to a number of people who have helped me throughout the duration of my thesis.

Firstly, to my supervisor Dr. Beverley Clark who is simply outstanding. I was privileged to have her as my strength. I really appreciated how she allowed me to write this research as an individual yet guided me all the way. I highly value her experience and enthusiasm.

I am grateful to all the schools that participated and allowed me to conduct my research during the busy period. Thanks to the Learning Centre staff who encouraged and helped me to proof read my work, especially Cindy, Caroline and Catherine. Thanks are also due to Dr. Shazia Naureen, for her valuable comments and expert guidance. I also do not want to forget my best friend Sabrina. Thank you, Sabrina for listening to my thesis stories.

Last but not least, to my family who have provided me with endless encouragement and love. A special thanks to my Dad, who has supported me in the fragile moments and read me his favourite verses to encourage and inspire me to put me back on track.

I am sharing one of his favourite verses:

Tundi-e- Baad-E-Mukhalif se naghabra, ae Uqaab;

Yeh to chalti hai tujhe uncha udane keliye

(Hussain, 1918)

Translation

“You don’t get frightened of these furious, violent winds, Oh Eagle!

These blow only to make you fly higher.”
Table of Contents

Declaration ........................................................................................................... ii
Abstract ............................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................... v
Table of Contents .............................................................................................. vii
List of Tables ....................................................................................................... xiii
List of Figures ..................................................................................................... xiii
List of Abbreviations ......................................................................................... xv
1 Chapter One ..................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 1
  1.2 Background .................................................................................................. 2
  1.3 Rationale ..................................................................................................... 3
  1.4 Research Aims ............................................................................................... 5
  1.5 Research Questions ....................................................................................... 5
  1.6 Overview of thesis ......................................................................................... 6

2 Chapter Two ................................................................................................... 7
Literature Review ................................................................................................. 7
  2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 7
  2.2 General Effectiveness and Roles of Teacher Aides ..................................... 7
  2.3 Historical progression of the position of the teacher aide ......................... 12
      2.3.1 United States of America ..................................................................... 12
      2.3.2 United Kingdom .................................................................................. 13
      2.3.3 Aotearoa New Zealand ........................................................................ 15
2.4 Different Titles of Teacher Aides ................................................................. 17
2.5 Teacher Aides’ Salary ............................................................................... 17
2.6 Training and qualification of TAs ................................................................. 18
2.7 Andragogy: An adult teaching theory ......................................................... 21
2.8 Relationship between teachers and teacher aides ....................................... 22
2.9 Challenges faced by TAs during their Job ................................................. 25
2.10 Social Capital Theory ............................................................................... 29
2.11 Summary .................................................................................................. 30

3 Chapter Three ............................................................................................... 31
Methodology ...................................................................................................... 31

3.1 Introduction ................................................................................................... 31
3.2 Research Overview ...................................................................................... 31
3.3 Research paradigms ..................................................................................... 33
3.4 Rationale ....................................................................................................... 34
3.5 Sample Selection .......................................................................................... 36
  3.5.1 Open-ended questionnaire sample......................................................... 37
  3.5.2 Semi-structured interview sample ........................................................ 37
3.6 Research Methods ......................................................................................... 38
  3.6.1 Open-ended questionnaire .................................................................... 38
  3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews .................................................................. 40
3.7 Data Analysis ................................................................................................. 42
3.8 Validity .......................................................................................................... 44
3.9 Reliability ............................................................................................................ 45

3.10 Ethical Considerations ........................................................................................ 46

3.11 Summary ............................................................................................................... 47

4 CHAPTER FOUR ..................................................................................................... 47
Data Results and Findings ......................................................................................... 47

4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 47

4.2 Part 1: Section 1 .................................................................................................. 49

Results of teacher aides’ questionnaires .................................................................. 49

4.2.1 Training and qualification of teacher aides ..................................................... 49
4.2.2 Roles and responsibilities of TAs ................................................................... 51
4.2.3 Difficulties of the TAs job ............................................................................. 53
4.2.4 Relationships between teachers and TAs ..................................................... 54
4.2.5 Feedback to improve the TA system ........................................................... 55

4.3 Part 1: Section 2 .................................................................................................. 55

Results of teachers’ questionnaires .......................................................................... 55

4.3.1 Training of teachers, regarding TAs ............................................................. 57
4.3.2 Roles of TAs from teachers’ perspective ....................................................... 58
4.3.3 Training and qualification of TAs: Teachers perspective ............................... 61
4.3.4 Teachers Working Relationship with TAs .................................................... 61
4.3.5 Improvement of the TA system ..................................................................... 62

4.4 Part 1: Section 3 .................................................................................................. 62

Results of TAs supervisors’ questionnaires ................................................................. 62

4.4.1 Roles and responsibilities of TAs from TAs supervisors’ perspective ....... 63
4.4.2 Training and qualification of TAs ................................................................. 63
4.4.3 Relationship of TAs with class teachers: TAs supervisors’ perspective 64
4.4.4 Suggestions to improve the TAs system ...................................................... 65

4.5 Part 2: Section 1 ................................................................................................. 66
Results of teacher aides’ interviews .......................................................... 66

4.5.1 Training of TAs ....................................................................................... 66
4.5.2 Roles and Responsibilities of TAs .......................................................... 66
4.5.3 TAs: Satisfying aspects of the job.......................................................... 68
4.5.4 TAs: Frustrating aspects of the job ......................................................... 68
4.5.5 Changes in the role over the years .......................................................... 69
4.5.6 Relationship with the class teachers ....................................................... 69
4.5.7 Improving TA system in New Zealand ..................................................... 70
4.5.8 TAs advice to the future TAs ................................................................. 70
4.5.9 TAs advice to future teachers ............................................................... 71

4.6 Part 2: Section 2 ......................................................................................... 71

Results of teacher interviews ......................................................................... 71

4.6.1 Number of children in classes who require help from TAs ....................... 71
4.6.2 Training given to teachers regarding TAs ................................................. 72
4.6.3 Training and qualification for TAs ............................................................ 73
4.6.4 Instructions to TAs: a difficult phase ....................................................... 73
4.6.5 Determining the responsibilities for TAs ................................................ 74
4.6.6 Change of role for Teachers .................................................................... 74
4.6.7 Anxiety while working with TAs .............................................................. 75
4.6.8 Satisfying aspects of TAs ....................................................................... 75
4.6.9 Advice to future teachers ......................................................................... 76

4.7 Part 2: Section 3 ........................................................................................ 76

4.8 Part 3: Main themes .................................................................................... 78

4.8.1 Training and qualifications ..................................................................... 78
4.8.2 Relationship between teachers and TAs ................................................ 79
4.8.3 Roles and responsibilities ...................................................................... 80

5 Chapter Five ................................................................................................ 82

Discussion of the Findings ............................................................................. 82

5.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 82

5.2 Interpretation of TAs role ......................................................................... 82

5.3 Relevance of job description ................................................................... 84

5.4 Challenges faced by TAs during their job ................................................ 85

x
5.4.1 Lack of training for both teachers and TAs ........................................... 86
5.4.2 Limited involvement of TAs in planning and collaboration .................. 89
5.4.3 Lack of time for communication ............................................................. 90
5.4.4 Relationship between TAs and teachers .............................................. 91

6 Chapter Six ................................................................................................. 94
Conclusions and Recommendations .............................................................. 94

6.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 94

6.2 Conclusions .............................................................................................. 94

6.3 Recommendations .................................................................................... 97

6.3.1 Recommendation 1: Training for both Teachers and TAs ................. 97
6.3.2 Recommendation 2: Opportunities for ‘communication’ between teachers and TAs ................................................................. 98
6.3.3 Recommendation 3: Including TAs in planning students learning ...... 99
6.3.4 Recommendation 4: Monitoring the system ........................................ 99

6.4 Further Research ...................................................................................... 100

6.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Research ............................................. 100

6.5.1 The Strengths of the research ................................................................. 100
6.5.2 The Limitations of the Research ............................................................. 101

6.6 Concluding statement .............................................................................. 101

References .................................................................................................. 104
Appendices .................................................................................................... 120

Appendix 1 Interview guide: Teachers ......................................................... 120

Appendix 2 Interview Guide: Teacher aides ................................................ 121

Appendix 3 Interview Guide: TAs supervisors ............................................. 122

Appendix 4 Teacher Aides’ (TAs) Questionnaires ..................................... 122

Appendix 5 Teacher’s Questionnaires ......................................................... 128
List of Tables

Table 1: Responsibilities of TAs in two primary schools...........................................67
Table 2: Role of a TA from teachers’ perspective .........................................................72
Table 3: Interviews of TAs Supervisors from two different schools ............................77

List of Figures

Figure 1: Relationship between Methodology, Epistemology and Ontology ..........33
Figure 2: Outline of the data results and findings ......................................................48
Figure 3: Qualification of TAs from five different primary schools .........................49
Figure 4: Number of TAs working in each school ......................................................50
Figure 5: Number of roles explained to TAs in different Schools .............................52
Figure 6: TAs level of satisfaction with their job .........................................................54
Figure 7: Number of teachers working in different schools ......................................56
Figure 8: Number of students requiring extra help from the TAs in a classroom ......57
Figure 9: Roles and responsibilities of TAs explained to class teachers ...................59
Figure 10: TAs helping teachers in their responsibilities in different schools ..........60
Figure 11: Teachers’ response regarding TAs helping students in their learning .....60
Figure 12: Importance of TAs qualification in their jobs ............................................63
Figure 13: Importance of job training for TAs ..............................................................64
Figure 14: TAs helping students in their learnings ........................................... 65

Figure 15: Suggestions to improve the TAs system ............................................ 65

Figure 16: Students requiring extra support form TAs in two schools ................. 71
List of Abbreviations

Kaiawhina ......................................... Teacher aide in Maori
SENCO ........................................... Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEN ............................................... Special educational needs
ESOL .............................................. English for Speakers for Other Languages
TA/TAs ............................................. Teacher Aide/Teacher Aides
PD .................................................. Professional Development
UREC ............................................. Unitec Research Ethics Committee

QS1TA1 .............................................. Questionnaire School 1 Teacher Aide 1
QS1TA2 .............................................. Questionnaire School 1 Teacher Aide 2
QS1TA3 .............................................. Questionnaire School 1 Teacher Aide 3

QS2TA1 .............................................. Questionnaire School 2 Teacher Aide 1
QS2TA2 .............................................. Questionnaire School 2 Teacher Aide 2
QS2TA3 .............................................. Questionnaire School 2 Teacher Aide 3

QS3TA1 .............................................. Questionnaire School 3 Teacher Aide 1
QS3TA2 .............................................. Questionnaire School 3 Teacher Aide 2
QS3TA3 .............................................. Questionnaire School 3 Teacher Aide 3

QS4TA1 .............................................. Questionnaire School 4 Teacher Aide 1
QS4TA2 .............................................. Questionnaire School 4 Teacher Aide 2
QS4TA3 .............................................. Questionnaire School 4 Teacher Aide 3

QS5TA1 .............................................. Questionnaire School 5 Teacher Aide 1
QS5TA2 .............................................. Questionnaire School 5 Teacher Aide 2
QS5TA3 .............................................. Questionnaire School 5 Teacher Aide 3

QS1T1 ................................................ Questionnaire School 1 Teacher 1
QS1T2 ................................................ Questionnaire School 1 Teacher 2
QS1T3 ................................................ Questionnaire School 1 Teacher 3

QS2T1 ................................................ Questionnaire School 2 Teacher 1
QS2T2 ................................................ Questionnaire School 2 Teacher 2
QS2T3 ................................................ Questionnaire School 2 Teacher 3

QS3T1 ................................................ Questionnaire School 3 Teacher 1
QS3T2 ................................................ Questionnaire School 3 Teacher 2
QS3T3 ................................................ Questionnaire School 3 Teacher 3

QS4T1 ................................................ Questionnaire School 4 Teacher 1
QS4T2.................................Questionnaire School 4 Teacher 2
QS4T3.................................Questionnaire School 4 Teacher 3

QS5T1.................................Questionnaire School 5 Teacher 1
QS5T2.................................Questionnaire School 5 Teacher 2
QS5T3.................................Questionnaire School 5 Teacher 3

IS1TA1.................................Interview School 1 Teacher Aide 1
IS1TA2.................................Interview School 1 Teacher Aide 2
IS1TA3.................................Interview School 1 Teacher Aide 3

IS2TA1.................................Interview School 2 Teacher Aide 1
IS2TA2.................................Interview School 2 Teacher Aide 2
IS2TA3.................................Interview School 2 Teacher Aide 3

IS1T1.................................Interview School 1 Teacher 1
IS1T2.................................Interview School 1 Teacher 2
IS1T3.................................Interview School 1 Teacher 3

IS2T1.................................Interview School 2 Teacher 1
IS2T2.................................Interview School 2 Teacher 2
IS2T3.................................Interview School 2 Teacher 3
1 Chapter One

*He aha temeanui o teao?  
He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!  
What is the most important thing in the world?  
It is people! It is people! It is people!*

*(Maori proverb)*

1.1 Introduction

In today’s schools, teacher aides (TAs) are a substantial part of the education workforce (Woodward & Peart, 2005). As in the proverb above, these people are extremely important. They play a vital and dynamic role in providing educational opportunities to students and in supporting the effectiveness of schools. As schools around the world try to look for new ways to structure and provide services, the role of the TAs continues to expand (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Project PARA: Paraeducator selfstudy program, 2009; Watkinson, 2003). The main characteristic of the teacher aide workforce is substantial diversity, not only of their titles and linked responsibilities, but also of prior experience, formal qualifications, pre-service and in-service training options, methods of working and skills for carrying out support work (The Open University, 2014). In addition to qualified teachers, many paid and volunteer teacher aides are offering their time and skills to students’ learning. According to Brighton (1972) one of the most significant advances in education could arise if teacher aides are utilized in the classroom with planning and effectiveness. This aspiration, it seems, is yet to be realised fully.

Teacher aides support students’ learning at school. They support teachers in a classroom by working with students either on a one-to-one basis, or in groups (Careers NZ, 2013). The effective use of teacher aides started in western countries when the philosophy of inclusive education became prevalent and based on the assumption that every child has the right to be educated in the school of their district, and should be given the same educational prospects as every other child of
their age, (Angelides, Constantinou, & Leigh, 2009). In order to implement this right to education, schools began to be organised in such a way as to offer chances for teaching and learning for all children. However, to achieve this, more teachers were required which was a costly method. Thus to reduce the cost effects of additional teaching personnel, teacher aides were used for supporting children categorised as having special needs (Rutherford, 2012). Since the realisation of the Education Act, 1989, more teacher aides/kaiawhina have been appointed by boards of trustees in New Zealand, as members of school staff (Ministry of Education, 2002a).

1.2 Background

In June, 2012, I enrolled in a Postgraduate Diploma in Education at Unitec. I have a Science degree as my bachelor’s degree and I struggled through the first semester of Education. To improve my knowledge of the education system in New Zealand I volunteered as a teacher aide in a primary school. My primary purpose was to improve my understanding of the education context and therefore improve my assignment grades. However, once I began to attend the school my thinking changed and I realised that this experience was significant for me personally as well as for my studies. By early 2013, I realized that the TA system is lacking in some aspects which are causing less than optimal consequences for TAs, students and on the educational involvement of students with whom they work. Key issues I identified were: a lack of communication between teachers and teacher aides; TAs were asked to perform roles they had not been trained for; and teachers were unsure of how to manage TAs and frequently asked the TAs what they wanted to do.

During my experience as a TA I became concerned about the experience of the TAs in working within the school system, and also about their contribution to students’ learning. In my view, teacher aides are often overloaded with the range of different responsibilities within the present educational system: they assist with the purpose of enhancing education for students with various learning needs, yet they have little or no training and are unaware of their roles, responsibilities and rights. They appear to
have little (or no) recognition by educational decision-makers for the potential they have as an influential and important force for educational support and social transformation.

1.3 Rationale

The Ministry of Education (Mitchell, 2010) has described three different groups of students who require assistants from TAs. Those groups are students with disabilities, students with difficulties and students with disadvantages.

Students with disabilities are viewed in medical terms as having “organic disorders attributable to organic pathologies; their educational need is considered to arise primarily from problems attributable to these disabilities” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 29). This group is also referred as Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Students with difficulties are those who have behavioural, emotional or learning disorders. These difficulties are believed to arise from interactions between the student and the educational context. Socio-economic, cultural, and/or linguistic are factors which contribute to the group of students with disadvantages. Given the specialised role of the TA supporting students with disabilities, and the fact that numbers of studies (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Beth Doyle, 2001) have focused on the role of the TA supporting students with disabilities, this group is not the focus of this study. Rather, this research examines the role of TAs who work with students with disadvantages and difficulties, which has been currently under researched. This study also does not include early childhood, secondary or post-school sectors as these fall outside the scope of this research of ‘an investigation of the role of teacher aides in primary schools in New Zealand’.

New Zealand is one of the countries where both the extent of cultural diversity and the percentage of overseas-born people are swiftly growing (C. Ward, 2008). A report from the Ministry of Education (2013a) has revealed that there are over
120,000 students in New Zealand’s schools from a migrant/refugee background. These students are from 156 different ethnic groups and speak 116 different languages. Out of these, currently 31,378 are English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) funded students who speak little or no English. Related to this is that classrooms have students with an extensive range of learning needs, apart from Special Educational Needs (SEN). To provide additional learning support to these students, Teacher Aides (TAs) are appointed in schools.

In New Zealand, teacher aides are used for diverse educational purposes. For example, TAs might carry out learning activities with a student, manage a student’s behaviour, and work with an individual or groups of students to enhance students’ learning and social skills, and help class teachers to finish their duties (Ministry of Education, 2013b). However, I argue that a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities, problematic employment conditions, and a lack of required pre-service and in-service training have had some less than optimal consequences for TAs, students and on the educational involvement of students with whom they work.

Surprisingly, over the years the role of teacher aides has changed from largely clerical duties to primarily instructional roles (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001). However, working conditions of teacher aides are still very similar to many years ago. Many researchers have emphasised that in general these individuals have little or no formal training or experience in working with students with learning difficulties. Also, they receive limited directions for their work, have incomplete job descriptions, rarely receive feedback regarding their performance, have little or no involvement in program planning activities for the students they help, and usually have insufficient career structures (Blalock, 1991; Carr, Allison, & Tierney, 2002; Doyle, 1998; Jones & Bender, 1993; McKenzie & Houk, 1986; Parsons & Reid, 1999; Rutherford, 2011). Researchers and educators over the years have highlighted the importance of TAs and have proposed methods to enhance the TAs’ programs. Rutherford (2011) puts this well in the following statement; “teacher aides and others involved in their work, have consistently identified the need for a relevant certification, thorough induction,
ongoing professional development, and the development of a career structure"(p. 97) yet nothing much has changed for teacher aides.

Therefore, through this study I want to highlight the work that TAs do with the ultimate aim of ensuring that their input is maximised, that their work is recognised and that better support and resources are provided to them. As a researcher I also want to provoke the idea, to educators particularly, that TAs can significantly enhance students’ learning if TAs are provided with essential and specific training, support as well as options for acquiring qualifications.

1.4 Research Aims

1. To investigate the role of teacher aides in primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How do teacher aides interpret their role?

2. What are the challenges that face teacher aides?

3. How relevant is the teacher aide’s job description to their work?

4. What conditions would be conducive to develop effective working relationships between teachers and teacher aides?
1.6 Overview of thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters as follows:

Chapter one briefly outlines the research background, the rationale and research aims and questions. The chapter also presents a thesis outline.

Chapter two critically reviews a wide range of literature with regards to the role of teacher aides in primary school classrooms. The main themes related to teacher aides are discussed with reference to both New Zealand and overseas studies.

Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the research methodology, the rationale for the selection of the research methodology and the sample selection. It also defines the research methods used for data gathering and discusses the data analysis. Finally, the validity and reliability of results are examined.

Chapter four provides the results of the qualitative study gathered from interviews and questionnaires with teachers, teacher aides and teacher aides' supervisors. The data results and findings are organised according to the themes identified.

Chapter five discusses the major themes which emerged from the findings and relates these with reference to the literature reviewed in chapter two.

Chapter six focuses on the implications and limitations of this study. It also suggests recommendations for future study along with some reflective thoughts.
2 Chapter Two

Literature Review

“One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.”

Carl Jung

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature and explores research findings related to issues of teacher aides’ roles in primary schools. Research indicates that teacher aides are taking up various roles in schools around the world. Their roles revolve around students’ learning, helping class teachers, as well as looking after school property. This chapter begins with the introduction of the role of teacher aides and the historical development of teacher aides’ roles around the world. It then discusses the different titles of TAs, TAs’ salary, training and qualification, andragogy, relationship between teachers and teacher aides, challenges faced by TAs during their job; and social capital theory.

2.2 General Effectiveness and Roles of Teacher Aides

Teachers are not the only adults in today’s primary school classes around the world, in fact there is a whole team of workers delivering the curriculum and evaluating students’ learning. Primary schools are employing a number of support workers who have direct engagement with children’s teaching and learning (Kay, 2005). A number of researchers (Blatchford et al., 2006; Department for Education and Employment, 2000; Thomas, Cremin, & Vincett, 2005; Webster et al., 2011) have highlighted that
over the last few years there has been a remarkable increase in the number of people who work in supporting student’s learning in classrooms and other educational settings around the world. These include nursery nurses, learning mentors, learning support staff and teacher aides (Watkinson, 2003). The term teacher aides (TAs), is assigned to those who help teachers carry out the educational goal of the school and who make the educational experiences of students more worthwhile. The Alberta Teachers' Association (2012) argues that some TAs are highly qualified professionals who offer dedicated assistance, others have non-professional college certificates, yet some have no post-secondary qualifications at all. Despite their qualification levels, these TAs bring many useful skills with them such as health care/nursing skills, reading, writing, numeracy skills, bilingual skills, good communication, flexibility, creativity and parenting skills (Tes connect, 2012; Watkinson, 2007). Some of these TAs are paid for their work yet others are unpaid and work as volunteers. Often, community members who wish to have a career in education volunteer in schools to gain some experience before applying for a job. Volunteers include parents, grandparents and other community members (Watkinson, 2007).

Teacher Aides are fulfilling different students’ needs including those students who have special needs. A student has special educational needs “if he or she has a learning difficulty which may be a result of a physical or sensory disability, an emotional or behavioural problem or developmental delay” (Fox, 2003, p. 1). Teacher aides who support these students usually have a qualification, training and/or enough experience in special education to support those children (Doyle, 1997). However, recently the levels of language and cultural diversity in schools in western countries (Lovin, Kyger, & Allsopp, 2004) including in New Zealand (Edwards, 2014; Statistics New Zealand, 2006), have increased. The reason behind this is the growing number of immigrants all around the world particularly English speaking countries. Therefore many schools have students with English as their second language. In 2009, more than half of all new-born babies in New Zealand were of Maori/Pacific, Asian or mixed heritage (Callister & Bromell, 2011). Due to this increase in language diversity, classrooms, apart from SEN, have students with
an extensive range of learning needs. For example, these may include language based learning problems, attention problems, weak reading skills which interfere with students learning in all areas, and difficulty with mathematics (Lovin et al., 2004). Thus it is evident that a classroom teacher alone cannot deal effectively with all the diversity in New Zealand’s classrooms. Adults from within the communities are needed to support those with English as an additional language in the classroom (New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, 2010). French (2003) also argues that the complexity of the student body in schools today is much greater compared to the 1970s and 1980s. Watkinson (2003) highlights that when directed and guided to do so TAs can contribute significantly to the academic achievement of the students who have restricted English proficiency. Moreover, bilingual TAs not only support teachers to help understand students’ academic problems but they also serve as translators for families.

Furthermore, socioeconomic situations have added diversity to the schools. Children from financially disadvantaged families go to schools with fewer benefits and are at risk of academic failure. Poverty is a major factor in placing students at risk for educational failure (Leroy & Symes, 2001). This poverty is an issue in many New Zealand schools, as about 270,000 children are living in poverty (Children’s commissioner’s expert advisory group on solutions to child poverty, 2012). Leroy and Symes (2001) explain that warm and caring relationships need to be developed between teachers and students in order to enhance students’ learning. They further argue that a good relationship between teacher and students will enable teachers to detect any warning signs that may place students at-risk for failure, interfering with their chances for success in school and life. However, due to a large number of students in classrooms, teachers are unable to keep an eye on every student. Thus, schools with a large number of students living in poverty often need TAs to support those students. TAs can inform teachers if they detect any warning sign in students’ regular learning pattern. Lopez, Esquivel, Nahari, and Proctor (2012) point out that it is often noticed that TAs are from the same cultural and linguistic heritage as the students served by the schools. In addition they believe that having TAs from the
same background as students is an important source of cultural knowledge and they can serve as a cultural broker.

Teacher aides play connecting roles through their associations with students, peers, teachers, families and the broader school community. They act as interpreters, mediators and even sometimes as advocates. They use their knowledge of students and relationships with them to support their academic achievement and social interaction (Rutherford, 2012). A blog written about TAs emphasises that TAs contribute greatly to a community and they not only work to empower the future of the students they work with, but they also care for the school, neighbourhoods, and families. TAs influence the lives of students, families, and are a critical part of the teaching strategies, as they spend time with the schools they become a source of inspiration, role-modelling and community activism (ParaEducator Training, 2014).

Parents have commented that TAs know their children better than the classroom teachers and are their primary source of information regarding their children’s day to day progress in school (French, 2003).

Teacher aides are hired to work with a wide range of students. They work in early years settings, in primary and secondary classrooms, and in the broader school environment, such as the playground (Watkinson, 2003). TAs may work directly with individual students or with small groups to deliver curriculum that emphasises and advances the educational program. They also give suggestions and recommendations to teachers. For example, they may assess how well students are functioning, and observe and document behaviours as students contribute in learning activities. Together with teachers, TAs enhance the curriculum by helping students learn the knowledge and skills they need to function in the classroom, the school and the community (The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2012). A report on TAs roles and responsibilities (The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2012) explains that there is no precise list of the duties that TAs are anticipated to carry out. Their duties are assigned to them by factors such as their qualifications, the needs of the students and the tasks required by the teacher.
The issue of large class size is another reason to hire more TAs in schools. Many researchers have shown that the class size influences students’ learning (Blatchford, 2003; Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, & Martin, 2007; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 2000). Larger class size not only decreases students’ achievement ratio but also increases teachers’ stress levels. Due to the lack of funding in many schools around the world, schools have failed to cut class sizes (French, 2003). Cutting the class sizes would not only mean that districts have to employ more teachers but also have to provide them with their own classrooms with full resources. However, TAs are practical alternatives, they can efficiently help to reduce the ratio of students to adults if hired in instructional roles, appropriately directed and trained to accomplish their responsibilities (French, 2003). Conversely, Hattie (2009) believes otherwise, his book *Visible Learnings* gives class size a small effect size on student achievement, and he considers that class size is not important for students’ learning achievement. However, PPTA: New Zealand post primary teachers’ association / Te wehengarua (2014) argues that reducing class size allows the teacher and students to do things differently, leading to the success in the educational lives of students.

The swift changes and increased ramification of today’s world brings new challenges and puts new demands on our education system (Bar-Yam, Rhoades, Sweeney, Kaput, & Bar-Yam, 2002). The emphasis on high academic standards for every student, and the attention on testing to determine achievement of standards, have led to an increased need for caring instructional support for students. French (2003) indicates that the increased need for human contact is vital to the change toward increased instructional roles for TAs and is consistent through programs. When the student population was less complex, and when there were fewer academic demands to be met, TAs assumed mainly clerical roles. However, today the TAs role has changed to include significantly greater responsibility for instructions.
2.3 Historical progression of the position of the teacher aide

2.3.1 United States of America

According to Page (2001) TAs were introduced to American public schools around the 1950s. She further explains that at that time there was a shortage of qualified teachers, funding was low and class sizes were large. Class teachers needed more time to give instructions to the students. Therefore, to fulfil the clerical duties and routine housekeeping chores, TAs were employed. They were on low wages and performed non-instructional tasks. In 1964 inclusive education was introduced to public schools and therefore a different dimension to the roles of the teachers and the TAs were introduced. It was very difficult for class teachers to cope with all the students therefore they willingly invited TAs to share their instructional roles with them. Moreover, along with the clerical and housekeeping duties TAs played a part in instruction too. Thus from the 1970s to 1980s the role of the assistant for instructional purposes became indispensable and the number of TAs increased (French & Chopra, 1999; Hill, 2003).

Although the evidence from international research (Broer et al., 2005; Ministry of Education, 2011a; Thomas et al., 2005) shows that adequate training and appropriate feedback is needed for new roles of TAs, very little attention is paid to it (Page, 2001). In most schools the training of a TA was left to a class teacher, who had no time or knowledge of how to train TAs. Major problems identified by Giangreco et al. (2001) in the United States regarding the use of TAs in the integrated model of education include:

- Teacher aides being used without appropriate pre-service and in-service training in instructional roles with students with very complex needs;
- Teachers paying less attention to students who are assigned to TAs; and
- Uncertainty as to whether the primary role of the TAs is to help the teacher or the students.
Although for the past decade a lot of effort has been put into the TA system in the United States, issues listed above need to be addressed strategically in order to improve the current TA system.

2.3.2 United Kingdom

The use of TAs in United Kingdom schools has been stated to be as early as the Plowden report 1967 (Kerry, 2005). The number of TAs in mainstream schools in England has more than trebled since 1997 to about 170,000 (Department for Education, 2010). In 2010, 43% of the staff in England’s schools were support staff and over half of these people were TAs. Researchers have suggested that there are two main reasons behind the increase in TAs in United Kingdom schools: the inclusive schools movement (Farrell, Balshaw, & Polat, 2000; Groom & Rose, 2005; Moran & Abbott, 2002); and the Workforce Remodelling Movement (Brookson, 2006; Butt & Lance, 2005; Rhodes, 2006).

2.3.2.1 Inclusive Schools Movement

The Education Act 1981 stated that all children with special needs were to be educated in mainstream schools in the United Kingdom. Therefore, to support the classroom teachers, TAs were employed (Farrell et al., 2000). Also, one of the new Labour government’s educational keystone policies was inclusion, thus they hired more TAs to support the students with widely different individual needs, including students with behavioural difficulties (Moran & Abbott, 2002).

In 2003, the number of TAs increased further due to the National policy of raising pupil standards and tackling excessive teacher workload via new and expanded support roles (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003). Another reason the volume of support staff in the United Kingdom has increased is diversity of students in schools. Official statistics have shown that primary and secondary schools in England are becoming more diverse (Department for Education, 2011). It is also evident that the proportion of students whose first language is not English has
risen to 16.8% in primary schools, from 13.5% five years before (Shepherd, 2011). Therefore, TAs have become essential to both the inclusion agenda and the drive to those who are not making the expected levels of progress in English and mathematics.

### 2.3.2.2 Workforce Remodelling Agreement

To reduce the work load of teachers, Workforce Remodelling Agreement (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003) proposed to increase the number of support staff in United Kingdom schools. In the agreement, three levels of hierarchy of TAs were introduced which are: Senior Higher Level TAs (SHTLA), who would manage all TAs; Higher Level TAs (HLTA), who would cover some lesson responsibilities from teachers; and finally all other TAs (Brookson, 2006).

### 2.3.2.3 New policies under consideration

It is suggested that TAs increased in number in England and Wales due to the ungrounded assumption that TAs help raise students’ learning. Between 1999 and 2002, 350 million pounds were made available for 20,000 TAs’ recruitment and their training (Blatchford et al., 2007). However, despite the fact that the government of the United Kingdom is investing money and hard work to improve the TAs system, results of the current research regarding TAs show that some educators find them helpful, yet others disagree (Giangreco, 2013). According to the largest study of the impact of TAs in schools, “[TAs] do not boost pupils’ progress”, (Budge, 2009, p. 1). Webster et al. (2011) suggest that there is evidence that TAs help reduce class teachers’ workload, however, there has been little systematic research on their impact on students’ outcomes. However Thomas et al. (2005) argue that despite the fact that TAs were given the funds for training, conditions of service and arrangements for training and development have not improved. This conflict regarding whether TAs are enhancing students’ learning or not has led politicians to change their policies, when up until recently they thought TAs were the solution to increasing learning amongst students. In June 2013, a news headline from a British newspaper stated that an “army of teaching assistants faces the axe as Education
department attempts to save some of the £4 billion they cost each year” (Stevens, 2013, p.1). According to Stevens, educational researchers have shown that TAs have a negative impact on students’ learning and therefore they need to leave.

2.3.3 Aotearoa New Zealand

In 1989, the Education Act gave the right to all the children in New Zealand to attend their neighbourhood school. It was then that TAs were seen as the ‘solution to inclusion’ (Rutherford, 2008). Classroom teachers did not appreciate the new changes however they were relieved that many disabled students came with a TA. In those days teachers’ education and professional development did not include special education therefore it was hard for teachers to understand the social and academic learning needs of disabled students. In 2002, however, professional development of special education for teachers was made compulsory. In spite of this, as classroom teachers were busy with other students, they let TAs take care of the SEN students. TAs were given little guidance from the teachers and often took the students to another room to teach. TAs often taught students according to their knowledge and provided simple activities (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002).

In New Zealand’s schools, one third of staff is made up of support staff. This includes teacher aides, librarians, ICT managers and staff, administrative staff, and student and whānau support workers (Minister of Education, 2014). According to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, ‘2003-2012 Occupation Data’ 13,727 teacher aides were working in New Zealand’s schools in 2012. Out of these 13,727, 67% of them worked in primary and intermediate schools whereas 26% of them worked in secondary schools (Careers NZ, 2013). In New Zealand, different schools have different challenges and requirements for TAs, some schools value TAs time and presence and guide them accordingly. However, there are also some schools where TAs feel unappreciated “support staff have said they don’t always feel appropriately valued within their schools—they can feel like outsiders in an ‘us/them’ culture” (Northcott, 2011, p. 24).
There has been relatively little research on TAs’ practice in New Zealand; most of the decisions in TAs’ careers are made by looking at the international research on TA (A. Ward, 2011). Currently, the aim of the Ministry of Education is to close the achievement gap between Pasifika and students from other ethnicities who require help in their learning (Ministry of Education, 2010). New Zealand’s Education Minster Hon Hekia Parata announced on 26th of August 2013 that $27 million will be invested in education initiatives targeted at priority children (Parata, 2013).

Generally, there is positive feedback on TAs function in schools; however, there are substantial gaps in knowledge regarding their preparation, pre-service and in-service training, deployment and their interactions with students. In addition, there is uncertainty about the TA role in relation to teachers and teaching, and the inclusion of pupils with SEN (Webster et al., 2011). Rutherford (2012), New Zealand’s woman researcher on TAs, has raised the question of how much evidence is needed before we begin implementing the suggested practice for TAs? (A. Ward, 2011).

According to Gerber, Finn, Achilles, and Boyd-Zaharias (2001) as long as TAs were playing clerical roles they did not need to know what was going on in the educational system. However, now that they are involved in pedagogical roles, it is important that they know what their roles are and what roles other educators play in students’ lives. Many TAs have shown an interest in being included in school planning, professional discussions and information sessions (Ministry of Education, 2011a). A number of studies have explored the need to make some changes in the schools and in the New Zealand education system regarding the role that teacher aides play in the education of students with learning difficulties (Tutty & Hocking, 2004). Some TAs have complained that they have so much potential to enhance students’ learning but all they do is ‘babysit them’ (Ministry of Education, 2011a). This practice is because their talents have not been recognised. Different people have different skills. If individual TAs’ skills are identified and then utilized accordingly, it is possible that we can achieve more benefits from this practice.
2.4 Different Titles of Teacher Aides

There are many different titles related to the role of supporting students and teachers in a learning environment. These include teacher aides, teacher assistant, school learning support officer, learning support assistant, inclusion support assistant, integration aide, teacher aide (Special), teacher aide (Identified), para-educator, paraprofessionals, classroom assistant, educational technician, instructional aide, para-teacher, special needs assistant (Balshaw, 2013; French, 2003; Kerry, 2001; Watkinson, 2003). In New Zealand the most common term used is teacher aide however ‘education support worker’ is also used in some schools, whereas “Kaiawhina” is used in Kura Kaupapa Maori schools (Rutherford, 2002). Different countries/states use different titles for TAs however some terms are related to the specific roles and responsibilities undertaken by TAs. There are few schools that do not have them, although they may use different titles and utilise them in different ways (Stevens, 2010). A survey conducted in 2003, whereby 327 schools participated from England and Wales, shows that there were forty-eight different job titles for TAs including behaviour worker, pastoral assistant and mobility officer (Smith, Whitby, & Sharp, 2004). Different job titles reflects that there is a lack of shared understanding about what is the actual role of a teacher aide (Rutherford, 2012).

2.5 Teacher Aides’ Salary

Despite the fact that TAs work very hard at their job, a study of literature (Blatchford et al., 2006; Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Lee, 2003) has shown that TAs get paid less compared to teachers and other school professionals. However, this pay rate is beneficial for schools as they can hire non-professionals to support students’ learning while balancing the budget. According to the New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI) and Ministry of Education(Careers NZ, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2014a), teacher aides usually earn between $15 to $23 per hour. However TAs salaries vary from school district to school district. It is also dependent
on the level of education, work experience, special training, district policies, and local laws (ParaEducator Training, 2014). In 2012 an average TAs salary was $23,000 to $25,000 (Careers NZ, 2013) whereas primary school teachers usually earn $46,000 to $72,000 per year (Careers NZ, 2014). The salary of a TA in the United States in 2012 was between $19,160 and $29,790 (Taylor, 2014), salary for teachers are between $37 595 to $ 53 180 (OECD iLibrary, 2012). In England things are not very different, teachers can earn from £21,588 to £36,387 per year (Robinson, 2014), on the other hand salaries for full-time TAs range from £13,000 to £21,000 a year (Adams & Burn-Murdoch, 2013). It is roughly half the salary level paid to full-time teachers. French (2003) suggests that it makes good economic sense to hire a selection of staff members at different pay rates if the roles can be ethically and legally differentiated, and the responsibility distributed.

2.6 Training and qualification of TAs

One of the main concerns regarding TAs is the issue of training for teachers, teacher aides and school principals. Pre-service and in-service training can provide opportunities to support the development of a common understanding of a range of legal, ethical, and professional practice issues concerning the scope of teacher aides’ work (as cited in Rutherford, 2011). Rutherford (2012) emphasises that it is crucial for TAs to have some kind of training because their role is varied and demanding in nature. She then goes on to say that training will enable teacher aides to carry out their work efficiently, safely, and professionally. A study conducted in England on ‘perceptions of the barriers to effective inclusion’ revealed that practices within a school were varied and ranged from highly inclusive to highly exclusive. Key barriers identified from this study were lack of funding, resources and training. During this study many TAs complained that they were often inadequately trained to educate students who need the most help. “Our training is appalling….. I wasn’t trained how to deal with children who have speech and language difficulties” (Glazzard, 2011, p. 5). Some of the TAs feel guilty for not teaching the students they are supposed to but it is not their fault as they are not given appropriate training.
There is no pre-service training currently required in New Zealand, the only requirement is the completion of a police screening check (Rutherford, 2012). The duty of training a TA is mostly given to the class teachers. According to the Ministry of Education, it is the class teacher who is responsible for the education of each and every child in their classes therefore they are supposed to plan, deliver, monitor, and evaluate TAs' training. “Teacher aides/kaiawhina work under the supervision of a teacher and in accordance with defined school procedures to support teaching programmes and student learning” (Ministry of Education, 2002b, p. 3). However, teachers often complain that when they decided to follow a career in education, they never thought of being managers of other adults in the classrooms (Thompson, 2002). They also argue that they are not taught the management and deployment of TAs who work in their classes as well as they are unsure of how best to use TAs and how to find what skills and knowledge TAs are lacking (Thomas et al., 2005).

Many school principals in a research study conducted on TAs in New Zealand agree that providing TAs with adequate professional development/training is difficult, they also said that finding the time to work with TAs is an ongoing difficulty for both teachers and school leaders (Ministry of Education, 2011a). Thomas and his colleagues agree and emphasise that teachers do not have enough time for planning and for meeting with the TAs as they are busy with their class’s learning (Thomas et al., 2005). Because of this lack of training for class teachers and TAs they are both unsure of how to deal with each other. The TAs report shows that they often work separately with partial direction from teachers (Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). “They feel undervalued and unappreciated for the jobs that they do” (Thompson, 2002, p. 2). It is suggested that these problems arise because neither group is given training to work as a team.

A study conducted in 1999 revealed that 80% of teachers do not receive any formal training on how to manage TAs, and 63% of them thought that it would be helpful if they did receive training (Thomas et al., 2005). Furthermore, there are few opportunities offered for class teachers to receive training about working efficiently with TAs. Research conducted on ‘the wider role of teaching assistants’ in 2010,
shows that 75% of teachers reported having no training regarding TAs (Webster et al., 2011). Giangreco and Broer (2005) have warned educators that if TAs continue to play important roles in education without proper training, it would be similar to treating the symptoms of a problem rather than its causes. Improving the training and supervision of TAs is necessary and appropriate however, to achieve this teachers and principals should be provided with training on how to manage TAs. Rutherford (2011) also explains that it is unjustified that TAs have many responsibilities for the education and care of students who have complex support needs yet they are the ones with the least or no training. “Through no fault of their own, too many paraprofessionals remain inadequately trained and supervised to do the jobs they are asked to undertake” (Suter & Giangreco, 2009, p. 82). Well-trained TAs are a key resource and can be used very effectively in many primary schools. However, TAs cannot automatically be expected to produce good practice without direction and training (Department for Education and Employment, 2011).

Giangreco (2003) argues that TAs need to be more educated, most of them have far less qualifications, skills and experience compared to the class teachers and it is appalling that students in need of the most help, receive their primary instructions and support from the least qualified members. A report published by Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment (2009) stated that only 10% of TAs in New Zealand had a Bachelor or higher qualification in 2006, 18% had no qualification and 40% of them have only school qualifications. Teacher aides and all those involved with them in their work have recognized the need for an applicable certification, thorough initiation to on-going professional development, and the advance of a career structure (Glazzard, 2011). Study of literature (Bentham & Hutchins, 2007; Brookson, 2006; Careers NZ, 2013) shows that for the past few years educators are introducing courses which are designed to help TAs understand their jobs better. In New Zealand a Certificate in Teacher Aiding, Diploma in Education Support, or relevant class experience, is endorsed by employers (Careers NZ, 2013).

Watkinson (2007) argues that despite the fact that governments around the world are spending a lot of time and money on management of TAs, there is still
substantial confusion over their best use and deployment, and how the day to day matters of a school’s life can best be facilitated for the good of the students and the TAs themselves. She further explains that TAs of all descriptions and levels raise serious issues, most of which could be resolved by better management practice and training. Some practitioners are working hard to make visible the high-quality work undertaken by those who serve as TAs in schools yet others had their concerns regarding TAs from as early as when TAs started to increase in numbers (Watkinson, 2003). However, Brighton (1972) argues that the reward and penalties of the TAs’ perception cannot be realistically evaluated until it becomes an ordered structural operation. Even though Brighton raised these points in 1972, they are relevant in today’s TA positions as we still do not have an official TAs program model for guidance.

2.7 Andragogy: An adult teaching theory

Andragogy is an adult teaching theory which was developed by Malcolm S. Knowles in 1970 in United States (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2012). The focus of andragogy is on the adult learner and his or her life situation (Sharan B. Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2012). The groundwork of andragogy and the ideas it encompasses seem well related to the intent of this study. In regards to those educators who believe that pre-service and in-service training and providing professional development opportunities to TAs is a complex process, and are unsure if TAs are capable of taking instructional responsibilities, this theory provides a different perspective. For example, andragogy endorses self-directed learning, recognises prior learning and the significance of building on an already held foundation of knowledge, stimulates real-world application, and promotes direct utilization of newly developed understandings and skills (Riemenschneider, 2014).

Andragogy assumptions provide that adults have enough knowledge and are capable of making the right choices in their learning experiences. They also emphasise that adults learn best when the teacher uses a combination of teaching
styles, even if some of them are 'pedagogical' in nature. Knowles describes andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn (Sonnheim & Lehman, 2009) therefore it is a notion of pedagogical approaches for adult learners in lifelong learning (Yoshimoto, Inenaga, & Yamada, 2007). Thus designing professional development classes for TAs according to assumptions of andragogy could help TAs to perform their roles effectively in classrooms.

For TAs many factors such as pre-service and in-service training, qualifications and life experience of TAs can influence classroom performance. These reinforce the application and use of andragogy. Knowles came up with a number of design elements related to the learning process which he thought of as taking account of the status of adult learners. These design elements highlighted the role of the teacher as facilitator and were described under the following headings: climate, planning, diagnosis of needs, formulation of objectives, design and activities and evaluation (Gould, 2009). For true adult education, all of the above should be advanced as joint enterprises between teacher (TA supervisor and classroom teacher) and learner (TA).

2.8 Relationship between teachers and teacher aides

With the integration of growing numbers of immigrant students as well as students with learning difficulties into New Zealand primary schools (New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, 2010), the number of TAs is increasing too. Therefore, in the current education system it is essential for teachers and TAs to develop effective working relationships (Burgess & Mayes, 2007). The Ministry of Education stated that it has been consistently shown that the benefits for the school increase significantly as the quality of communication and planning between the teacher and teacher aide improves (Haddock, Nicholls, & Stacey, 2008). Doyle (1997), also emphasises that communication must occur on a regular and ongoing basis and in ways that are clear and efficient.

Making the best use of a teacher aide requires good communication between senior management, teaching staff and the learning support staff (Haddock et al., 2008). In
2001 New Zealand provided their TAs with an introductory professional development programme and in 2002 they evaluated the programme. The main areas for improvement were identified and top of the list were: programme time for teachers and TAs to plan and evaluate together; and to improve communication between teachers and teacher aides (Cameron, Sinclair, Waiti, & Wylie, 2004). Regular communication not only reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings and isolation between team members but also increases the potential for proactive, effective problem solving and support (Doyle, 1997).

The main concept of hiring TAs is to reduce the workload of class teachers and in some cases to ease the burden of clerical work; however, teachers do have to take the responsibility of managing another adult in their classroom. Kerry (2001) states that some teachers have complained that there is an increase in time and work when TAs are working inside the classrooms. ATL, ‘the union for education professionals across the UK’ says that it’s important to remember that for an effective working relationship to take place, both teacher and TA need to show commitment and understanding (ATL The Education Union, 2013). The Ministry of Education, in the book, ‘a handbook of Teacher aides and bilingual tutors’ (Haddock et al., 2008) states that there is evidence that practice improves greatly when teacher aides and teachers have consultations on a regular basis. Research has recognized that the effectiveness of TAs is dependent usually on support they receive from a teacher or head teachers (Zaki, Allen, Almula, Al Motawaha, & Fakhro, 2009). Therefore, the best use of teacher aides happens when the teacher and the support staff have shared understanding (Haddock et al., 2008).

One school in Auckland, Te Kura Māori o NgāTapuwae has shown that if appropriate methods are used to enhance the TAs skills, TAs can play an important part in students’ lives to help increase their learning. In this school, staff members design TAs roles carefully and develop clear systems for induction, performance appraisal and professional development. The school has created a culture where TAs are an integral part of the team and are expected to attend all school meetings, and also to do teaching and professional development. Principal Arihia Stirling has emphasised
that “All staff sing from the same song book and this helps the children learn better” (Northcott, 2011, p. 24). Furthermore she explained that the essential part of using TAs effectively is the way they are involved in classroom programmes and how teachers communicate with them. One of the efficient practices in the school is that TAs meet with the teachers weekly to find out what’s coming up and go through their support plan for the week. It is also noted that the TAs in this school are highly qualified and eventually go on and train as teachers. Another New Zealand school which is utilizing TAs to do their best is Windley School. The Ministry of Education (2011b) has recognised school managements’ efforts to ensure they get the best from all staff in their school, including their teacher aides. It is believed that there have been benefits for the TAs in making it easier to do their job well.

Giangreco (2003) explains that for most of the class teachers having a TA means that they have to be a gracious host, but he argues that for TAs to have an impact on students’ learning it is important to provide carefully designed TA support. A study carried out by Glazzard (2011), states that “all participants stressed that effective inclusion depends on the availability of support in the classroom” (p. 59). However, schools and teachers need to understand that TAs are not substitutes for teachers, nevertheless, they can give them the right training and support to help children to get the most out of school. It is not fair to blame the lack of progress of students on TAs; the problem is the way in which TAs are deployed and the way in which they are managed.

Research shows that most TAs are very dedicated to their job and often work extra hours without pay (Gwilliam, 2013), however, as their deployment with students seems to be the problem, policymakers and school staff need to rethink the way TAs are utilised in classrooms to maximise their help to teachers and students. The significance of the successful deployment of TAs is in understanding the nature of the support that they can provide (Department for Education and Employment, 2000). Regardless of the evidence showing that there are many TAs in primary schools, there is little systematic data on how they are deployed (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, & Webster, 2009). Imaginative Minds Ltd (2013) warns educators and
policymakers that despite the best intentions of government “to get excellent teachers into schools through tough new recruitment policies, training and huge cash injections, it will all be undermined by the growing army of support assistants who end up at the sharp end of pupil contact” (p. 1).

2.9 Challenges faced by TAs during their Job

Teacher aides have to face a lot of challenges during their work but one of the most frequently occurring issues in research is the lack of clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities of teacher aides and class teachers (Rutherford, 2011). A lack of well-defined roles and duties brings unintentional consequences which have been pointed out in some international research (Rutherford, 2012). Giangreco and Broer (2005) also highlight that due to undefined roles many educators see teacher aides as unhelpful and think that their constant presence with students affects students' learning and social interaction.

As the number of TAs is increasing, their roles are also continuing to change, becoming more specialized and comprehensive (Doyle, 1997). There are four major categories of the role of TAs, which include support for the students, support for the teachers, support for the curriculum and support for the school (Department for Education and Employment, 2000), however it can be extremely difficult for TAs if they have to work in all four categories. The complex and evolving nature of the TAs’ role and the importance of TAs in the lives of students, giving clear instructions about their roles is necessary (Farrell & Ainscow, 2002). TAs are moving from traditional practical support to learning support and they require help from other staff to enhance students' learning (Zaki et al., 2009).

While many researchers have highlighted the range of TAs roles, an actual understanding of effective support in the classroom is more challenging to accomplish than one might anticipate. The fundamental question of many researchers is whether additional educators in the classrooms increase the level of
achievement of students. However, Blatchford et al. (2006) report that TAs are helpful in the classrooms as they decrease workload and level of stress for teachers, share engagement in planning and help in delivering the curriculum. If the educators want to increase the chances for students to learn they need to pay attention to how the roles and responsibilities are distributed in schools and how they can be organised better (Parker et al., 2009).

The English Department of Education and Employments guide (2000), emphasises that TAs cannot produce good practice without guidance; therefore supportive management is needed for them to function effectively. Giangreco (2013) stresses that any primary instructions should come from teachers, potential instruction provided by TAs should not be exclusive which is only possible if teachers recognise their roles and responsibilities. He also explains that it is important that TAs should work from professionally organised plans developed by teachers based on evidence-based approaches, which will not put TAs in the inappropriate role of making pedagogical decisions. Zaki et al. (2009) highlight that in some schools where the role of teachers and TAs are not well defined; teachers do not experience the full benefit of TAs. Schools therefore need to make sure that TAs are well managed and know their duties otherwise they will just increase the workload for teachers. Wallace et al. (2001) point out that when TAs are not given clear instructions about their roles, they assume and follow their own knowledge and skills.

A clear understanding of duty within a team of TAs is important (Webster et al., 2011). The definition of team is “a group of people with different skills and different tasks, who work together on a common project, service, or goal, with a meshing of functions and mutual support” (Hensey, 1992, p. 1). Therefore, it is absolutely important for both the teacher and TA to know that they have the same goal, which is creating a better learning environment for students with learning difficulties. Once the essence of each other’s roles and responsibilities is understood, team members’ interactions become cooperative rather than competitive (Thomas et al., 2005) and they adopt respect towards each other and avoid stepping into each other’s circles. The literature emphasises that teams need to be clear about their purposes,
however, despite this fact, many TAs are appointed without clear instructions (Thomas et al., 2005). However, Farrell and Ainscow (2002) have clearly outlined the role of TAs and that of teachers. They have described that teachers are supposed to plan the programmes, monitor their success, arrange review meetings and communicate with parents. On the other hand TAs are supposed to carry out the programmes under the teachers’ guidance.

Teacher aides are not the only ones who have not been given a clear description of their roles and responsibilities, teachers have also complained about the lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities regarding TAs. Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) start their book “ATeacher’sGuidetoWorkingwithParaeducatorsandOtherClassroomAides” with the statement that this book is for the teachers who have to adapt to the new role of their job “supervising paraeducators”. They further explain that if some teachers feel that they were not prepared in their undergraduate teacher training then they are not alone. Unfortunately this is not the case with classroom teachers only, many special education teachers who regularly work with TAs, also receive little training in working with other adults.

Moreover, Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) illustrate that the principles of effective supervision should apply equally to any adults who work in the classroom, including parent or grandparent volunteers, student teachers, and others. TAs could be younger or older than the class teacher, they may have a high school diploma or full teaching qualifications. They may have many years of experience as a parent, businessperson, or politician. However, no matter what the role of the TAs is in a classroom, the important perception is that the teacher should have overall responsibility for the classroom and the TAs should work under the teacher’s direction. The writers further explain to classroom teachers that the principles of effective supervision are the same, although managerial responsibilities are obviously more widespread and could take more time and strength.
Berliner (1989) emphasised that teachers are playing the role similar to those of executives in business and management. He suggested this from the fact that TAs and volunteers were increasing in number in classrooms. He listed nine “executive functions” of a teacher’s role which are

- Planning work
- Communicating goals
- Regulating the activities of the workplace
- Creating a pleasant environment for work
- Educating new members of the work group
- Articulating with other units in the system
- Supervising and working with other people
- Motivating those being supervised
- Evaluating the performance of those being supervised

(as cited in Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001, p. 2)

He further explained that the presence of another adult in the classroom adds a management level and complicates the functioning of the classroom. Major benefits can be taken from TAs when handled properly. If teachers delegate some of the responsibility for instruction to their TA then they must ensure that TAs are competent. This is due to the fact that both of them have contact with students.

Literature highlights (Kerry, 2001; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Page, 2001; Parker et al., 2009) that a class teacher can only make some specific decisions that reflect their qualifications and professional responsibilities. However, they are allowed to share the chore of carrying out those decisions with other adults who work in the classroom. TAs will carry out the task accurately once they have received proper training and clear expectations have been set (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). It is important to understand teachers’ responsibilities as leader of the classroom and how those responsibilities are webbed together for the benefit of students. Despite TAs day to day support for students and teachers, there is inadequate acknowledgement of the teacher aide as a practitioner. Surprisingly, most of the
research data about TAs roles and responsibilities is collected from employees such as special education teachers, classroom teachers and administrators. Researchers have found out that the TAs themselves and students are rarely identified as major stakeholders in the inclusive education context (Bourke, 2008).

2.10 Social Capital Theory

Social capital means that social networks have value (Nan Lin, 1999). It can be demarcated as those resources inherent in social relations which promote collective action. Those resources include “trust, norms, and networks of association representing any group which gathers consistently for a common purpose” (Garson, 2006, p. 1). It is believed that reciprocity is a norm of a culture high in social capital which inspires bargaining, cooperation, and multicultural politics. Another norm is belief in the equality of people, which strengthen the development of cross-cutting groups. According to Nan Lin (2001) social capital produces profits when individuals engage in interactions and networking. OECD defines social capital as “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups” (Brian, 2007, p. 103). In this definition networks can be between TAs and schools, TAs and classroom teachers and TAs and students. The basic principle of social capital theory is that "interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric" (Beem, 2000, p. 20). According to this theory team members need to be committed to their goals as well as to each other. For example if TAs and teachers are collaborating well with each other then they can achieve their ultimate goal which is to enhance the learning of students. Once students learn they can produce benefits economically. Häuberer (2010) reinforces that, there are “three basic kinds of capital occurring in a society: economic, cultural, and social. These capitals can be converted into one another using transformation labour” (p. 35). This theory favours that every member of the team should be aware of their roles in order to invest their best performance. Thus, not only TAs should have training on how to work best with
students and teachers, but teachers and SENCOS should have training on how to guide and utilise TAs too.

Nan Lin (1999) highlights that social relations are expected to emphasise distinctiveness and recognition. She further explains “being assured of and recognized for one’s worthiness as an individual and a member of a social group sharing similar interests and resources not only provides emotional support but also public acknowledgment of one’s claim to certain resources” (p. 20). Hence social capital theory supports the need for TAs to collaborate with teachers and vice versa. Schools should create atmospheres that "enable paraprofessionals to learn the duties required of them, receive evaluation that helps them excel in their positions, and become more aware of the important role they play on the instructional team" (Leighton et al., 1997, p. 34).

2.11 Summary

Recently the levels of language and cultural diversity in schools in western countries, as well as in New Zealand, have increased. Due to that increase, classrooms, apart from SEN, have students with an extensive range of learning needs. This has led to an increase in the number of TAs not only in New Zealand but around the world. In addition, TAs roles and responsibilities in schools are being questioned by many educators. Evidence is showing that TAs are an important part of a school team; however on the other hand some researchers are suggesting that TAs have a negative effect on students’ learning outcomes. This chapter highlights that there is a lack of clearly defined roles not only for TAs but also for classroom teachers. Usually no, or very little, pre-service and in-service job training is provided to TAs who work with students to enhance their learning. It is also noted that their relationship with teachers is complicated. This chapter has also discussed the challenges TAs have to face during their job.
Chapter Three

Methodology

A major strength of the qualitative approach is the depth to which explorations are conducted and descriptions are written, usually resulting in sufficient details for the reader to grasp the idiosyncracies of the situation.

Margaret Myers

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief overview of research methodology, ontology, epistemology and research paradigms. Key characteristics of the qualitative research approach are examined and the rationale for choosing a qualitative research methodology for this study is outlined. The two data collection methods, the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview, are discussed in relation to relevant literature. Then, key concerns related to appropriateness of selection and sampling are explained and strategies for data analysis are identified and discussed. Thereafter, the validity and the reliability of results are examined. The chapter concludes with consideration of ethical issues.

3.2 Research Overview

Research helps to develop a new theory or enhance an existing one (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013). Research methodology relates to the theory underpinning the research and the explanations for the way the research has
been designed. Within the literature a range of different definitions of methodology can be identified. Schwandt (2007) describes methodology as “a theory of how inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry (that in turn governs the use of particular methods)” (p. 161). He further argues that methodologies explicate and outline the kinds of problems that are worth investigating. Whereas 6 and Bellamy (2011) in their book *Principals of methodology: Research design in social science* explain that methodology is the understanding of how to continue from the findings of empirical research to make assumptions about the truth of theories. They also point out that ‘methodology’ should allow researchers to design research so that it is possible to draw invaluable conclusions about what might be causing the things detected in a study, including those reasons stemming from ways in which people think about the world.

Clough and Nutbrown (2007) state that a methodology shows how research questions are coherent with questions asked in the field. Its outcome is a claim about significance. Moreover, a characteristic determination of a methodology is to demonstrate not how such and such seemed to be the best method accessible for the given purposes of the study, but how and why this method of doing was inevitable. In simple words, “methodology explains the literature the researcher is using, the language and terminology, the other theories and explanations being used, the methods and the type of analysis that will be used to interpret the data and information collected” (Rangahau, 2014, p. 1). Kaplan (1965) proposed that the aim of methodology is to help us to comprehend, in the broadest conceivable terms, not the products of scientific investigation, but the process itself. Even though these definitions are slightly different from each other; they hold a common idea of justification to determine the approaches, methods and strategies within the methodology.

Clough and Nutbrown (2007) maintain that the key terms of methodology are ontology and epistemology. Ontology refers to ways of constructing reality, “how things really are” and “how things really work” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 201).
Epistemology is a theory of knowledge that pursues to express knowledge and deals with “how we know what we know” (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 25). In social science, epistemology is the theory of knowledge that describes what kind of knowledge is possible and legitimate (Feast & Melles, 2010). Epistemological beliefs relate knowledge with subjective meanings and social phenomena. Those beliefs focus on “the details of situation, the reality behind these details, subjective meanings and motivating actions” (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70). In simple words “Ontology is reality, epistemology is the relationship between that reality and the researcher and methodology is the technique used by the researcher to discover that reality” (Healy & Perry, 2000, p. 119).

![Figure 1: Relationship between Methodology, Epistemology and Ontology](image)

In this study ontology refers to the experiences of TAs in primary schools. The aim of this study is to use methodology (tools and techniques) to discover perceptions about the roles of TAs (epistemology) in primary schools.

### 3.3 Research paradigms

The term paradigm defines how a researcher follows the study of phenomenon on scientific and social grounds (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Davidson & Tolich,
The normative and interpretive paradigms are two classical research paradigms which comprise the researcher’s ontological, epistemological and methodological premises and are interpreted as opposite and divergent anchors (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). The normative paradigm has a deductive approach to research where a theory is generated and the research aims to prove the theory. On the other hand, an interpretive paradigm practises an inductive approach, where data is gathered and analysed so that the researcher can grasp the subjective meaning of the social action (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007).

This study sought to interpret from multiple perspectives the roles, challenges and relationship of TAs in New Zealand primary schools. Therefore, the research problem was most appropriately positioned within an interpretive paradigm based upon the principle that it allows systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of individuals in natural settings (Neuman, 2003). Furthermore it is to understand and define how TAs generate and preserve their social worlds. Creswell (2002) suggests that this approach claims knowledge through a set of hypotheses used by researchers to comprehend the world in which individuals work and live. The role of a TA is active, complicated and at times overwhelming. Thus alignment of this study with interpretive research allowed for the perspectives and experiences of those with responsibility for students learning to be studied in depth. This paradigm was also appropriate as it recognises and investigates the role of TAs in schools in relation to teachers and TAs’ supervisors (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

### 3.4 Rationale

This study draws on a qualitative methodology with an interpretative paradigm because the prominence of the research is on understanding individual’s interpretations of their social realities. Weaver and Olson (2006) refer to qualitative methodology as a philosophical foundation which supports the interpretive paradigm in a view that there are many truths and multiple realities. Thus, qualitative research
allowed the use of multiple techniques; in which the researcher had close contact with the participants and captured their perspectives on the meaning of reality. Additionally, using qualitative research has allowed the researcher to study participants in naturalistic settings (e.g. in schools) while searching for the meaning and understanding of the teacher aides’ roles and responsibilities (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). It is believed that qualitative researchers aim to understand the meaning people have assembled, that is, “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Sharan B Merriam, 2009, p. 13). Thus, TAs, teachers and TAs’ supervisors’ feelings and thoughts regarding the role of TAs were analysed and interpreted. Thorne (2000) suggests that qualitative researchers are “more concerned about uncovering knowledge about how people feel and think in the circumstances in which they find themselves, than making judgments about whether those thoughts and feelings are valid” (p. 68). Therefore, the researcher focused on the feelings and experiences of participants without judging their views and beliefs.

Using qualitative methods for researching the role of TAs in primary schools allowed the researcher to add different kinds of data collection and analysis techniques and gave the advantage to generate contextually rich data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) qualitative researchers use the inductive method of reasoning and believe that there are several perspectives to be revealed in their research. According to Carter and Little (2007) qualitative research allows an understanding of the meaning of human actions. Hence qualitative research methodology is appropriate for this research as the researcher wanted to investigate several perspectives of TAs jobs. Mutch (2005) believes that qualitative research is bound by the context and works with a small number of participants in order to share their experiences with others. Thus this study aimed to investigate the roles of TAs as well as what conditions need to be met to develop effective working relationships between teachers and teacher aides.
3.5 Sample Selection

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) emphasise that the worth of a piece of research not only stands or falls by the relevance of methodology and instruments but also by the aptness of the sampling strategy that has been adopted. As the overall aim of this research was not to conclude but rather to look in-depth at specific aspects of TAs in primary schools, the sample needed to be purposive. The scope of this research focused on the TAs roles in New Zealand’s primary schools, from teachers, TAs and TAs’ supervisors’ perspective. Two methods of data collection, questionnaires and interviews, were used to provide differing perspectives on the topic of study.

The researcher collected information from a total of seven primary schools around the Auckland region. The criteria for the selection of the participants for this research were respondents who were teachers, TAs and TAs’ supervisors in different primary schools. In total, 35 staff members (three teachers, three TAs and a TAs supervisor) from five Auckland primary schools were invited to fill out questionnaires. Three teachers, three TAs and a TAs supervisor were invited for interviews from two primary schools; in total 14 staff members were interviewed. Information regarding each school was gained from the Ministry of Education’s website. Permission to participate in this study was obtained via phone calls to each school, followed by an email with the information sheet. Once the approval was obtained, the researcher personally dropped and collected the questionnaires at each school to reduce the time of the data collection. Interview dates and times were confirmed through email. The researcher had to visit school one (IS1) a few times to conduct the interviews of the staff members however for school two (IS2) all the interviews were conducted on the same day. Interviews were obtained with all 14 staff members. Participation in this research study was voluntary and informed consent was gained firstly from the deputy principals and then each staff member.
3.5.1 Open-ended questionnaire sample

To get responses to the open ended questionnaires the researcher approached five primary schools out of the seven involved in this study in the Auckland region. The reason was that the researcher wanted to see the variability in different schools in regard to TAs, also a larger sample would allow the comparison and contrast of answers and therefore would lead to rich data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Questionnaires were completed by three teachers, three TAs and one TAs’ supervisor from each school. The researcher wrote three different types of questionnaires for three different groups of staff: teachers, TAs and TAs’ supervisors. It was important because different questionnaires were necessary for different groups to extract the targeted information required for this research. Most schools took a week to complete the questionnaires. All the school members have completed and returned the questionnaires to the researcher. In total, all 35 school staff members completed the questionnaires.

3.5.2 Semi-structured interview sample

In this method, purposive sampling was used as purposive samples are the most reliable and accurate methods for qualitative researchers. It provides maximum insight and understanding of what they are studying. Purposive samples are usually suited to small studies therefore the researcher decided to conduct interviews with three class teachers, three teacher aides and a supervisor of teacher aides of two out of seven primary schools in Auckland. This is a small group and semi structured interviews are also appropriate to work with small samples (Laforest, 2009). Teacher aides in New Zealand usually work with many teachers in each school (Rutherford, 2011) therefore interviewing three teacher aides from each school seemed reasonable. Interviewing the supervisor of TAs is important as they can convey the message from their point of view regarding TAs’ responsibilities around the school. Phone calls were made to the school principals to seek permission to interview their staff members, followed by an email with the information sheet. Once permission was achieved, assistant principal chose the staff members who then participated in the interviews. Interviews were conducted individually and took 30 to 50 minutes in
duration. All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed by the researcher.

3.6 Research Methods

Cohen et al. (2011) define research methods as the approaches chosen by the researcher to collect data for interpretation, explanation and prediction. Two research methods adopted in this study were open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

3.6.1 Open-ended questionnaire

Questionnaires are very useful tools for gathering data from a large number of respondents (Wilkinson, 2000). “A questionnaire is a written collection of self-report questions to be answered by the selected group of research participants” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 373). For this study, the researcher wanted to gather as much data from primary school teachers and teacher aides as possible. The reason behind this was that a large sample can provide more accurate measures of the problem (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Therefore, the questionnaire seems to be the most appropriate method. The researcher’s decision to use a questionnaire was three-fold; firstly to obtain demographic information, as it was important to gain an understanding of the background of teachers and TAs, which includes gender and age and whether they were aware of their roles and responsibilities while working together. Secondly the questionnaires were designed to find out more about teachers and TAs qualification and training, such as, had both groups been given instructions on how to work as a team? Or were they just put together and left alone to work things out themselves? And thirdly, the questionnaires were used as a tool to identify the relationship between the group of teachers and TAs who are working together.

The advantage of questionnaires is that they can be very detailed, covering many issues or they can be very simple and focus on one important area. Furthermore, a
well-planned questionnaire can generate rich data in a format ready for analysis and simple interpretation. An effective questionnaire allows the transmission of useful and correct data from the respondent to the researcher (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). For this research a group-administered questionnaire was used as it is a useful instrument for gathering data from a sample of respondents who are working together. For example, were teachers and TAs working together in schools to enhance students' learning? This form of instrument permits each member of the group to fill out his or her own questionnaire and return it to the researcher upon completion. It is believed that the response rates using group-administered questionnaires are higher when compared to mail surveys (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). The reason behind this is that the group is often put together specifically for the purpose of assisting with the research, also the respondents feel personally involved with the work by being handed the questionnaire by a member of the research team. For this research, questionnaires were delivered to assistant principals who then passed them on to their staff for completion. On completion, participants put the questionnaires in an envelope and handed them to the school receptionist. School receptionists then phoned/emailed the researcher to inform that questionnaires were ready to be picked up. The researcher usually collected questionnaires on the following day.

In this study, the researcher was interested in collecting data which covers the main aspects of the TAs job. Using different questions and approaches to questioning allows the researcher to access the required information. Wilkinson (2000) maintains that questionnaires usually contain a number of different approaches to asking questions. In questionnaires, questions can be closed questions, multiple-choice or ranking questions, and open-ended questions. Both open and closed questions were used in this research to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Open questions gave the freedom to the respondent to add their opinions, thoughts or suggestions about the question asked, however, in closed questions respondents are required to choose answers from one or more pre-defined category of 'answers' to the question. Responses to closed questions can be coded beforehand; this helps in speeding up the analysis (Wilkinson, 2000).
Designing a good quality questionnaire is a skilled and difficult technical activity (Wilkinson, 2000). Review of literature (Ary, 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003) shows that questionnaires which generate more useful and reliable data are those with short and clear instructions to the respondent. Johnson and Christensen (2008) emphasise that presentation should not be avoided, make sure that questionnaires look attractive, and unnecessary questions should not be asked. A well-constructed questionnaire is likely to get a higher response rate compared to an un-structured questionnaire (Ary, 2006). All of this information was kept in mind by the researcher when the questionnaires were structured.

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

An interview is a purposeful interaction in which one person attains information from another (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In order to gain a deeper understanding and detail about participants’ views regarding the roles of teacher aides, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. Clifford and Valentine (2003) explain that even in a semi structured interview, an interviewer still prepares a list of predetermined questions. Semi structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the opportunity to investigate issues they feel are important. Johnson and Christensen (2008) state that when conducting semi structured interviews, the researcher is never at a loss as they can add questions to their understanding of what is happening in the research setting by guiding the conversation around who, what, where, when and why.

The aim of this study was to find out the roles of teacher aides in different schools and identify the factors which were causing issues regarding TAs progress. Semi structured interviews had allowed the researcher to ask open ended questions and shape the conversation according to the topic. Unlike the structured interview, the semi structured interview does not have the pre-planning of all the questions asked (Massey University, 2011). However, Burns (1997) argues that a semi structured interview does not mean that interviewers cannot have a specific interview schedule. An interview guide can be developed for complex parts of the study in which the
researcher feels that clarification is required. The advantages of semi structured interviews are that they allow complex viewpoints to be discussed without the limitations of scripted questions; also they are likely to tap both content and emotional levels. In semi structured interviews, very often the interview process itself is the medium through which researchers gain knowledge of what data are most useful and important to their research, and flexible interview guides permit focusing on topics that appear to be most interesting (Tracy, 2012). Therefore, semi structured interviews were considered the most appropriate technique for this study as the researcher wanted to collect in-depth information on the research problem which otherwise cannot be achieved through the use of only a questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2000).

There are five stages to the interview as illustrated by Martin Wood of Massey University (Massey University, 2011) that were followed by the researcher when interviews were conducted. The researcher arrived before the time to set up the equipment (tape recorders) to make sure they were working. The researcher explained the purpose of the research in a few sentences and why she was interested in this topic. She then presented the written consent form and informed the interviewees as to what was expected of them during the interview. She also gave them the written interview questions so they could read them before the interview. All the interviews were conducted in a comfortable environment. Wherever an interviewee was not sure about a question they did seek an explanation. The researcher was interested in their answers and their body language and whether this was positive or not. No personal comment was given by the researcher. If there was something which was confusing for the researcher, she asked them in a polite manner such as “would you give me an example”. Interviews were finished on time and the researcher thanked each interviewee for their time.
3.7 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is a multifaceted process which arises from the variety of data and the epistemological position implemented by the researcher (Newby, 2010). Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) define data analysis as difficult, time consuming, challenging, yet potentially the most important part of the research as researchers try to understand what they have learnt through their investigation. According to Lodico et al., (2010), this is an ‘inductive process’ which means that many small pieces of data are gathered and progressively combined to form broader descriptions and conclusions.

It is believed that thematic coding can be used with a number of types of data that focus on specific acts, conversations, reports, behaviours, interactions, activities, contexts, settings, conditions, actions, strategies, or practices (Cohen et al., 2011). Thematic coding is acknowledged as a fundamental strategy (Denscombe, 2007; Lofland, 2006; Neuman, 2003) and was used to analyse the data from both the semi-structured interviews and the open-ended questionnaires in order to classify and analyse common themes.

Upon the completion of all the questionnaires, the researcher divided the questionnaires into three groups: teachers, TAs and TAs supervisors, respectively. Then the researcher familiarised herself with the data by reading each questionnaire thoroughly. As Ary (2006) describes, the first step after collecting the raw data should be familiarising and organising it, as it makes the coding process a lot easier. The second step taken by the researcher was coding the data.

One of the most common data analysis actions undertaken by qualitative researchers is coding (Gay et al., 2006). Coding is the process of examining the raw qualitative data which will be in the form of words, sentences or paragraphs, and assigning labels. As data is analysed and coded it is reduced into a controllable form (Lewins, Taylor, & Gibbs, 2005). The first step of the coding was ‘open coding’. Ary (2006) suggests that in this stage it is important to read the data and sort it by looking for meaning. During this process themes were identified from the data and
then they were compared with the themes from the literature review. From the literature review common themes allowed the researcher to compare and discuss TAs issues (Gay et al., 2006). The researcher analysed the questions for all of the groups and found many themes during this process. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) advise that it is useful to look for patterns from interviews and questionnaire data. The next step was axial coding where the researcher started to group the codes. Some codes were grouped in more than one group. In the final stage ‘selective coding’ provided deeper understanding of the research result which then was interpreted (Mohdkhairieahmad, 2012).

The interview data that was gathered from two out of seven primary schools was audiotaped and transcribed before being identified and transformed into categories. (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2011)) describe that “thematic analyses move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes” (p. 12). Therefore once the transcribing was completed, the main themes of the data were sorted together. According to Bryman (2004) qualitative analysis basically begins with sequences of codes and the essence of coding is the process of sorting the data into several categories. Numerical coding of the participants in the interview was also used such as: QS1TA1 (Questionnaire School 1 Teacher Aide 1), QS1T1 (Questionnaire School 1 Teacher 1), IS1TA1 (Interview School 1 Teacher Aide 1), and IS1T1 (Interview School 1 Teacher 1). This allowed for ease of administration and assisted analysis. Additionally, relevant points of interest and marginal notes were made.

Themes were evident from within schools, across schools and between the interviews and questionnaires. Once the main themes of all the groups were gathered, they were all summarised altogether. Ary (2006) argues that in this process data should be explained like a story in a consistent manner so others can understand.
3.8 Validity

Validity is a significant key to effective research (Cohen et al., 2011) as it is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are produced from a piece of research (Bryman, 2004). Wilkinson (2000) defines validity as “relates broadly to the extent to which the measure achieves its aim, i.e. the extent to which an instrument measures what it claims to measure, or tests what it is intended to test” (p. 42). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state that the issues in validity include the characteristics of the interviewer, interviewee and the substantive content of the questions, for example, interviewers’ attitudes, judgments, and anticipations, and tendency to see the respondent in their own image. This can include the interviewers’ tendency to pursue answers that favour their preconceived ideas, their respondent’s misunderstanding of the question and the misunderstanding of the respondent’s answers. Validity of data collection and data analysis can be ensured through authenticity, credibility, trustworthiness, and integrity (Bryman, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 2005). Bryman (2008) suggests that validity can be improved through careful sampling, suitable instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatment of the data. It is also important that the researcher is confident in the elements of the research plan, data obtaining, data analysing, and interpretation. To achieve greater validity, it is important to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible.

In this qualitative research, the perceptions of teachers, TAs and TAs supervisors’ regarding the roles of TAs were investigated through interviews and largely open-ended questionnaires. Issues of authenticity and credibility were addressed in this study through the recording of the original data and the confidential storage of accurate typescripts (Cohen et al., 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 2005). All the interviews in this study were audiotaped and transcribed in order to offer participants a chance to check for precision, and their response was requested so that the degree of consistency was sustained. Interviews were transcribed by the interviewer herself to facilitate the consistency of the interpretation and an understanding of both the tone of the voice and body language evidenced in the interview and the words they were speaking.
3.9 Reliability

Golafshani (2003) describes reliability as “the extent to which results are consistent over time” (p. 1). She further explains that an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable. Therefore reliability refers to a test which consistently measures whatever it seeks to. Reliability issues in interviews and questionnaires may include unclear instruction from the researcher and non-consistency in the respondents answer (Gay et al., 2006). In this research, clear instructions were given to all the participants, both verbal and written. Also, the researcher ensured that the methods used to collect data were consistently applied, and that data were recorded in the identical way in all settings where the research was completed. Moreover, clear reporting of the procedures and protocols of research have been written, including the methods of selecting participants, protocols for data collection and the data analysis techniques.

One procedure of checking reliability of interviews and questionnaires is internal consistency. Internal consistency can be checked by rephrasing and repeating the same topic in the interviews and questionnaires (Ary, 2006). The more consistent the responses from the respondents, the higher the rate of reliability will be. Therefore the researcher made sure that the important issues of this research were asked in different ways to check the consistency of the participants. Bryman (2012) argues that to achieve reliability and objectivity it is important that the researcher does not allow “personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research” (p. 392). Thus, the data collection and analysis has minimal of the researcher’s opinions and views of performance, which includes only data that was contributed by the participants.
3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are the moral principles that control behaviour (Savin-Baden & Claire, 2013). Ethical issues exist in any kind of research because the research method creates tension between the aims of research to make generalizations for the benefit of others, and the privileges of participants to preserve privacy. The protection of human participants in any research study is vital (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). The Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) describes seven ethics principles that are considered to be important. These are: informed and voluntary consent, respect for rights and confidentiality and preservation of anonymity, minimisation of harm, cultural and social sensitivity, limitation of deception, respect for intellectual and cultural property ownership, avoidance of conflict of interest and research design adequacy. Thus, each of them was taken into account before conducting the interviews and questionnaires (Cohen et al., 2000). In this study, the researcher sought informed and voluntary consent by the use of covering letters to all respondents, explaining the purpose and breadth of the research, and requesting their participation in it without duress or coercion.

In this research the consent forms were very specific about the protocols and stated that through this research no harm would be done to any participant in any way (physical or emotional etc.); participation by all the teachers and teacher aides was voluntary; they could choose not to answer any particular question and could stop the interview at any time. They were ensured that their identity and replies would be held in the strictest confidence. Tolich and Davidson (1999) state that the researcher’s responsibility does not finish once the data has been analysed but it remains even after the research has been completed and published. Therefore the storage of the data is carefully organised so only authorised people have access to it. He also suggests that videotapes or audios which can reveal someone’s identity should be destroyed after the conclusion of the research. In this study, the researcher has avoided deceit, and has analysed and reported the data authentically and will destroy the audio tapes five years after the completion of this research.
3.11 Summary

This chapter has summarised the methodological approach used to conduct this study into the roles of teacher aides in different primary schools. The reasons for choosing a qualitative approach have been defined and substantiated with reference to the literature. The two methods used for data collection, open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews have also been justified in relation to the study. Aspects of validity and reliability relevant to the collection and analysis of data have been examined. The ethical issues relating to this study have been identified and the approaches in which these have been addressed.

Chapter Four will provide findings from the analysis of the semi structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire data from primary schools.

4 CHAPTER FOUR

Data Results and Findings

“The role of TAs is to support the learning and understanding of the children in the classroom……they also support me [teacher] with behaviour management, so I can actually teach” IS1T2

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the data results and findings gathered from the seven primary schools in Auckland. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers, six TAs and two TAs’ supervisors from two primary schools. Open-ended questionnaires were completed by 15 teachers, 15 TAs and 5 TAs’
supervisors from five primary schools. The research design focused on investigating the role of teacher aides in different primary schools. Therefore, the perspectives of teachers, teacher aides and teacher aides’ supervisors have been taken into account.

The data results from both the interview and the open-ended questionnaire have identified and contributed new knowledge about the role of teacher aides in the primary schools. Research findings will be presented in three parts. Part 1 will have the results of the questionnaires. Part 2 will provide the results of the interviews. Part 3 will summarise all the main themes gathered from part 1 and part 2. In this chapter, some of the data is presented in the form of graphs and tables to summarise the main points.

Figure 2: Outline of the data results and findings
4.2 Part 1: Section 1

Results of teacher aides' questionnaires

Interestingly, 14 out of the 15 TAs who completed the questionnaires for this study were women. There were six TAs who were in the age group 50 – 59, six TAs 40 - 49, two TAs between 30 - 39 and one TA was under 25.

The number of years teaching as a TA varies across the schools. There were two TAs who were new to this field and had been teaching for less than a year. Nine TAs had been in this job between 1 - 5 years, three TAs had been teaching for 11 - 15 years and one TA was in the field for more than 16 years.

4.2.1 Training and qualification of teacher aides

![Qualification of TAs from five different primary schools](image)

Figure 3: Qualification of TAs from five different primary schools
The above graph shows that TAs from five different primary schools have different levels of qualification. TAs’ qualifications vary between high school certificates, certificate in teacher aiding and a teaching diploma. There were only two TAs who had qualification higher than a bachelor’s degree. Thus no qualification pattern can be seen.

When questioned whether the TAs had received any training on how to work effectively with teachers, mixed answers were received. All the TAs from QS3 (Questionnaire School 3) mentioned they did receive training whereas all the TAs from QS4 said that they did not receive any training on working effectively with teachers. Four TAs from the other three schools said they have received training yet five TAs highlighted they did not receive any training.

![Number of classes that TAs work at each school](image)

**Figure 4: Number of TAs working in each school**

Regarding how many classes a TA is assigned to, no pattern is identified. In school 2 (QS2), one TA is working in one classroom whereas the other two TAs are working in three different classrooms. In school 4 (QS4), two TAs are working in more than
five classrooms. There is also one TA who is not assigned to any classroom but has been given an independent role to work with students.

4.2.2 Roles and responsibilities of TAs

The major role illustrated by TAs is to support the students’ learning. They either work with a group of students or give individual sessions. One TA said “one to one support to my 9 year old boy student” (QS1TA2). Another TA said that she works “on either 1:1 or small group basis” (QS2TA3). Some TAs are helping students with their literacy while others are helping in numeracy. There are also a few TAs who help in both numeracy and literacy. QS2TA2 said that she helps children with “alphabetic, alphabetic sounds and maths”. Another TA quoted “I help students with special needs in numeracy and literacy” (QS4TA3). TAs apply different strategies for students to enhance their learning, “I apply various strategies that help the students to learn and manage their behaviour” (QS5TA2).

TAs are also responsible for making sure that the class environment is safe for students to learn, as well as helping students with behavioural issues with their social skills to enrich their learning. However, a TA role extends to do anything that is required to be done around the classroom or school as requested. TAs often give a helping hand to the class teacher to reduce their extra activities. “I am involved in many aspects of the school, fitting in where there is a need” (QS4TA3).

Seven TAs from five different primary schools explained that there have been substantial changes to their role over the years. The data of this study shows that the more experience a TA has, the more responsibilities are given to her. As stated by TA2 from QS4 “Last year I assisted students in literacy (reading) while this year I've been given numeracy target group”. Another TA said that she can now take a group of students outside of the classroom to teach. TA1 from QS2 explained that she previously looked after ESOL students but this year she had also been given the role of looking after the special needs students. TA2 from QS4 illustrated that she had to learn strategies related to the latest educational technology as her assigned child had been funded with an iPad. Therefore, she is learning how to work best with this
technology. Other six TAs who completed the questionnaire indicated their roles had not changed this year. The remaining two TAs elaborated that they were new to this job so this question does not apply to them.

Figure 5: Number of roles explained to TAs in different Schools

The above graph shows that two TAs from School 1 (QS1) said ‘Yes’ their roles and responsibilities were explained when they started their job whereas one TA said ‘No’. In School 2 (QS2) and School 3 (QS3), two of the TAs answered ‘Yes’ but one TA from each school said they were given brief instructions. As for School 4 (QS4) and School 5 (QS5), all the TAs commented that their roles and responsibilities were explained to them.

TAs also pointed out that different staff members assign roles to them. In some schools more than two members of the staff assign the roles to the TAs. For example, the assistant principal, SENCO member, ESOL and class teachers.
4.2.3 Difficulties of the TAs job

As all the TAs are from different backgrounds and have different qualifications and life skills, the difficulties they face in their job are different too. Time is a big issue for many TAs. They complained they do not have enough time to work with students and to communicate with the class teachers. “Finding time to liaise with teacher” is difficult for QS4, TA2, whereas QS1, TA1 discussed that she does not have “enough time with students”.

Others find it hard to mould themselves in every role which is given to them. One of the TAs explained that sometimes the instructions given by the teacher for a particular student do not match the level of the student’s understanding. Therefore, the activity becomes a challenge for the TA to teach. Another TA explained that sometimes teachers want them to move on from one activity to the other yet they feel that students still need more time with the current activity. Consequently, the TA becomes frustrated. TAs also complained that they have to adjust when placed in a different environment and be ready for any changes to their plan at any time. Another TA illustrated that she would like to be involved in other subjects as well, not just in literacy and numeracy as she feels she is not being utilised to her full potential. TAs also said it is hard to concentrate on the assigned child as they keep getting interrupted by the rest of the class.

Students’ behaviour is a challenge for both teachers and TAs. As one of them said “students’ aggressive behaviour” is difficult to deal with (QS1TA2) yet another explained that it is “hard to settle them” when they are very hyper (QS1TA3). Some of the TAs said that they are not getting paid enough for the amount of work they do.
The above bar graph shows all the TAs from the School 1 (QS1) are very satisfied with their job; all the TAs from School 2 (QS2) are somewhat satisfied with their job. For Schools 3, 4 and 5 (QS3, QS4, and QS5) one TA was very satisfied with her job yet another said that she was somewhat satisfied with this job. No TAs said that they were ‘not very satisfied’ or ‘not at all satisfied’ with their jobs. Therefore, all the TAs were satisfied with their jobs. However, they pointed out that there are some amendments that need to be made in the TA system to improve New Zealand’s primary schools education.

4.2.4 Relationships between teachers and TAs

The results of this study show that overall the relationship between TAs and teachers is very good. TAs described that there is a sense of team work, teachers have an open door policy, and they can discuss anything regarding children's learning at any time. Although some of the TAs did mention that even though teachers welcome them any time, often they are so busy that it is difficult for them to give the TAs enough time for discussion.
With regard to the feedback on the TAs work, many TAs responded positively and explained that they do receive regular feedback from the class teachers. They also said that during the feedback they discuss the students' progress. Some of them complained however that feedback is usually very brief due to a shortage of time. TAs also receive feedback from the SENCO members or their assistant principal, though this feedback is either monthly, term based or annually.

4.2.5 Feedback to improve the TA system

In regard to the improvement of the TA system in New Zealand’s primary schools many suggestions were received from the TAs. TAs emphasised that they need more time with class teachers or associate principals to discuss the students' progress. They also believe that they should have the opportunity to have meetings with other TAs so they can discuss their problems and solutions with each other. TA1 from QS5 reinforced this saying “an opportunity to catch up with the class teacher to discuss planning, progress, feedback etc., would be really useful”. Another one explained that “maybe a TA meeting once a month, with all the TAs in the school to give feedback on the students” would be useful (QS3TA3).

Many TAs showed interest in more professional development courses so they can improve their strategies and knowledge on a regular basis. This would make it easier for them to understand the curriculum better and help the students more effectively. TAs also pointed out that training is an issue, as one of the TAs said “training is a biggy as many TAs get the job with none and are thrown in the deep end” (QS3TA1).

4.3 Part 1: Section2

Results of teachers' questionnaires

There were 14 female and one male teacher who completed the questionnaire for this study. There were four teachers who were in the age group 30 to 39, three
teachers between 40 - 49 and seven teachers between 50 - 59. There is one teacher who is between the age group 25 - 30.

All the teachers who completed the questionnaires for this study, have the experience of teaching for more than three years. There are three teachers who have experience of 3 - 5 years and more than 20 years, respectively. There are also two teachers who have been teaching for 6 - 10 years and one teacher who has been teaching for 16 - 20 years.

Figure 7: Number of teachers working in different schools

No pattern can be seen from the above graph regarding how many TAs are working with each teacher in different primary schools. In School 1 (QS1) one TA is assigned to each classroom teacher. In School 2 (QS2) Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 are working with one TA, however Teacher 3 is working with two TAs. In School 3 (QS3) Teacher 1 is working with two TAs and Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 are working with 4 TAs. In School 4 (QS4) Teacher 1 is working with one TA, Teacher 2, is working with two and Teacher 3 is working with three TAs. Lastly, in School 5 (QS5) Teacher 1 is working with one TA and Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 are working with two TAs.
Figure 8: Number of students requiring extra help from the TAs in a classroom

There is no pattern with regard to how many students each teacher has in their classes who require extra help from the TAs. The above graph shows that there are five teachers who in their classes each have one student who requires extra support in his learning from a TA. There is also one classroom which has two students who require extra help from a TA. There are three classrooms that have 3-5 and 6-7 students respectively, who require extra help with their learning. There is also one classroom that has 8-10 students who need extra help and lastly there are 3 classrooms that contain more than ten students who require additional support from a TA.

4.3.1 Training of teachers, regarding TAs

Not many teachers have received training regarding how to work effectively with TAs either during their studies or on the job. Only a few teachers were explained the roles of TAs and how to use TAs in specific areas for students' learning, and that was only when a student with a learning difficulty was introduced to the classroom. Most of the teachers who participated in the questionnaires agreed that they would have appreciated the training when they started their jobs. They described that it would have been helpful to know the potential of the TAs, what their roles were and how they could have used them in a way to maximise the students’ learning. They also agreed that having some training would make their relationships more positive. As
one of the teachers explained, “I think its [training] very important. At least we will know what we are supposed to expect from TAs and how can we support each other” (QS4T3).

4.3.2 Roles of TAs from teachers’ perspective

TAs have a wide range of skills that are being used in New Zealand’s primary school classrooms to support the teachers and students’ learning. Teachers find TAs very helpful in their classrooms and appreciate the support they get from them. Many teachers reinforced that TAs are providing one to one tutoring to the students who need extra help. Once the teacher has given the lesson to the class, the TA then can reinforce the lesson to the students who had trouble understanding the first time. One of the teachers quoted “it becomes double dose for the students” (QS4T1). TAs not only help the students one to one but also work with the group of students that teachers have assigned to them. Primary schools are running many learning programmes for students who need extra aid in their learning. These programs cannot run without the TAs support. In those programs teachers give plans to the TAs and TAs then implement those plans for the students. “TAs are great support people to help us with learning needs of students. ESOL students have shown excellent progress with one to one support” (QS4T3). ESOL teachers cannot imagine running the classes without TAs. Teachers agreed that it would be difficult to teach the whole class without the TAs especially if they have students with special learning needs. Many teachers feel guilty for not helping all the students in their classes, but they are satisfied when a TA is there to help their students. T2 from QS1 said when teachers get extra support from TAs they “do not feel as torn as they can’t meet students’ needs on their own”.

When TAs are not helping students in their learning or when teachers are giving instructions, TAs can simply manage the students who can interrupt the class leaning. One of the teachers said that when she has a TA in her class “I can relax and not be concerned about behaviour [students]” (QS1T1). With regard to having a TA, one teacher said that the main thing is to have another pair of hands and eyes in the classrooms. She further added, TAs support us in what we do and take any
overload we have and help us in supervising the students during independent work time. All teachers emphasised that the main purpose of TAs in their schools is to help the students in their learning. TAs are being used in different environments to help different learners. Teachers explained that the main priority of TAs is to reinforce students’ learning and use different methods and strategies to achieve that. One of the teachers said that TAs should help students in their learning because they play a supportive and important role in the classroom with slow learners. However they can be used for clerical roles depending on the situation and needs of a school. Some teachers are using TAs for non-academic purposes but they explained that they cannot leave the classroom so they have to ask TAs to help them. They also said that “teacher aide’ means aiding the teachers therefore they can ask TAs to play other roles, but their main role is to support students’ learning.

With regard to the question of how class teachers assign roles to TAs, most of the teachers explained that they do not assign the roles to the TAs as it is management’s job. However, if a TA is assigned to some particular student then the teacher instructs them in the right direction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles and responsibilities of TAs: Explained to class teachers by the managment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: Roles and responsibilities of TAs explained to class teachers

The majority of teachers said ‘yes’ they were explained the roles of a TA by the school management however some of them said ‘no’. There are two teachers who did not answer this question.
Figure 10: TAs helping teachers in their responsibilities in different schools

Fourteen (14) teachers from different primary schools responded that TAs are helping them in their responsibilities. One of the teachers did not answer this question.

Figure 11: Teachers’ response regarding TAs helping students in their learning

Fourteen out of fifteen teachers from different primary schools commented that TAs do help students in their learning. One of the teachers did not answer this question.
4.3.3 Training and qualification of TAs: Teachers perspective

Surprisingly, many teachers agreed that TAs do not need a formal qualification however they do require more pre-service and in-service training. Teachers emphasised that TAs need the right skills and training to do their job efficiently. They said that most of the TAs are parents and usually have the basic skills but it would be extremely helpful if all the TAs have the same training and know the basic strategies to work with the students. As one of the teachers quoted “I feel that TAs need to be trained because they need to have the knowledge of dealing with the students to support them better” (QS4T1). Teachers also suggested that professional development (PD) courses on a regular basis are also important for TAs. They further explained that if as a teacher we need PD then it should also be provided to the TAs as they are also involved in the learning of students. Teachers also agreed that most of the TAs are open to new learning and learn a lot from them on the job.

4.3.4 Teachers Working Relationship with TAs

Many teachers described their relationship with TAs as positive, open and friendly. Teachers were very happy with their TAs as they listened to the teachers’ instructions and followed them. TAs also respect the teachers and help them to support the students’ learning. Teachers acknowledged the skills of their TAs and let them lead where they think is appropriate. As one of the teachers said “my current TA is very experienced and therefore has the freedom to use her initiative” (QS3T2). However, the researcher believes there are a few teachers who have some issues with the TAs as they did not give clear answers regarding their relationship with the TAs. One of them said “I would like to think great” another one said “same as any other staff member”. The rest of the teachers who completed the questionnaire described their relationship as flexible, positive, very good, great etc.

Time is an issue for teachers as well: many of them said that they do not have enough time to communicate with TAs. They also stated that finding the time to do separate planning for a TA is difficult. Teachers have described that different TAs
have different capabilities and it is difficult when one TA works very well with some instructions yet others require more time and training. “Having one that is unsure of themselves can be time consuming” (QS3T2).

Nevertheless, all the teachers appreciate the work and effort of TAs that they put into their classes. Teachers try to give verbal and non-formal feedback to the TAs on a regular basis and explained that even if it is a small “Thank You”, we try to say it to them every now and then.

### 4.3.5 Improvement of the TA system

With regard to the improvement of the TA system in New Zealand’s primary schools many recommendations were given by teachers. They have suggested that training for TAs is very important to enhance their understanding of the curriculum to more effectively help the students. They also illustrated that TAs have the potential to do a lot if the right guidance is given to them, for example, proper training and professional development courses. One teacher brought up the issue that TAs should be clear in their roles from management, and teachers should not assume that they know everything. Many teachers argued that each room should have a TA of their own; however they showed their concern regarding the funding of TAs from the Ministry of Education.

### 4.4 Part1: Section3

**Results of TAs supervisors' questionnaires**

According to most TAs’ supervisors, more than ten TAs are working in their schools. However there are a few schools that have five to seven TAs.
4.4.1 Roles and responsibilities of TAs from TAs supervisors’ perspective

Regarding the question about who assigns the roles to TAs' many different answers were received. In some schools more than two school members were assigning roles to the TAs. Mostly, SENCO, ESOL, and assistant principals assign roles regarding the children's learning; some roles are assigned by other staff members such as the school principal and class teachers. It has also been found that all the schools have different responsibilities for their TAs. However all of them are utilizing TAs to support the students’ learning. Their second priority is to help the classroom teachers and then help in school wide activities.

4.4.2 Training and qualification of TAs

![Importance of TAs qualification in their jobs](image)

**Figure 12: Importance of TAs qualification in their jobs**

Many TA supervisors expressed that TAs’ education is important for their job; however it is not a barrier that can lead to major issues for students learning.
All the TA supervisors strongly agreed that pre-service and in-service training is a crucial part in the life of a TA. They did not only emphasise pre job training but also highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development for TAs. One of the TA supervisors explained that “[training is] very important for a TA to continue with their professional development…” (QS4), another supervisor highlighted that training is important “so they can support the student they are working with” (QS1).

When asked whether TAs are helping classroom teachers, all the supervisors agreed that they are helping. However many explained that TAs’ helpfulness depends on many circumstances, such as “if they have positive relationship with the class teacher” (QS5), and their training and work experience. One of the supervisors said that they are helpful if “they have given clear, specific” instructions (QS2).

4.4.3 Relationship of TAs with class teachers: TAs supervisors’ perspective

In regard to the relationship between classroom teachers and TAs many TAs’ supervisors’ responded that the relationship is good however it depends on different circumstances, “varies, and depends on personalities of both teachers and teacher aides” (QS3). However, most of the supervisors have described an ideal relationship. The researcher believes that she could have asked the question more clearly. For example, describe the relationship between teachers and TAs at your school.
Figure 14: TAs helping students in their learning

The figure 14 above shows that all the TAs supervisors agreed that TAs are helping students in their learning. In response to the question ‘Are TAs helping students to improve their learning’ many TAs’ supervisors said that they are helping but the help varies from time to time. One of the supervisors elaborated that “yes, but more importantly they are allowing children to have access to the curriculum” (QS3), others explained they are helpful for children if “a teacher aide follows the learning steps as outlined in the plan” (QS5). Another supervisor said “yes, to some extent” (QS2), yet another explained “in most cases- yes” (QS4).

4.4.4 Suggestions to improve the TAs system

Figure 15: Suggestions to improve the TAs system
In regard to the improvement of the TA system in New Zealand’s primary school many suggestions were given by TAs’ supervisors. All TAs’ supervisors agreed that more funding is required to improve the TA system in primary schools. They all also suggested that ongoing professional development is crucial to improve the TA system. Two of the supervisors suggested that training should also be provided to the teachers on how to best handle the TAs. In other suggestions, one of the supervisors said that there should be one person handling the TAs in the whole school rather than three to four staff members.

4.5 Part 2: Section1

Results of teacher aides’ interviews

Six TAs who were interviewed from two different schools were mature, between 30 to 50 years of age, and had been working for more than three years. Five of them were female and one of them was a male TA.

4.5.1 Training of TAs

All the TAs from both schools explained that they did not receive any training regarding how to work with class teachers. However most of the TAs mentioned that they did receive some basic training regarding how to work with students when they started as TAs. Later on in their career some TAs have received different training related to their teaching. As one of the TAs said that “in my two years, one of them [training] is language intervention” (IS1 TA1). Another TA explained “I did the Pacific course here at school, by someone from the Ministry” (IS2 TA2). Yet, there are a few with no training and are learning from their own mistakes and experience.

4.5.2 Roles and Responsibilities of TAs

All the TAs have different roles in different classes however most of the roles are oriented around the students’ learning.
Table 1: Responsibilities of TAs in two primary schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School1</th>
<th>School2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TA1</strong></td>
<td>• Looking after a child with Autism</td>
<td>• Working with year five and year six students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Working alongside him in group setting or individually</td>
<td>• Working with the group of students with their maths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supporting him in his reading and writing</td>
<td>• Working one to one with different students to help them in their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Helping him to develop social skills</td>
<td>• Looking after the library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Helping two children with learning intervention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supporting their language building through their reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TA2</strong></td>
<td>• Working in several classes</td>
<td>• Working with the group of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Helping the targeted and slow students</td>
<td>• Helping in Samoan bilingual class all day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Looking after two Autistic students from two different classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Basically do anything that is required” TA2S1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TA3</strong></td>
<td>• Working with the group of students who need help in their mathematics</td>
<td>• Assigned to one special need student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Working with groups of students who need help in their reading</td>
<td>• Looking after her and helping her in her studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2.1 Roles of TAs

Some TAs set the goals for children with the collaboration of classroom teachers yet others just received the timetable with their responsibilities on it. Once the goals are set their role is to provide the resources for the students to achieve the goals. It has been found that some teachers provide the resources yet others let TAs find them. TAs are also responsible to note down the progress of children so they can discuss this later on with teachers. One of the TAs described that TAs have to do everything that is required to “make their [children] life as easy as possible so they can learn” (IS1 TA2). TAs also pointed out that usually two different staff members assign roles to them, for example class teacher and SENCO or class teacher and TAs’ supervisor.

4.5.3 TAs: Satisfying aspects of the job

All the TAs from both schools illustrated that the most satisfying aspect of their job is to help students in their learning. TA1 from IS1 said “when I see children are celebrating the learning they did with you” is a proud moment for her. Another TA said helping the students who need a gentle push “is most satisfying” aspect of this job, moreover “the whole thing is awesome” (IS1 TA3).

4.5.4 TAs: Frustrating aspects of the job

Most of the TAs have different obstacles in their job. Three of the TAs explained that they get frustrated when special need students start to hit them or yell at them. They further explained that they are learning strategies to manage the children’s behaviour but sometime it gets out of control. Two of the TAs mentioned that sometimes it feels like a student has taken five steps forward and eight steps back. Also, sometimes TAs have clashes with the teachers’ instructions as teachers want them to move on to the next topic with their assigned student yet the TA thinks that they need more time with the previous topic, and it is a frustrating situation for TAs. Two of the TAs stated that looking for the right resources is frustrating and time consuming. TA1
from IS1 said that it’s frustrating “that there aren’t many of us…. It’s just you can see the potential the more we could do if there were more of us”.

### 4.5.5 Changes in the role over the years

Most of the TAs agreed that their role has changed over the years. TA2 from IS1, who has been working for over 21 years as a TA said that “we get a lot more responsibilities now than we ever did when we started teacher aiding”.

TA1 from IS1 said that she is enjoying her role more compared to before. This is because rather than assisting a teacher she is assigned to specific children “I think it is more rewarding for me because [I] get to know my child really well”.

TA3 from IS2 explained that as your experience increases “you tend to take on more responsibilities and there are no boundaries to your job”. She also pointed out that when someone first starts this job, they are not sure of their capabilities and don’t know much about teaching, however, as the time passes they learn more and take on more responsibilities.

### 4.5.6 Relationship with the class teachers

All the TAs asserted that their relationship with the class teachers is positive. As some of them described that “we got a really collaborative relationship” (IS1 TA1), “absolutely amazing; we are treated equally with the teachers of this school” (IS1 TA2) “just awesome” (IS2 TA3). All the TAs mentioned that their relationship with the class teacher is strong and respectful and if they ever have any problem with the teacher they would speak directly to the teacher to solve the problem. Also most of the TAs emphasised that they learn a lot from the teachers and appreciate their help and support. “I like learning from them [teachers]” (IS1 TA1).

Another TA admired how teachers know the strengths and the weaknesses of their students as this helps TAs to teach the students better. Another TA said that she and her teacher both learn from each other.
However some TAs feel that their skills are not being utilised as much. TA1 from IS1 explained “sometimes it’s frustrating for me personally because sometimes I feel like I am underutilised”, another TA said that working alongside a new teacher is always difficult as you do not know her teaching style and have to figure it out “every teacher is different and they have different expectations and needs from you [TA]” (IS1 TA1).

TAs strongly agreed that they are helping students learn, however some students are learning more than others. One of the TAs said that if the student is not learning then one cannot point the fingers at the TA but have to look at the system. Has the TA been given proper training, does TA have resources and what is TA's relationship with the class teacher? These facets all count towards the child’s learning. A few TAs quoted the following regarding helping the students:

“I am making a difference; otherwise I won’t keep doing it” (IS2 TA1)

“if you talk to our boss or colleagues they will tell you how helpful we are” (IS2 TA2)

“if TAs are not helping the students it will depend on the environment” (IS1 TA1).

4.5.7 Improving TA system in New Zealand

The TAs said that their team management is very supportive and if they are unsure of some strategies, they will be explained. However, they all also agreed that the Ministry of Education should introduce some training for them so they all can stand on one ladder. Having basic training will remove many barriers from their jobs. Teacher Aides “need more training; they need to be more professional” (IS1 TA3). And also “there is a need for some standardised training” (IS2 TA1).

4.5.8 TAs advice to the future TAs

Most of the TAs advised that one has to be patient in this job; you cannot achieve anything without being patient, whether you are teaching a student or learning from the teachers. Others also mentioned that you get to know your teachers well; if you have a good relationship with them then you can do your job better. One of the TAs
also said that at the end of the day the aim of this job is to help the students in their learning.

4.5.9 TAs advice to future teachers

Most of the TAs suggested that teachers should communicate well with them and explain things explicitly. They also said, use us to our full potential, and respect us so we can respect you. Another one added “Just remember they [TA] can’t read your mind, give them clear instructions and develop good relationships” (IS2TA2).

4.6 Part 2: Section2

Results of teacher interviews

All the teachers who were interviewed from both schools were mature females over the age of 30.

4.6.1 Number of children in classes who require help from TAs

![Diagram of students requiring extra support form TAs in two schools](image)

Figure 16: Students requiring extra support form TAs in two schools
The interview results from six different teachers show that there are many students in different classes who require extra support from TAs. The highest number is 9 students from School 1 (IS1) with Teacher 2, the lowest number is one child who has special needs. However, this class is for new entrants where any support from a TA is appreciated. All the teachers from both schools are working with two TAs at the moment except Teacher 3 from School 2. She is working with one TA.

### 4.6.2 Training given to teachers regarding TAs

No special training was given to any of the teachers in School 1 (IS1) however one teacher did receive some general training when she was teaching in England. Another teacher mentioned that the TA supervisor had given her brief instructions on how to utilize TAs in her class. No teacher from School 2 (IS2) has received any special training either; however all of them have been working with TAs since they have started teaching and have built their own systems to work with TAs.

Table 2: Role of a TA from teachers’ perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IS1</th>
<th>IS2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>Helping students with their learning and record the learning data</td>
<td>Teacher gives the instructions to the whole class and then assigns TA to work with the children who require extra help or with a child with special need to help them in their learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6.3 Training and qualification for TAs

All the teachers agreed that TAs need more training or need to have professional development classes on a regular basis. They said that as a teacher, if they have PD then why not TAs as they work alongside the teachers. Teachers also stated that once they all have the same training it will be easier for us to know where they all stand and where they need help. “I totally agree they should do [PD] that and everybody should be on the same page” (IS1 T2). However teachers were not in favour of high qualifications for the TAs, they said the TAs system can improve a lot with proper training, although they agree that basic literacy and numeracy skills are compulsory.

4.6.4 Instructions to TAs: a difficult phase

Different teachers have developed different ways to engage the TAs in their classes. Some take a few minutes off from their teaching time to give quick instructions to the TAs at the beginning of the lesson. Others have the notebook rule, where they write
instructions for the TAs. Once the TA comes in the room, they quietly work with the assigned students and write their comments and leave for the next class. The teacher later on reads the comments by the TAs. However if there is trouble TAs can ask a teacher. Later, when teachers have a meeting with them they can discuss what went well and what did not work. Some teachers ask the TA supervisor to look after their class for 15 minutes so they can teach the TAs the strategies they want them to teach the students.

Most of the teachers have explained that time is an issue to have proper communication with TAs and would appreciate more detailed conversations with TAs regarding children’s learning.

4.6.5 Determining the responsibilities for TAs

For most teachers, TAs’ responsibilities depend on their personalities and their skill. That is, if a TA is good at writing then they are asked to help students with their writing, and if a TA is “soft” and cannot manage the behavioural children then she is asked to do something else she is good at. T3 from IS1 explained “actually it depends on the capability like how well they can manage kids”. For some teachers they have to teach the TAs the appropriate skills and strategies so they can help students. “A TA will only gain more knowledge and experience while working alongside a teacher who is willing” explained another teacher (IS2 T1).

4.6.6 Change of role for Teachers

For some teachers having a TA has eased pressure for them, for some they have extra hands to work with children. Teachers have expressed that knowing the child who needs extra help is being looked after is a good feeling. When children with challenging behaviours are being looked after by the TAs, then teachers can look after more children in less time. So overall, having TAs in the classroom has made teaching easier for teachers.

All the teachers are very happy with the TAs they have; they described them as helpful, caring and good listeners. All the teachers stated that they never had any
massive difficulty in their relationship with the TAs, if there was something they can always talk to the TA directly and this strategy usually works best. “I really think that most of the time I actually am able to approach the person first” (IS1 T1). Another teacher said if there was trouble with the TA, first she would talk to the TA herself to solve the problem, she also stated that we both, teacher and TA, are in the classroom to help the students and that’s what we should do.

4.6.7 Anxiety while working with TAs

All the teachers explained that there are no big issues they have with TAs but only small hiccups which are in every relationship. One teacher explained that she feels guilty for not giving them proper time to explain things better; another teacher said that there is nothing that causes her anxiety about TA, “you know a respect given is a respect received” (IS2 T1). For some teachers they described that sometimes when they have explained a strategy to a TA and asked them to help the child, they don’t do it properly. This causes them anxiety, but they said it only happens rarely as they do ask TAs that if they don’t understand something they can ask again rather than teaching the wrong stuff.

4.6.8 Satisfying aspects of TAs

For most teachers having another adult in the class helping them is very satisfying. They described that they feel very joyous when the TA comes and tells them that one of the children has mastered the task they have been working on. The teacher then knows that those children who need extra support are getting somewhere. One of the teachers said that knowing that they are always there to support and give quality time to children is very satisfying. “I tend to have like most teachers the tricky kids, and that’s really nice that you have somebody else in there with you with the tricky kids” (IS1 T2). Teachers think of TAs as a team “The achievements, at the end of week, at the end of the term and at the end of the year, knowing that we have worked together as a team and the child’s learning has grown because of that” (IS2 T1).
All the teachers strongly agreed that TAs in their schools are very helpful and are supporting the student in their learning, many teachers also suggested that if a TA is not helping the students in their learning then it is not the TAs fault.

“if you are not an effective teacher, you can’t use your TA in an effective way” (IS1 T2).

“if its [TAs] not helping with child’s learning then obviously teacher is not doing a good job” (IS2 T1).

They also argued that TAs work under the management of a classroom teacher therefore teachers need to have an organised system which utilises TAs to help in students’ learning. One of the teachers said TAs are adults and you don’t have to spend too much time on them to explain things, and after some time they just do their work without any instructions. Teachers reinforced that TAs are helping and they deserve more respect and guidance. Teachers also mentioned that it would be great if every class has a TA of their own, as the number of students with a diverse range of culture is increasing in New Zealand’s primary schools.

4.6.9 Advice to future teachers

Most teachers advised that it is important to know the personality of a TA as well as getting to know their skills. Teachers understand that they have to be organised and be ready to benefit from the helping hands from TAs. “You have to have a system in place, and you need to share that system with them” (IS1 T2). One of the teachers said to take it easy with them, as they are not teachers and cannot do everything, and do not give them too many tasks at the same time. Other teachers said, give them respect, clear instructions, and be specific.

4.7 Part 2: Section3

Results of Teacher aides’ supervisors’ interviews are summarised in the table below
Table 3: Interviews of TAs Supervisors from two different schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Supervisor 1</th>
<th>Supervisor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many TAs at your School?</td>
<td>In total 10, some are working part time some full time</td>
<td>In total 7, some are working part time some full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who assigns the roles to TAs?</td>
<td>School principal and I</td>
<td>I do, with the collaboration of teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the main responsibilities of TAs?</td>
<td>1. Help students’ in their learning</td>
<td>1. Look after children with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Follow teachers instructions</td>
<td>2. Help in literacy and numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Help in school activities</td>
<td>3. Help in school activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Look after resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are TAs helping Students or Teachers?</td>
<td>They are there for students but need to follow the instruction of a teacher</td>
<td>They support the teachers so children can learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are staff comfortable having TAs around?</td>
<td>Yes they are</td>
<td>Yes, they love them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are relationships between TAs and teachers?</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there job training for TAs?</td>
<td>Yes, however everyone is different and they require different training</td>
<td>Yes, different children have different needs, so training should be according to the individual child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is relevant education for TAs?

If they have an understanding of a child's behaviour they fit in the role.

If they have the right skills then they can do this job even better than highly educated people.

| What improvements are needed to TAs system? | 1. Good relationships between teachers and TAs | 1. More funding  
2. Good training and PD | 2. More PD and training sessions |

### 4.8 Part 3: Main themes

The results of questionnaires and interviews have shown that TAs are helping students in their learning. TAs are also sharing the responsibilities of the classroom teachers to reduce their workload. The main themes that have been extracted from the results are training and qualifications, relationships between teachers and TAs, and roles and responsibilities of TAs.

#### 4.8.1 Training and qualifications

All the teachers, TAs and TAs’ supervisors agreed that pre-service and in-service training is very important for TAs. They not only emphasised the training at the beginning of the job of a TA but also on the professional development courses throughout the TA’s career. It was also pointed out that all the TAs should have the same basic training so they all know the same basic knowledge regarding students. Teachers and TAs’ supervisors stressed that it would be prodigious if MoE introduces a basic training course for all the TAs around New Zealand’s primary schools. It will also help teachers to guide TAs better in their everyday routine.

TAs and teachers argued that both of them need some basic training regarding how to work best with each other. Teachers explained that when they are assigned to
new TAs, they spend a few days or weeks to identify the skills they have. TAs expressed that when they work with new class teachers they also have to spend some time to understand their methods and teaching styles. Therefore they both agreed that if they are provided with the right training on how to work best with each other they can both work more effectively and harmoniously.

Regarding the qualifications of TAs, teachers and TAs’ supervisors discussed that TAs do not need high qualifications to fulfil their roles. They argued that TAs need the right training, skills and positive attitudes to help students in their learning. They pointed out that there are a few TAs who hold high qualifications but do not have the right skills and therefore do not help students as much in their learning as non-qualified TAs with the right skills. TAs bring their skills as parents, grandparents or community members who love to help the new generation to learn better.

4.8.2 Relationship between teachers and TAs

Very good feedback has been received from the teachers, TAs and TAs’ supervisors regarding the relationship between the teachers and TAs in New Zealand’s’ primary schools. Most of the TAs agreed that they are well respected in schools by the teachers and the schools’ management. They are treated as equals to the teachers and their opinions are usually counted toward decisions. There are some TAs who feel that they are underutilised and have the abilities to do more than they have been asked for. No big issue was brought out either from the questionnaires or during the interviews regarding the relationship between teachers and TAs. They all commented that they work as a team and their common goal is to help students achieve in their learning.

Teachers and TAs did mention that they never have enough time to discuss the progress of the students. Teachers explained that they feel guilty at times for not giving clear instructions or discussing the progress of the students with TAs due to the lack of time. Lack of time had caused a few misunderstandings between the teachers and TAs. However the issues were resolved in communicating with each other. To solve the issue of time, many teachers have come up with their own
system. Some of the teachers explained that they have placed a diary in their classrooms where they write the instructions for the TAs. Once the TAs come to the classroom, they read the instructions and work with the assigned students, write their feedback and leave the class to go for the next class.

Many of the teachers and TAs stressed that for stronger relationships it is important that they have meetings on a regular basis. During the meetings they can discuss the strategies and difficulties as well as fill out communication gaps.

4.8.3 Roles and responsibilities

The main role which is played by TAs in New Zealand’s primary schools is to support students in their learning. Mainly they help students in literacy and numeracy but they are open to fit any role they are required for in the class. They either work one on one or with a group of students. Some TAs only work with one SEN student whereas others work with more than ten students from different classrooms. TAs also help teachers with students with behaviour difficulties, take care of the sick or injured students, help with morning breakfast and afternoon fruit times. They also are given duties at lunchtime during students’ play time; basically they do everything that they have been asked to do.

Their roles are determined by more than two staff members in the majority of schools. Usually SENCO and/or the assistant principal assign them to students but the class teacher decides what will be their role and responsibility of the day. Every day is different for them as they do different tasks each day.

Most of the TAs clarified that they were not explained their roles when they started their job. They argued that as their experience increases their roles and responsibilities increase as well. Teachers and TAs’ supervisors agreed that if TAs are not helping students in their learning, then one should not lay blame on the TAs. They argued that in this case we need to look at the environment where TAs are teaching, we also need to look at the relationship between the teachers and TAs,
and the skills of those TAs and whether those skills match the students’ needs. They also highlighted to check whether a TA was given full job training or not.
5 Chapter Five

Discussion of the Findings

“In many ways, teaching assistants have been the ‘unsung heroes’ of the classroom for many years, performing a wide variety of learning support and pastoral roles across their working day and week” (Kay, 2005, p. 205)

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to enhance the understanding of the roles of teacher aides in New Zealand’s primary schools. Particularly, the study investigated the role of teacher aides through the eyes of the classroom teacher, the teacher aides, and the teacher aides’ supervisors. This qualitative study has examined the relationship between teachers and teacher aides, the type of tasks teacher aides carry out daily and the contributions the teacher aide makes to the school and classroom. The results of this study show teachers and TAs’ supervisors’ expectations of the teacher aides, and their views of teacher aides as members of the instructional team. The findings were grouped into four themes as follows: Interpretation of TAs role, relevance of job description, challenges faced by TAs during their job and relationships between TAs and teachers.

5.2 Interpretation of TAs role

In this study teachers and TAs have revealed that TAs do not have a specific list of roles to play during their work in primary schools. They can be asked to do anything at any time. One of the TAs said “you have to be ready to do anything” (IS2TA3). The range of roles that TAs play in primary settings differs depending on the schools’
management (Kay, 2005). Briggs and Cunningham (2013) explain that TAs who are new to the job need to understand that TAs’ roles and responsibilities have changed hugely compared to when TAs themselves were in schools. At that time TAs were expected to do clerical work however now they are involved in the learning and progress of students. This study also discloses that as TAs’ experience increases, the number of roles they play in schools also increases. TA3 from IS2 pointed out that as your experience increases “you tend to take on more responsibilities and there are no boundaries to your job”. Kay (2005) highlights that in recent years, TAs have taken on more responsibilities, and are working with a wider range of tasks. However, the major role which is assigned to all the TAs is to enhance students’ learning. On a regular basis, TAs either work one to one with students or groups of students.

This study shows that in some schools more than two staff members assign roles to TAs. It has been found that TA supervisors/ SENCO recognise the targeted students who require extra support in their studies. Then they assign TAs to those students according to their needs. For example if a student is weak in mathematics and requires assistance from a TA, then the TA will assist the student/students during the mathematics class. However when a TA is in the classroom, the class teacher can also ask her to do something which has come up in the classroom. This practice can possibly misguide TAs as they are not spending the time they are supposed to spend with the student they were assigned to. Giangreco (2013) notes that too often TAs are not deployed wisely in classrooms, which then affects TAs roles in supporting students.

Briggs and Cunningham (2013) comment that to deploy TAs effectively, some specific planning and sharing of knowledge is required. In this study, TAs supervisors explain that they deploy TAs according to their students’ needs. Auckland’s primary school teachers try their best to acknowledge the personality and skills of their TAs and, they also advised that the teachers have to be organised and be ready to take advantage of helping hands. “You have to have a system in place, and you need to share that system with them [TAs]” (T2S1). In this research
teachers and TAs complain that due to an increase in complication of pedagogy there are more roles being created in classrooms and there is a need for more TAs in primary schools. However Fox (2003) points out as many TAs are assigned to the different needs of the students, it is the class teacher who has the responsibility to make sure that suitable programmes are planned, followed and monitored.

Thomas et al. (2005) reported that lack of clarity in TAs' roles can lead to stress at work, which could be due to undefined roles or because an individual is unsure about suitable behaviour. Teachers in New Zealand’s primary schools understand the stress of work and suggest that other teachers should take it easy with TAs, as they are not teachers and cannot do everything. They also emphasised the need for clear instructions, and specification of the activities assigned to TAs. Fox (2003) also emphasises that it is essential for teachers to remember that TAs are not teachers and should never be exploited in terms of responsibilities.

5.3 Relevance of job description

This study reveals that TAs do not usually receive any formal job description. Most of the TAs pointed out that their job description was either briefly written or verbally explained to them. It has also been found that not only TAs, but sometimes even class teachers, are unsure of their own job description regarding TAs. TAs argued that they have to mould themselves for every new role given to them and teachers have to guide them in that new role.

The practice Windley school is running in their school regarding TAs has been recognised by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2011b). The school has focused on being clear about what is expected of TAs. The school principal highlighted that the skills of TAs can be utilised in a better way, with a clear description of their jobs. She further explained that with an up to date job description, TAs can prioritise their time around key tasks. The future aim of the Ministry of Education is to implement this practice to every school. Through this study it was
found that at many schools only one TA is assigned to many classes in one day due to lack of funding. Therefore timetables are complex with various roles for TAs. Campbell and Fairbairn (2005) explain if schools have many TAs with complex timetables then the timetable arrangements would be complex too.

The idea of clear roles and instructions for TAs has been pointed out by many researchers (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Parker et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2005; Wallace et al., 2001; Zaki et al., 2009). They reinforce that not describing a clear role can have negative effects on students’ learning. Regarding clear instructions Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) point out that if a teacher lists “help students with math,” that might include correcting and giving grades for work completed, or only correcting work but leaving assignment grades for teacher. It may contain showing the student how to do a math problem or technique the teacher has already explained. It also could include deciding when students can move on to another assignment. They further advise that giving clarification to TAs can make their role easier and less frustrating. In their example job description for TAs, the Ministry of Education (2012) highlights that TAs will work under the direction of the class teacher to support the students who need help in their learning. However, many teachers report they have not received any training either during their study or in the school on how to guide/utilise TAs in their classes.

5.4 Challenges faced by TAs during their job

Through this study the researcher has found that many TAs in Auckland primary schools face different challenges in their roles. These challenges are lack of training for both teachers and TAs, lack of communication between TAs and teachers and limited involvement of TAs in planning and collaboration.
5.4.1 Lack of training for both teachers and TAs

The first major challenge which both teachers and TAs face regarding the TA system is their lack of pre-service and in-service job training. The majority of the TAs had not received any formal training for the tasks they were expected to carry out on a regular basis. All the teaching staff emphasised that the major role of TAs is to enhance the learning of the students; so they are required to have a general knowledge of the curriculum, have an understanding of learning disabilities as well as familiarity with bilingual learning. All of these skills would be enhanced by some basic training either from the school or the Ministry of Education. Burgess and Mayes (2007) stress that the way in which TAs are trained, supported to develop as individual members of staff, and assimilated into the school community, will have an influence not only upon their individual progress but also upon the professional development of those teachers with whom they work closely.

Wallace et al. (2001) highlights that if not trained adequately, TAs assume and follow their own knowledge and skills. In this study most of the TAs were mature women, thus they attended primary school a long time ago. With little or no training, TAs usually base their knowledge on their own previous primary school study. This could be a disadvantage for struggling students as they might learn outdated strategies. During my volunteer work as a TA at a primary school last year, I was working with a year 6 student who did not know his times tables. Since no one gave me any instructions on how to teach times tables I recalled them from my primary years. After a few weeks the class teacher overheard me and then explained that they do not teach students 2x1 2x2, 2x3, we teach as 1x2, 2x2, 3x2. She told me this technique is more logical and helps students relate the mathematics better to the real world. My point is that when proper training and guidance is not provided to the TAs they might teach students material that is old, outdated and sometimes not relevant. This could lead to the failure of TAs support to bring about improved learning for students (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007). It is also very common in New Zealand’s primary schools that TAs are working in more than one classroom. Working in more than one class requires an understanding of the curriculum of each
class level they are working in. It is a difficult task yet teachers appear to expect TAs to be familiar with the curriculum, without acknowledging that they have not discussed the curriculum with TAs. Giangreco (2003) says that most TAs do not have higher levels of qualification, skills, or experience than teachers, especially when it comes to curriculum and instruction. However, referring back to the andragogy that TAs (adults) already have basic knowledge, they just need guidance to perform better in their role.

Through this study, teachers, teacher aides and teacher aides’ supervisors all highlighted the importance of the TAs’ training. Teachers argued that all the TAs should have the same basic training so they do not have to spend time with each TA brushing their basic skills. Giangreco and Broer (2005) favour the training of TAs and explain that training for a TA is desirable and appropriate. TAs also favoured the idea of the ‘same basic training’ for all TAs. They explained that all class teachers have different styles of teaching and expectations; therefore they train TAs according to their own style. They further argued that some teachers explain instructions fully yet others assume TAs know everything. Giangreco (2013) reinforces that TAs should be trained to control and respond to challenging student behaviours that might arise during instruction. He further comments that TAs should be trained to implement the teacher-developed plans with practical reliability. This means an appropriate training program should be designed for TAs to train them. Drecktrah (2000) illustrates that managers do not have enough time to train people without a background in education. Thus it would be helpful if all the TAs have the same basic training, because this would reduce the time, stress and conflict between teachers and TAs that may arise at the beginning of their relationship.

Training regarding TAs is a challenge for teachers. Results of this research show that some class teachers are better class managers than others. That is, some teachers are guiding their TAs more appropriately and in accordance with the students’ needs than others. According to Giangreco (2013, p. 2) “[TAs] are not at fault or responsible for existing shortfalls in school service delivery; that responsibility lies collectively with those who are accountable for ensuring appropriate education
for all students (e.g., government education officials, community school board members, school administrators, special educators, teachers)”. Brighton (1972) describes that the teacher is the class leader and as such she has the responsibility of coordinating the educational growth of the whole child. Therefore leading a TA in the right direction is a teacher’s responsibility. The Ministry of Education (2002b) also highlights that TAs are to work under the direction of class teachers. Burgess and Mayes (2007) suggest that for schools to become an active learning community, teachers involved in school-based training of teacher aides need to reflect on how this training will influence their professional learning.

However, through this study it is revealed that almost all the teachers who participated in this study did not receive any formal training regarding TAs. Teachers have learnt and are learning to be better managers of their classes through experience and they work with their TAs according to their own beliefs and practices. Many teachers argued that it would have been useful to have some guidance or training, at the beginning of their teaching career, on how to manage another adult in the class. One of the teachers says “I think its [training] very important. At least we will know what we are suppose to expect from TAs and how can we support each other” (QS4 T3). Dew-Hughes, Brayton, and Blandford (1998) believe that for outcomes to be effective, training roles needed to be addressed at all levels of teacher training, from initial teacher training through to national professional qualifications for head teachers. The Ministry of Education has not introduced any appropriate training programs for teachers on how to work best with TAs. Therefore many teachers have made their own systems. These systems are helping TAs to enhance students’ learning; however as many TAs are working in more than one classroom, they have to understand the system of each class teacher. This can be extra hard work for TAs.

Another finding for this study was about the qualifications of TAs. Many international researchers have shown qualifications of TAs as a barrier to their profession (Fox, 2003; Giangreco, 2003; Glazzard, 2011; Rutherford, 2011; The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2012). However, New Zealand’ primary school staff have responded
differently. All teachers, teacher aides and teacher’ aides’ supervisors suggested that qualifications are not an issue and TAs can perform better without high qualifications. Two of the TAs’ supervisors who were interviewed for this study pointed out that they value the skills TAs bring with them and they employ them for their unique skills and bilingual abilities. Teachers reinforced that they acknowledge that TAs are not here to teach low achieving students but to enhance the learning for these students. They also said TAs are there to motivate the students and relate to them. Kormos, Kiddle, and Csizér (2011) explain motivation is why people choose a particular activity, become willing to persist at it and invest their efforts in it. It is fair to say that TAs assist in motivating students who need help with their learning.

TAs’ supervisors further argued that they have qualified teachers in their schools but they require people from similar backgrounds as their diverse students, so they can relate to them. Villegas and Clewell (1998) state that school is a place where academic knowledge is built and communicated; it is also a setting where values are fashioned. They further argue that if children do not see adults from their ethnic background in professional roles in schools and instead see them over-represented in the ranks of non-professional workers, then they may have low self-esteem and be less interested in studies. To overcome this issue in New Zealand’s primary schools many TAs are employed from different ethnic backgrounds to encourage many bilingual students in their studies. Teachers also agreed that high qualifications are not a big issue and cannot solve the problems TAs are facing at the moment. Regular training and professional development for TAs can solve many unintentional barriers in their careers. TAs of New Zealand primary schools are willing to learn new strategies and techniques to help students. This study shows that the main reason TAs are working in classes is that they want to help students to succeed in their studies.

5.4.2 Limited involvement of TAs in planning and collaboration

The findings from this study show that TAs are rarely invited to the planning of their students’ learning material. Usually, planning for SEN students is done by SENCO/TAs’ supervisors, and planning for students with learning difficulties is done
by the class teachers. Through this study many TAs have shown an interest in being involved in the planning and suggested that they can share the current progress of their students and can give feedback on whether a particular activity is suitable for their assigned students or not. A few of the TAs complained how some activities do not match the level of their students. For example, sometimes the activity is either too easy or hard. Many researchers (Haddock et al., 2008; Hill, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2011a; Thomas et al., 2005) emphasise that TAs should be involved in the planning so they can understand the aims of the activities and obtain the knowledge and skills required to successfully work with students on assigned tasks. Therefore, it is advisable that the person who is working the most with students should be involved in the lesson planning. Social capital theory is aligned to this idea and emphasises that members need to be aware of all the activities in order to produce profit (or in this case, benefit).

5.4.3 Lack of time for communication

This study highlights that time is an issue for both teachers and teacher aides. Both groups have recognised the importance of meeting with each other and communication regarding students' progress. However, because of their busy schedules they are unable to meet with each other on a regular basis. The TAs in this study enjoy working with teachers who regularly guided them and communicated with them regarding their students. Many researchers (Cameron et al., 2004; Doyle, 1997; Haddock et al., 2008; Parker et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2005) reinforce the need for meeting time and communication between teachers and TAs. Haddock et al. (2008) say that making the best use of a teacher aide requires good communication between senior management, teaching staff and the TAs. Doyle (1997) argues that communication can reduce the misunderstandings and isolation between team members. In the words of QS5, TA1 “an opportunity to catch up with the class teacher to discuss planning, progress, feedback etc. would be really useful”.

The Ministry of Education, in their recent document on teachers and TAs responsibilities in the classroom, proposes that the teacher and teacher’s aide
should have regular discussions and meetings to give each other feedback about the planning and responsibilities in the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2014b). It also states that these meetings can provide the opportunity to clarify the teacher’s expectations about what the teacher’s aide does, when and with whom. However, lack of quality time between teachers and TAs is linked to the limited paid hours of employment of the TAs and the workloads of the teachers. It is often the case that when TAs are free to discuss, teachers are busy and vice versa. Tutty and Hocking (2004) explain that to discuss concerns, TAs have to ask for time from others in the school, which they find difficult and this often results in catching people on the run, while preparing for class or on the way to morning tea or lunch. Campbell and Fairbairn (2005) argue that depending on the goodwill of teachers and TAs in meeting informally for planning may not be good enough in the demanding atmosphere of most schools. Thus, it is the school management’s duty to arrange meetings for TAs and teachers as they both work under their supervision.

5.4.4 Relationship between TAs and teachers

The findings of this study suggest that, unlike other international studies (Cameron et al., 2004; Campbell & Fairbairn, 2005; Kerry, 2001), TAs and teachers in New Zealand’s primary schools have very positive and friendly relationships. Campbell and Fairbairn (2005) describe that TAs can be the greatest asset teachers can have, or, TAs can be regarded as extra work and responsibility that is not needed. For this study, teachers have shown great pleasure in having TAs in their classes. In New Zealand primary schools, teachers value TAs’ skills, support and hard work, while TAs appreciate the respect and knowledge received from teachers. One of the teachers interviewed commented regarding her TA that she appreciated “the achievements, at the end of week, at the end of the term and at the end of the year, knowing that we have worked together as a team and the child’s learning has grown because of that” (IS2 T1). Thomas et al. (2005) discuss that team achievement increases if team members identify their goals together. They further explain that team members put extra effort into work where they are acknowledged and
appreciated for the final outcome. This research reveals that teachers are utilizing TAs according to their experience and think of them as a great asset.

Teachers have understood that they are the leaders of the classroom and that guiding the TAs is their responsibility. Also, despite the fact that teachers themselves have no training regarding TAs, they are trying their best to guide TAs according to their students’ needs. Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) argue that although teachers are the ones who make the final decisions about roles of TAs, it would be helpful to discuss those roles with TAs. They also explain that TAs might have completely different expectations of their roles, thus discussing expectations with them can possibly reduce the conflict before it arises. Fox (2003) stresses that teachers will have their own notions and it is acceptable for TAs to discuss students’ learning with teachers so confusion can be reduced. The more TAs understand the system of the class and the way the teacher functions, the easier it will be for TAs to work within the class and to support the children who need help.

Teachers and TAs’ supervisors of this study did not blame the TAs for not achieving the learning outcomes with the students. Surprisingly many teachers have explained that if TAs are not helping students learn then one needs not to only look at TAs’ practice but at the whole system. One of the teachers interviewed said that in this case one needs to look at the teacher, the student and the environment where studying is taking place, they should not blame the TA only. T2 from IS1 pointed out, “It might actually come back to the teacher, because a lot of, if you are not an effective teacher, you cannot use your TA in an effective way, and I consider a TA in my classroom as a part of my teaching, my program and my learning”. Campbell and Fairbairn (2005) highlight that crucial components of collaborative working are good faith, openness and quality of relationships which can then lead a team to success. They further explain that in school environments collaboration is vital; however it is not easy to achieve as it takes time, thoughtfulness and skill from all participants. Brighton (1972, p. 76) demonstrates “theoretically, a teacher should be able to arrange the formal learning environment of her classroom in such a manner as to meet the goals of instruction”. However, Thomas et al. (2005) argue that it is often
the case that teachers and TAs do not have opportunities to reflect on their purposes and goals.

Chapter 6 will present the conclusions of this thesis with some recommendations.
6 Chapter Six

Conclusions and Recommendations

“We are doing our paraeducators [TAs] and our students a significant disservice if we do not provide proper supervision, support, and training to enable the paraeducators to acquire the skills they need to work effectively” (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001, p. 4)

6.1 Introduction

This study investigated the role of teacher aides through the perceptions of the teacher aides, teachers and TAs’ supervisors. Concluding summaries are presented that relate to the four research questions that have guided this study. This is followed by the recommendations, further research suggestions, and the strengths and limitations of the research. The research questions are:

How do teacher aides interpret their role?

What are the challenges that face teacher aides?

How relevant is the TAs’ job description to their work?

What conditions would be conducive to develop effective working relationships between teachers and teacher aides?

6.2 Conclusions

This study was designed to address a growing concern about the actual role of TAs in primary schools. As a TA, the researcher experienced that there was a lack of
communication between TAs and teachers. This led to the question of whether staff members (TAs, teachers and TAs’ supervisors) are aware of the roles and responsibilities of TAs and whether undefined roles create challenges for TAs in their everyday work life.

TAs are playing multiple roles in schools around the world, but mainly are helping students in their learning. However, the literature has highlighted several concerns specifically associated with the use of TAs to support the needs of students with learning difficulties. Surprisingly it has been suggested by many educators that the roles of TAs has become problematic for students with learning difficulties (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Howard & Ford, 2007; Rutherford, 2012; Webster et al., 2011). They have raised questions regarding current models of employment and deployment of teacher aides in relation to impartiality and justice for students with disability and learning difficulties. Conversely, there are some educators who have raised the point that it was a lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities by schools that have put untrained TAs in a position of responsibility for students who needed the most help. Both positive and negative attitudes toward the use of TAs in the New Zealand educational system have been received from many educators too. Many studies (Blatchford et al., 2006; Blatchford et al., 2009; Blatchford et al., 2007; H. Stevens, 2010) on the impact of TAs on students’ learning have carried out around the world and results have shown that TAs do not enhance students’ progress. However, I strongly agree with Brighton (1972) that “it is unrealistic and foolhardy for any individual or school system to attempt to initiate or evaluate a TA program while operating in an unstructured manner, especially if the system is formulated upon a tenuous foundation”(p. 1). This means, the rewards and consequences of the TAs perception cannot be realistically evaluated until it becomes a well-organised structural operation.

Through this study, qualitative analysis of data including questionnaires and individual interviews provided evidence that the definition of the role of TAs is equivocal. Roles are not always clearly defined by the school management. It is the researcher’s belief that undefined roles may lead to uncoordinated team efforts to
meet the educational needs of students with learning difficulties. Thus, uncoordinated team efforts could have negative academic and/or social impact for students with learning difficulties acquiring a general education.

The study of the literature (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Brighton, 1972; Project PARA: Paraeducator selfstudy program, 2009; Rutherford, 2012; Watkinson, 2003) has shown that as more students are being acknowledged with a wider range of special educational needs or learning difficulties, the roles of TAs continue to expand to an increasing number of specialised areas. Thus, TAs in this study have argued that due to an increase in complexity of pedagogy there are more roles being created in classrooms. They also pointed out that each year the number of roles they play increases. Researchers have also indicated that teacher aides are taking up various roles in schools around the world (Blatchford et al., 2006; Kay, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2013b; Webster et al., 2011). Roles include academic and non-academic tasks in classrooms and on school grounds. Through this study it is revealed that the major role of TAs in New Zealand primary schools is to support students in their learning. It has also been found that TAs either work one to one or with a group of students. TAs reported that roles are assigned to them by two or more staff members, Giangreco (2013) reasons that this can affect TAs roles in supporting students. Overall, it is concluded that there is a lack of clarity in roles of TAs.

Another finding of this study shows that the challenges TAs have to face during their work are the lack of defined roles and responsibilities, appropriate supervision, and lack of professional development opportunities (Doyle, 1997). Lack of communication between TAs and class teachers and planning time for students’ learning was also a challenge. Rutherford (2012) states that many TAs with inadequate training are given significant instructional responsibilities to support students. Burgess and Mayes (2007) believe no or inadequate training can make it difficult for TAs to work effectively with students. The majority of TAs who participated in this study revealed that they did not receive any training for the tasks they were expected to carry out on a regular basis.
Lack of communication is another challenge in New Zealand primary schools which gives rise to stress between staff members. Doyle (1997) believes that communication can reduce stress as well as give a chance to teachers to define TAs roles and responsibilities clearly. The findings of this study have raised the point that as the role of TAs is changing and developing, there is a need for personal and professional development for TAs. Many TAs who participated in this study highlighted that they had not received any formal job description and emphasised that it would have been helpful to receive one. It is the researcher’s belief that responding to the challenges discussed above can significantly progress the TA system in New Zealand primary schools.

6.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study have explained that over the years not only the number of teacher aides in New Zealand schools has grown but their roles too. Therefore it is important to develop an effective system for TAs which can lead to increased learning and success for our students.

6.3.1 Recommendation 1: Training for both Teachers and TAs

Today, training is a crucial part of any profession therefore it should be for teacher aides too. I strongly recommend that the Ministry of Education should produce a basic pre-service and in-service job training course for all TAs. It is argued here that no one should be allowed to assist the teachers or students without basic pre-service training. Glazzard (2011), in his study of one school, suggested that practices within the school regarding the training of TAs are diverse and range from highly inclusive to highly exclusive. I am of the opinion, on the basis of the findings, that training of teachers and TAs should not be left to schools, principals or SENCO members as they all have their own views and time restrictions. Training courses from the Ministry of Education (or by other appropriate organisations) should be taught by qualified staff to progress all the TAs on the same level. Brighton (1972), explains that
regardless of TAs duties and assignments they should be required to attend additional on-site training sessions. He further argues that these training sessions can highlight the schools’ basic educational objectives and policies and the way in which the TAs themselves will be included in the classroom pedagogy.

The training of teachers regarding TAs is as crucial as TAs’ training. A basic training session for teachers highlighting what to expect and what not to expect from TAs, can erase many false assumptions teachers have regarding TAs. During the training teachers can familiarise themselves with the roles of TAs and how to guide them according to their roles. Brighton (1972) emphasised that teacher training institutions need to acknowledge the importance of TAs in classrooms and should introduce TAs to the curriculum of future teachers. Knowing about TAs from the beginning of their study can help increase their planning regarding TAs. Therefore, having a basic training and familiarity with TAs’ roles can help teachers understand their TAs better.

6.3.2 Recommendation 2: Opportunities for ‘communication’ between teachers and TAs

Communication gaps between teachers and TAs has been identified by this study and many international educators (Cameron et al., 2004; Doyle, 1997; Haddock et al., 2008). I recommend that schools plan their meeting times rather than expecting both groups to meet when they are free. Parker et al. (2009) highlight the importance of meeting times for these two groups and explains that “short, informal chat time and formal meeting arrangements outside of the contact with children, are both essential components in ensuring that teachers, TAs and HLTAS [TAs supervisors] have strong communication networks” (p. 57). Some school managers in Auckland have recognised the need for ‘communication time’ and have taken steps towards it. Staff members of School 2, who were interviewed for this research, explained that TAs have meetings with their supervisor every Monday morning. During the meeting they are free to talk about any issue they have regarding their students. They can also discuss any problems or strategies with their fellow colleagues.
6.3.3 Recommendation 3: Including TAs in planning students learning

Today TAs are providing instructional support to many students therefore I recommend that school principals include TAs in the planning of their students’ learning. This will increase their understanding of curriculum goals and will help them to support their students better. This will also give TAs a sense of responsibility as being instructional team members. Parker et al. (2009) emphasise that TAs who are involved in planning feel they have an unambiguous and directed role in the teaching and learning process. The Newark Teachers Union (2003) says “for teachers and TAs to implement best practices in the classroom, they must meet regularly to plan for these activities” (p. 3). In those meetings, teachers, TAs and principals need to decide on how responsibilities will be shared among staff members and what impact those responsibilities will have on students’ learning.

6.3.4 Recommendation 4: Monitoring the system

Monitoring of TAs’ progress, behaviour and overall system is recommended as every system needs evaluation to determine future improvements. Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) assert that TAs should be monitored for the same reason as schools monitor the progress of their students. When TAs are assigned a role, teachers should find out whether that role has been fulfilled or not. Also, if a student has been assigned to a TA at the beginning of the term then the progress of a student’s behaviour and learning should be taken into account. It is also recommended that teachers should also work with the same group of students regularly so that they can see how TAs are supporting students. I strongly recommend that at the end of each term SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) members need to evaluate the progress of each TA. Giangreco (2013) emphasises ongoing monitoring and supervision for TAs from qualified professionals. He further argues that TAs should not be left to fend for themselves but should be supervised. Thus, to monitor TAs’ progress, teachers should make sure that TAs are working nearby them, instead of taking students outside the class. “A successful implementation of a teacher aide program will cause ramifications which will affect every segment of the present educational structure” (Brighton, 1972, p. 72). Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) suggest that working in
proximity to the teacher is beneficial for TAs as they can learn more from a class teacher's practice.

6.4 Further Research

This research has been conducted with seven primary schools (five schools participated in questionnaires and interviews were obtained from two schools) within Auckland city participating. Further research across the country would provide a wider representation of the concerns regarding teacher aides' roles in primary schools.

One school which was interviewed for this study had come up with a highly effective system for organising the work for teacher aides. Further research into how and why this TA system is working better than the other schools would be of benefit as this should be an area of future concern for schools and government.

In this research, all the TAs' supervisors indicated that they provide some kind of training to their staff; so further research could highlight what kind of training school staff are provided with. Also, it could explore how training is planned and how effective it is regarding TAs' roles.

6.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Research

6.5.1 The Strengths of the research

A strength of this research is that it gained the perspectives of teachers, teacher aides and TAs' supervisors. Data was obtained through questionnaires and interviews from seven New Zealand primary schools. Despite the busy schedules of TAs, teachers and TAs' supervisors, they all agreed to take part in this study and a 100% return, for both questionnaires and interviews, was achieved. Their multiple
points of view provided a wide variety of perspectives for this study and allowed data to be validated. This provided findings which are compelling and transferable to other primary school settings.

### 6.5.2 The Limitations of the Research

This study was limited to primary school settings and did not include TAs from early childhood centres, secondary schools or tertiary institutions. Although the sample size was reasonable for this study, data was only obtained from one city in New Zealand. Nevertheless, this study has illuminated significant new insights into the meaning of roles of TAs in primary schools.

Another limitation of this study was a gap in the literature available related to varied roles of teacher aides around the world, especially in the New Zealand context. Most of the literature which was utilised was published before 2000. However, as I continued with my thesis I did manage to find some literature from the period 2010 to 2014. This study also found that teacher aides have different titles in different countries thus I had to identify titles used in developed countries to find research on teacher aides. For example, for the United Kingdom I used ‘teaching assistants’ and for the United States of America I used ‘paraeducators’. The literature on teacher aides in the primary school sector in developed countries was reviewed and was applied to the New Zealand primary schools. Even though the literature of this research has been mainly critiqued and conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the issues raised are clearly related to the findings in the context of New Zealand primary schools.

### 6.6 Concluding statement

Teacher aides make a significant contribution to the success of students in the primary school classroom. Students with learning challenges not only benefit from TAs in their academic learning, but also in their social needs. Conducting this participatory qualitative study has been a privilege. From this study, my feelings of
appreciation and respect has grown for those who work as teacher aides. It has been a pleasure to conduct this participatory qualitative study and to see the compassion, determination, and commitment displayed by the teacher aides who contributed in this research. It is a great feeling to know that most of the TAs are in schools not because they have to, but because they want to. While I was volunteering, I have witnessed TAs being guardians of students whose parents struggle financially and do not have time to guide their children with their learning. I have seen TAs work overtime to help a few more students. It is incredible to hear such positive feedback not only from teachers, but also from students. Despite the fact what international researchers are portraying about TAs, TAs in New Zealand primary schools have a sense of flexibility and a willingness to adapt in any environment. I feel that with clarity of roles, adequate training and professional development, TAs can make life changing differences in students’ lives. The study had a profound influence on my own academic and personal development, enhancing the degree of honour and gratitude felt for both teacher aides and the students they serve.

Through this study it has become apparent that TAs are mainly supporting students who have learning difficulties. TAs also play a number of additional roles such as translators, counsellors and cultural brokers in bridging between home and school (Hemmings, 2007). Thus it is important for teachers, TAs and TAs’ supervisors to share information and work as a team to enhance students’ learning. According to social capital theory, successful school reform requires close collaboration and especially trust among staff members in support of student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). We know that each human being possesses unique attributes, and if teachers, TAs and TAs’ supervisors bring together their abilities, this can strengthen the primary schools as a great learning community for all students.

“All Teaching Assistants [TAs] possess skills, knowledge and previous experience that can be shared, adopted and applied by other members of the team, bringing about improvement in a specific area of the curriculum or in an aspect of access to the curriculum as a direct result of this collaborative working. This relies inevitably
upon trust, from stakeholders themselves, colleagues, and ultimately the leadership of the school or other educational setting" (Parker et al., 2009, p. 24).
References


Massey University. (2011). School of Health & Social Services: Interviewing for research and analysing qualitative data: An overview. Retrieved from


Riemenschneider, T. M. (2014). *Paraeducators: Building agency, capacity, and skill through participatory action research*. Texas Christian University. Retrieved from https://repository.tcu.edu/bitstream/handle/116099117/4548/Riemenschneider_tcu_0229D_10508.pdf?sequence=1


Appendices

Appendix 1  Interview guide: Teachers

(This statement will be read at the beginning of each interview.)

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. My name is Rafia Kalsum. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and am conducting research on roles of teacher aides in two primary schools of New Zealand. I will be recording our interview and will give you the opportunity to review the transcript of this tape before I write my report. Everything you share with me today will be kept in the strictest confidence. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How many students have you got in your class who require extra help in their studies from Teacher aides?
3. What, if any, training did you receive to work with teacher aides?
4. How many teacher aides do you currently work with?
5. What is the role of the teacher aides you work with?
6. How do you engage in working with teacher aides?
7. How do you determine the responsibilities of the teacher aide?
8. How has working with teacher aides affected your role?
9. How would you describe your relationship with the teacher aides you work with?
10. What aspects of working with teacher aides cause you anxiety?
11. How do you approach difficulties in your relationship with teacher aides?
12. What aspects of working with teacher aides do you find most satisfying?
13. What advice would you offer to a teacher who is working with a teacher aide for the first time?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 2  Interview Guide: Teacher aides

Interview Questions:

1. How many years have you been working as a teacher aide?
2. What, if any, post-secondary training do you have?
3. What, if any, training did you receive to work with teachers?
4. What training have you received since you began working as a teacher aide?
5. What is your current assignment?
6. What kinds of things are you responsible for in this assignment?
7. Who determines what your responsibilities are?
8. What part of your work do you find the most satisfying?
9. What part of your work do you find the most frustrating?
10. How has your role changed in the time that you've been a teacher aide?
11. How would you describe your relationship with the teachers you work with?
12. What aspects of working with teachers do you find the most frustrating?
13. How do you approach difficulties in your relationships with teachers?
14. What aspects of working with teachers do you find the most rewarding?
15. How would you describe your relationship with the school administration?
16. What advice would you give to somebody who has just accepted a job as a teacher aide?
16. What advice would you offer to a teacher who is working with a teacher aide for the first time?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3   Interview Guide: TAs supervisors

Interview Questions:

1. How many TAs are currently working at your school?
2. Who assigns the roles of TAs?
3. What are the main responsibilities of TAs?
4. In your opinion, are TAs more helpful toward Student’s learning or sharing teachers’ responsibilities?
5. Are all your staff comfortable having TAs around?
6. How would you describe the relationship between class teachers and TAs?
7. In your opinion, is it necessary for every TA to have job training?
8. In your opinion, how important it is for TAs to have some relevant education in their field?
9. Give suggestions on how to improve the TAs system in New Zealand’s schools?

Appendix 4   Teacher Aides’ (TAs) Questionnaires

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. By completing and posting this survey, you affirm that you give your consent for Rafia Kalsum to use your answers in her research.
1. What is your gender? (Please circle one)

   Male   Female

2. What age group do you belong to? (Please circle one)

   Under 25,   25-30,   30-39,   40-49,   50-59,   65+

3. What is your highest qualification?

4. How long have you been a Teacher Aide? (Please circle one)

   First year,   1-2 years,   3-5 years,   6-10 years,   11-15 years,   16-20 years,   more than 20 years

5. How many class (classroom) teachers are you currently working with? (Please circle one)

   1,   2,   3,   4,   more than 5

6. How many students are you currently working with? (Please circle one)

   1,   2,   3-5,   6-7,   8-10,   More than 10
7. Were you given any training on how to work best with class teachers either during your studies or at this school? (Please circle one)

Yes    No

8. Please explain your role as a TA in this school?

9. How would you describe how you work with students?
10. When you were appointed as a TA were you explained about your roles and responsibilities? (Please circle one)

Yes       No

11. Have there been any substantial changes to your role this year (compared to last year)?
(e.g. working at a different key stage, given a new area of responsibility). (Please circle one)

Yes (If yes, Please explain in the comment box below)       No

12. What is the most difficult thing about being a TA?
13. Who assigns you your roles?

14. Do you receive feedback on the work you do? Please explain.

15. In your opinion how can the TAs system be improved? Please comment.
16. Describe your relationship with class teachers?

17. How satisfied are you of /with this job? (Please circle one)

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Not at all satisfied

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. Please post this questionnaire in the addressed envelope provided.
Appendix 5  Teacher’s Questionnaires

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. By completing and posting this survey, you affirm that you give your consent for Rafia Kalsum to use your answers in her research.

1. What is your gender? (Please circle one)
   - Male
   - Female

2. How old are you? (Please circle one)
   - Under 25,
   - 25-30,
   - 30-39,
   - 40-49,
   - 50-59,
   - 65+

3. How long have you been teaching? (Please circle one)
   - First year,
   - 1-2 years,
   - 3-5 years,
   - 6-10 years,
   - 11-15 years,
   - 16-20 years,
   - more than 20 years

4. How many TAs are you currently working with? (Please circle one)
   - 1,
   - 2,
   - 3,
   - 4,
   - more than 5

5. How many students you have in your class who need any kind of support from TAs? (Please circle one)
   - 1,
   - 2,
   - 3-5,
   - 6-7,
   - 8-10,
   - more than 10

6. Were you given any training on how to work best with a TA either during your studies or at this school?
7. How important do you think it is for class teachers to have training on how to work together with TAs?
8. Please explain in a few words that what is the best thing about having a TA in your class?

9. In your opinion are qualifications for TAs important or not? Why?
10. Do you think TAs should help students in their learning or they should stick to the clerical roles?

11. When a TA was assigned to you, were the TAs role and responsibilities explained to you? (Please circle one)

   Yes              No

12. What is the most difficult thing about having TAs?
13. Please describe your relationship with TAs.

14. How do you assign roles to TAs?
15. How do you give feedback to TAs?

16. In your opinion do TAs help you in your responsibilities? (Please circle one)
   Yes           No

17. In your opinion do TAs help students in their learning? (Please circle one)
   Yes           No

18. In your opinion how can schools improve TAs system?
Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. Please post this questionnaire in the addressed envelope provided.

Appendix 6  Teacher aides (TAs) Supervisors questionnaires

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. By completing and posting this survey, you affirm that you give your consent for Rafia Kalsum to use your answers in her research.

1. How many TAs are currently working at your school? (Please circle one)

   1   2-3   3-5   5-7   7-10   10+

2. Who assigns the roles to TAs?
3. What are the main responsibilities of TAs?

4. In your opinion, how important it is for a TA to have education related to their field?
5. In your opinion, how important it is for a TA to have some kind of job training?

6. Are TAs helpful for class teachers?

   Yes (if yes, Please explain how)   No   (If no, Please explain Why not?)
7. How would you describe the relationship between class teachers and TAs?

8. In your opinion, are TAs helping students to improve their learning?
9. Give suggestions on how to improve the TAs system in New Zealand’s schools?

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. Please post this questionnaire in the addressed envelope provided.