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The Special Education Process: A Step-by-Step Guide to Understanding Your Rights and The Significance of Parent Involvement in Your Child's Educational Process.

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Education degree.

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Abstract

This project explores the challenges faced by parents with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in navigating the special education system, particularly the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process. It highlights barriers, such as language obstacles, lack of cultural sensitivity among educators, and parents' unawareness of their legal rights, which can lead to inadequate services for their children. The project's significance lies in empowering parents to actively participate in and advocate for their children's educational needs, thus fostering a more inclusive and effective special education program. This project aims to provide strategies and resources to enhance parents' understanding of the IEP process. It also examines the roles of key participants and the importance of collaboration in the development of IEPs, as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This project underscores the potential for creating a ripple effect of inclusivity and excellence in special education through informed and empowered parental involvement.

CHAPTER ONE

The background and context of special education are significant for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the educational process designed to meet the unique needs of disabled students. This context highlights the historical evolution of special education policies and practices, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the Americans with disabilities Act (ADA) of the United States.

IDEA is one of the central frameworks upon which special education laws in the United States are founded. IDEA mandates parental involvement throughout the special education process, ensuring that parents actively participate in their children's education (IDEA, 2004). However, FERPA is concerned with the privacy and confidentiality of student educational records, including records related to special education services and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) (Anderson, 2020). ADA takes a broader approach by prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities in various aspects of life, including education (Gilbert, 2007). While the ADA does not explicitly address parental rights, it indirectly supports parents by advocating for equal access to educational opportunities for their children, free from discrimination based on disabilities (Gilbert, 2007). It also involves exploring the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders including parents, educators, special education professionals, and advocates. It is crucial for educators, parents, and advocates to collaboratively navigate the complexities of the special education process and ensure equitable access and educational success for all students regardless of their unique learning needs.

IDEA mandates schools to collaborate with professionals and students' families to develop personalized goals within the IEP for students with disabilities, ensuring a tailored

approach to their education. IEP outlines specific goals, accommodations, and services tailored to each student's needs (Yell et al. 2013). A variety of assessments are used in the special education process, including standardized tests, curriculum-based measures, and dynamic assessments that compare a student's performance with a national sample (Fuchs et al., 2023). Research has highlighted the effectiveness of educators' collaboration with parents and families in interpreting assessment data and in making informed decisions regarding IEP goals and services. IDEA mandates that parents actively participate in the development of IEPs for their children, ensuring that each child's unique needs are addressed (Anderson, 2020).

In my personal experience, I have observed a troubling pattern in which non-English-speaking parents are absent from the development, review, and revision of their child's IEP, engage less in those meetings, fail to advocate for their child or children's needs, and feel timid to ask school personnel follow-up questions. In addition, parents are unfamiliar with legal rights in the IEP process, including the right to be informed about their children's educational rights and options. Consequently, parents receive less support and information due to a lack of understanding and/or misinterpretation of federal policies and laws. Parents have a range of legal rights in the IEP process, including the right to be informed of their children's educational rights and options (Anderson, 2020). Parents have the right to participate in the development, review, and revision of their children's IEP, and the right to consent to or refuse the proposed educational services (Anderson, 2020).

Navigating the special education system presents various obstacles to families with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Language barriers are among the biggest obstacles (Byram & Wagner, 2018). Both parties may become frustrated and misunderstand their intended communication. One of the challenges encountered by parents with diverse linguistic

backgrounds is a lack of cultural sensitivity and comprehension among educators. Parents may believe that their culture is not honored, or that their children are not receiving fair treatment (Hong et al., 2019). Also, parents may not be aware of their rights or how to speak up on their children's needs, which leads to unfit services and support for their children that are culturally acceptable.

Informed parents become empowered to actively participate in the decision-making process, advocate effectively for their children's unique needs, and collaborate effectively with educators to ensure that the IEP truly addresses their children's educational goals and requirements. Therefore, this project has great significance for parents as it empowers them to play an active role in their children's educational journey, fostering a more robust support network. Informed consent is a fundamental principle of special education (Applequist, 2009).

This project is significant because my passion for and commitment to the topic of special education and parental involvement align with my professional goal of creating a more inclusive and effective special education program. I plan to use this project to connect with parents and share insights within my district to empower parents to advocate for their children's rights and collaborate effectively with educators. Furthermore, sharing this knowledge with my colleagues can create a ripple effect, fostering a culture of inclusivity and excellence in special education settings. I believe that this can be a valuable resource for special education specialists by informing their practices, improving the educational experiences of students with disabilities, and strengthening partnerships between parents and the broader community. This project could potentially lead to more inclusive and effective special education programs in the future.

Research Question

What strategies and resources can be provided to parents to enhance their understanding of the IEP process and their ability to effectively advocate for their child?

Chapter Two

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of research and literature on the topic of parental rights and involvement in the special education process for non-English-speaking parents. First, it introduces federal law mandating parental involvement in special education. Next, it addresses the legal parental rights in the IEP process. Additionally, it discusses cultural sensitivity and bias reduction. Furthermore, it discusses outcomes and impact of parent involvement. Equally important, it outlines challenges faced by school team members, parents, and students with different languages and cultures. Most importantly, it delves into the problem with the current special education handbooks, in addition to addressing accessibility. Finally, it shares successful strategies for parental empowerment and advocacy in special education to enhance their understanding of the IEP process. This literature review aims to provide evidence for empowering non-English-speaking parents to advocate for their children's rights and to collaborate effectively with educators.

Federal Law Mandating Parental Involvement in Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is one of the central frameworks upon which special education laws in the United States are founded. IDEA mandates parental involvement throughout the special education process, ensuring that parents actively participate in their children's education (IDEA, 2004). In addition to IDEA, two other federal laws play pivotal roles in safeguarding the rights of parents of children with disabilities. The Family

Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complement IDEA in creating a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of these rights. IDEA specifically requires that parents be involved in the development, review, and revision of their child's IEP, and that they have the right to consent to or refuse proposed educational services (Anderson, 2020).

The Legal Framework

IDEA, at its core, is dedicated to ensuring that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) tailored to their individual needs. One of its distinctive features is the emphasis on parental involvement in the special education process (Anderson, 2020). IDEA mandates that parents actively participate in the development of IEPs for their children, thereby ensuring that the unique needs of each student are addressed (Anderson, 2020). It includes procedural safeguards designed to ensure parents have legal rights and that parents understand these rights as they engage in the education process.

FERPA, however, is concerned with the privacy and confidentiality of student educational records, including those related to special education services and IEPs (Anderson, 2020). FERPA provides parents with the right to access and review their child's educational records, and it further empowers them to request corrections if inaccuracies are identified.

ADA takes a broader approach by prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities in various aspects of life, including education (Gilbert, 2007). While ADA does not explicitly address parental rights, it indirectly supports parents by advocating for equal access to educational opportunities for their children, free from discrimination based on disabilities (Gilbert, 2007).

When considering parental rights within this legal framework, IDEA directly involves parents in the special education decision-making process, reinforcing their right to be active

participants in determining the appropriate education for their child. FERPA safeguards parents' rights to access and review their child's educational records, including information related to special education services (Anderson, 2020). Although the ADA does not address parental rights, it indirectly promotes parental interests by advocating for equal educational opportunities for their children, thereby fostering an environment free from discrimination.

Legal Parental Rights

Parents have a range of legal rights in the IEP process, including the right to be informed regarding their children's educational rights and options (Anderson, 2020). Parents also have the right to participate in the development, review, and revision of their child's IEP and the right to consent to or refuse the proposed educational services (Anderson, 2020). In addition, parents have the right to request due process hearings if they disagree with any aspect of their child's special education program or placement (Anderson, 2020).

Informed consent is a fundamental principle of special education (Applequist, 2009). Parents must be fully informed about their child's educational rights and options before they can provide meaningful consent to the IEP (Applequist, 2009). Informed consent requires parents to have access to clear and understandable information in a language they can understand (Applequist, 2009).

Effective special education is based on informed consent, which gives parents the power to decide what kind of education is best for their children. While Applequist (2009) correctly emphasizes the need for openness and information accessibility, more evidence (Sukys et al., 2015; Yell et al., 2013) indicates that parents encounter serious difficulties in navigating the complexity of special education.

There are widespread differences in parents' access to and comprehension of the information required for informed consent, according to recent studies. For example, Kea et al

(2023) found gaps in parents' understanding of their legal rights under IDEA. According to Kea et al. (2023), more than a third of parents exhibited a vague comprehension of crucial ideas such as least restrictive environments (LREs), IEPs, and reevaluation rights. There are questions regarding whether parents' decisions are genuinely empowered and informed because of this information gap, which has a direct impact on informed consent.

Hirano and Rowe (2016) conducted additional research to examine the precise function that communication techniques play in influencing parental comprehension. Their research, which concentrated on families with a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, discovered that conventional written communication techniques were useless for communicating essential information. Parents expressed irritation with technical language, difficult sentence structures, and lack of translation tools, resulting in misinterpretation and bewilderment (Hirano & Rowe, 2016). This emphasizes the necessity of customized communication plans that consider the linguistic and cultural preferences, as well as the preferred information forms, of parents.

Inadequate parental comprehension might have serious repercussions for informed consent. Burke (2013) found instances in which parents approved unsuitable placements or services for their children due to information shortages. In addition to impeding academic advancement, this may also infringe upon their IDEA rights. Informed consent in special education goes beyond mere legalities; it is about ensuring parents understand the implications of their decisions and can actively advocate for their child's needs (Burke, 2013). Through the implementation of strategies such as emphasizing accessibility, resolving language challenges, and providing parents with knowledge and training, we can foster an environment in which informed consent truly serves as a catalyst for inclusive and successful education for every child.

Cultural Sensitivity and Bias Reduction

Cultural sensitivity and bias reduction are essential in the assessment process to ensure that all students receive fair and accurate evaluations. Several methods can be used to achieve this goal. First, educators can use culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment tools, including choosing assessments designed for students from diverse cultural backgrounds available in their native languages (Hoover et al., 2019). School personnel should also consider cultural factors during assessment and be mindful of how cultural norms, values, and learning styles may influence a student's performance. It is important to provide training and professional development to the assessment personnel (Hoover et al., 2019). This ensures that assessors are trained to recognize and address potential cultural biases in their evaluations. Finally, it is necessary to collaborate with parents and their families. Involving parents and family members in the assessment process enables educators to gain insight into students' cultural backgrounds and learning strengths (Hoover et al., 2019).

Outcomes and Impact of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement plays a pivotal role in the education and overall well-being of students with disabilities. Research has consistently demonstrated that active parental engagement in a child's education is associated with a range of positive outcomes including improved academic performance, enhanced social skills, and increased self-esteem (Burke, 2013, Sukys et al., 2015). Students with disabilities who experience important levels of parental involvement tend to achieve better academic outcomes, including higher grades, improved test scores, and increased graduation rates (Sukys et al., 2015). Parental involvement can also positively impact students' social development, leading to enhanced communication skills, stronger peer relationships, and improved behavior (Burke, 2013, Sukys et al., 2015).

Parental involvement influences student outcomes through various mechanisms. Parents can support their child's learning by providing a stimulating home environment, encouraging

regular homework completion, and communicating effectively with teachers (Burke, 2013). Additionally, parents can serve as advocates for their child, ensuring that they receive appropriate educational services and accommodations (Burke, 2013).

Parental involvement has a significant impact on student achievement and well-being. Students with involved parents tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy, which contribute to their academic success (Burke, 2013, Sukys et al., 2015). Moreover, parental involvement can foster a sense of belonging and support, leading to improved mental health, reduced stress, and increased social-emotional well-being (Burke, 2013, Sukys et al., 2015). Parental involvement is a critical factor in the education and well-being of students with disabilities. By actively engaging in their child's education, parents can play a powerful role in promoting academic achievement, social development, and overall well-being.

Challenges Faced by School Team Members, Parents, and Students with Different Languages and Cultures

The challenges of uninformed parents regarding the IEP process and their rights can lead to miscommunication between parents and school team members. Uninformed parents may not be aware of their legal rights and the protection afforded to their child under IDEA. This lack of knowledge can make it difficult to ensure that their child receives an appropriate and inclusive education. Parents must be fully informed about their child's educational rights and options before they can provide meaningful consent to the IEP (Applequist, 2009). This empowers them to actively participate in the decision-making process, advocate effectively for their child's unique needs, and collaborate effectively with educators to ensure that the IEP truly addresses their child's educational goals and requirements.

Kibria and Becerra (2020), convey that immigrant mothers are crucial in fighting the educational rights of disabled children in the United States. This directly affects their ability to access vital resources and services for their children, particularly English Learners (ELs) with disabilities. These decisions significantly impact the educational experiences of ELs with disabilities from minority backgrounds, which leads to disadvantaged learning opportunities compared to their peers.

Chang, Avila, and Rodriquez (2022) suggested using an IEP meeting checklist that explains and provides the steps to be taken in this process. These include the assessment and IEP procedures and timelines, assessments conducted prior to IEP requests, the parent's role in the IEP process, and the dynamics and differences between early intervention and school-based services. They also indicated that teachers should explain unfamiliar special education terminology and acronyms used in the meeting (pp. 137-138). These experiences highlight the pressing need for a more equitable approach to policy implementation and communication to ensure that all parents, particularly those from minority backgrounds, have equal access to resources and support in their children's education.

Parents must be informed about the steps involved in the IEP process. As Kangas (2018) noted, parents, particularly those with language and cultural differences, can benefit from culturally responsive resources that explain the IEP process. These resources should not only be linguistically sensitive but also culturally relevant, recognizing the diverse backgrounds and needs of families. Furthermore, Siegel (2020) conveyed that certain questions may be useful for parents during the evaluation and development of the IEP, and non-English-speaking parents may be unaware that they are allowed to ask any questions. Informed and engaged parents are

better equipped to collaborate with educators to tailor educational plans to best serve their child's needs.

The Problem with Current Special Education Handbooks

Special education handbooks typically face major hurdles, yet they frequently serve as valuable guides for parents trying to comprehend the complex process of special education. The wording of these handbooks is sometimes complex and full of jargon, which makes it challenging for parents whose English is not their native or primary language to completely understand the vital information presented (Connor et al., 2019). Moreover, the difficulties faced by parents from diverse backgrounds are frequently worsened by products' lack of cultural awareness and linguistic accessibility. The complexity of legal jargon and procedural specifics might pose challenges that impede parents' capacity to effectively advocate for their children's rights within the context of the special education system (Connor et al., 2019).

Furthermore, it is possible that existing handbooks undervalue the variety of learning requirements that parents have, which could leave them feeling helpless and overwhelmed. This problem is increased by the lack of easily understood, visually appealing content (Nurjanah, 2018). Many parents, particularly those who do not primarily speak English, can benefit from information delivered in various formats.

Addressing Accessibility and Comprehension Using Infographics and Auditory Resources

To overcome the shortcomings of current special education handbooks, it is essential to integrate resources such as infographics and audio guides. Visual aids improve comprehension, particularly for those with low literacy or language challenges (Nurjanah, 2018). Infographics are a valuable tool for presenting complex information in a visually appealing and easily digestible format. They can use eye-catching images and design elements to effectively communicate

complex ideas to a wide range of audiences. These infographics can help close the communication gap and offer non-English-speaking parents a more inclusive way to communicate vital information using visually sensitive images (Nurjanah, 2018).

Moreover, the inclusion of auditory resources complements visual elements and caters to diverse learning preferences. Auditory learning can enhance comprehension and retention, particularly for individuals who struggle with written text due to language barriers (Nurjanah, 2018). By providing spoken explanations, parents can access essential information through multiple modalities, therefore reinforcing their understanding of the special education process.

Successful Strategies for Parent Empowerment and Advocacy in Special Education

Various strategies have proven to be effective at empowering parents and enabling them to take more active roles in the education of students with special needs. These strategies include cultural and linguistic considerations, cultural competence training, and language access for non-native parents. The nuances of these strategies are discussed below.

Cultural and Linguistic Considerations

The significance of cultural competence in working with various families in special education is being emphasized by an increasing amount of research. Sailor and colleagues (2021) explain that culturally sensitive special education approaches are linked to several favorable consequences for students with disabilities from varied backgrounds, such as enhanced academic performance, heightened social-emotional welfare, and decreased dropout rates. According to Cramer et al. (2015), parents of students from a variety of backgrounds who have disabilities are more likely to be happy with their child's special education services if they believe that the personnel providing the services are culturally competent. Professionals with cultural competence are more adept at establishing a connection with parents and creating IEPs that cater to the unique requirements of the student and their family (Rossetti et al., 2017).

To guarantee that students with disabilities have the resources and assistance they require to succeed in school, parental advocacy and empowerment are crucial. However, parents from diverse backgrounds may find it challenging to understand the special education process and to speak up for their child's needs due to language and cultural obstacles.

Cultural Competence and Its Importance in Working with Diverse Families in Special Education

The capacity to recognize and address the needs of individuals with diverse cultural origins is known as cultural competence (Cramer et al., 2015). For educators and other professionals who work with the families of students who have impairments, such recognition is important because it enables professionals to comprehend the cultural ideas and values that may affect a family's view on disability and education, cultural competence is crucial in the field of special education (Cramer et al., 2015). It also makes it possible for teachers to interact with parents in a courteous and culturally appropriate manner (Cramer et al., 2015). Teachers who possess cultural competence are also more equipped to create and carry out IEPs that are tailored to the unique needs of each student and their family while also being culturally sensitive (Cramer et al., 2015). Examples of practical applications of cultural competence in learning environments include tailoring learning material to suit the needs of students from various cultural backgrounds, the ability to communicate effectively with students from different native cultural and linguistic environments, and the capacity to recognize and address the cultural challenges that underrepresented students may contend with in the course of their learning and social interactions at school.

Language Access and Translation Services for Non-English-Speaking Parents during IEP

Research indicates that language access services are essential for ensuring that non-English-speaking parents can participate fully in their child's IEP meeting. Burke et al. (2021)

compared the similarities and differences between the learning experiences of Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents of children with disabilities. The study found that non-English-speaking parents who received language access services were more likely to understand the IEP process and to feel that they had a voice in their child's education (Burke et al., 2021). The researchers found that non-English-speaking parents who received language access services were more likely to be satisfied with their child's special education services (Burke et al., 2021). The study also found that language access services can help to improve communication between parents and teachers, which can lead to better outcomes for students (Burke et al., 2021).

Non-English-speaking parents have the right to participate fully in their child's IEP meeting. This means that they must be provided with language access services, such as translation and interpretation. School districts must provide language access services to parents of students with disabilities under IDEA (Lipkin et al., 2015). IDEA also requires that schools provide parents with information about their child's education and the special education process in a language they understand (Kangas, 2018).

There are several strategies that can be used to empower and advocate for parents of students with disabilities from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These strategies include providing training and professional development to educators and other professionals on cultural competence and language access, developing culturally responsive IEP materials and resources for parents, and hiring bilingual and bicultural staff to work with families (Kangas, 2018). Partnering with community organizations and advocacy groups to provide support and resources to parents is another useful strategy for empowering parents and fostering advocacy in special education. The next sections describe how a parent handbook can be used to explain the IEP process and facilitate parental involvement in special needs education.

Conclusion

Effective parent-teacher collaboration and communication are essential for ensuring that students with disabilities receive the services and support they need to succeed in school. To ensure effective parent-teacher collaboration and communication, it is important to be open and honest with each other. Parents and teachers should be honest about their concerns and expectations. Parents and educators should also aim to communicate regularly. They should communicate regularly about the student's progress and any challenges that may be arising (Schultz et al., 2016). It is also necessary to be respectful of each other's roles and expertise. Parents and teachers have distinct roles and expertise, but they are both working towards the same goal, which is helping the student succeed. It is crucial for education partners to work together to develop and implement the IEP. Parents and teachers should work together to develop and implement the IEP and make changes as needed. Finally, the IEP team including the parents should celebrate the student's successes together and support each other in working towards the student's goals.

Chapter Three

Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for my curriculum development infographic resources to enhance parent engagement in the special education process and deliver collaborative partnerships between families and schools. The principles and components aim to address the cultural, linguistic, and accessibility barriers that underserved parents' encounter.

The well-being of students with disabilities, especially in education, is influenced by their parental engagement (Sukys et al., 2015). However, since parents come from diverse backgrounds, they often encounter barriers, such as communication problems, limited knowledge about special education procedures, issues in cultural competence, and language issues (Allam &

Martin, 2021; Hirano & Rowe, 2016). Furthermore, the work by Allam and Martin (2021) found that budgetary limitations, inadequate staff training, and resources are among the systemic barriers that exist in special education classrooms. Therefore, a framework focusing on the values of fairness, cultural responsiveness, and accessibility is needed.

My exploration of educational frameworks revealed a significant gap in effectively engaging parents with diverse linguistic requirements in education. While extensive research exists on strategies for engaging diverse learners (Glazewski & Ertmer, 2020), there is a noticeable absence of addressing the needs of parents with varying linguistic backgrounds. The findings suggest that current educational approaches often overlook the crucial role parents play in their children's learning journey, particularly those facing language barriers. This gap highlights the need for supplementary strategies and resources tailored to effectively communicate with and involve parents with diverse linguistic needs in their children's education, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Universal Health Coverage Framework

The Universal Health Coverage (UHC) framework is a global health initiative that aims to ensure equitable access to quality healthcare services for all individuals regardless of their linguistic or socioeconomic status (Yanful et al., 2023). UHC provides a detailed roadmap specifically designed to effectively communicate with patients with various linguistic requirements, ensuring accessibility. It aims to dismantle barriers to healthcare and promote the well-being of every member of society, particularly those who are marginalized or poor. At its core, the UHC framework emphasizes the importance of including underserved groups in healthcare initiatives, ensuring that no one is left behind. The principles of fairness and equity,

cultural responsiveness, accessibility, and social justice were founded within the UHC

framework.

Yanful (2023), defined fairness and equity by providing healthcare services that meet

quality standards and are delivered in a timely, respectful, and culturally appropriate manner to

all individuals regardless of their background. It acknowledges that marginalized groups often

face greater obstacles in accessing quality special education. Thus, equity should be considered

at the forefront.

Cultural humility is defined as recognizing that patients are experts in their own cultural

experiences and ensuring that healthcare delivery is sensitive to and respectful of diverse cultural

norms, values, beliefs, and practices. Whereas cultural responsiveness refers to adapting

healthcare practices, services, and communication strategies to be culturally appropriate and

relevant to various cultural groups (Yanful, 2023).

Yanful (2023), emphasized accessibility by adapting programs, activities, materials, and

facilities to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities. This principle aims to provide

services and communication materials that are inclusive and usable by people with diverse

abilities, preferences, and linguistic backgrounds. In addition, Yanful suggested using plain

language and visual aids in communication materials and providing interpretation services for

individuals with limited English proficiency.

According to Yanful (2023), social justice is the principle of ensuring equitable access to

healthcare services for all individuals regardless of their socioeconomic status, geographic

location, race, ethnicity, gender, or other factors. This involves understanding and respecting

cultural beliefs, practices, and languages and actively involving patients and communities in decision-making processes related to their care.

Proposed Framework

I created a Universal Special Education (USE) framework inspired by UHC (Yanful et al., 2023). USE envisions special education as a collaborative partnership between families and schools. The key components to be factored into creating this framework include multimodal design, culturally sensitive materials, and language access. The principles and components seek to address the cultural, linguistic, and accessibility barriers that underserve parents' encounters. Similarly, USE aims to make special education more inclusive and accessible by addressing language barriers faced by underserved parents. It draws inspiration and suggestions from the UHC approach to promote equitable access to critical services.

The USE framework aims to create a parent infographic that explains the IEP process in an accessible manner. The infographic will use simplified language, translated materials, visual aids, and audio resources to make the IEP process more understandable to underserved parents. This will help equip parents to advocate effectively for their children's needs.

In special education, fairness, and equity for underserved families with linguistic differences means providing additional support, such as language programs and translated materials, to ensure that we level the playing field for families with linguistic differences. This provides parents with effective communication with school staff, understanding complex educational terminology, and advocating for their children's needs. Drawing parallels to the UHC framework designed to promote equitable access (Yanful et al., 2023), we acknowledge that marginalized groups often face greater obstacles in accessing quality special education. By

following the principles of UHC and ensuring that information is fair and equitable, creating an infographic for parents of children with special needs can empower them. This can provide parents with the knowledge they need to support their children and effectively navigate the education system. This could mean fewer disparities in accessing important services and a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all the students. Consequently, fairness and equity must be considered.

Creating resources based on the principles of cultural humility and responsiveness is essential for diverse linguistic parents because it promotes accessibility, empowerment, trust, equity, and inclusion within the special educational system. Through culturally responsive practices such as providing information in multiple languages, incorporating diverse perspectives into curriculum development, and actively involving parents in decision-making processes, schools can ensure that all families feel welcomed and supported. By focusing on cultural humility and responsiveness, special education can strive to remove obstacles to participation and attain fair outcomes for every student, regardless of their linguistic differences.

Building upon the principles of accessibility and inclusivity, it is imperative to recognize the importance of creating resources that can be tailored to diverse linguistic parents. By providing materials in multiple languages and ensuring cultural sensitivity, special education programs can effectively engage and empower parents from linguistically diverse backgrounds to actively participate in their children's educational journey, foster stronger partnerships between educators and families, and enhance their overall learning experience.

Social justice in special education involves advocating for the human rights and dignity of marginalized groups by identifying and dismantling policies and practices that continue to oppress based on factors such as disability, race, class, or language ability (Bal & Trainor, 2016).

This requires challenging ableism and deficit views, which limits opportunities for individuals with disabilities. For instance, training to enhance educators' skills in culturally competent and language-accessible practices can foster inclusive partnerships with diverse families. By prioritizing social justice in special education, efforts are made to ensure that all students have equitable access to education and support, regardless of their background or abilities.

Inspired Key Components of USE

Language Access Services

The IDEA mandates information accessibility for non-English speakers, including translated documents and interpreters (Kangas, 2018). Burke et al. (2021) showed that language access services enhance Spanish-speaking parents' comprehension and engagement in the special education process. Adapting key components from UHC (Yanful, 2023), USE uses the following specific services;

Document Translation: Convert key materials such as IEPs and student handbooks into major languages spoken by families.

Qualified Interpreters: Provide well-trained interpreters to facilitate precise communication of complex ideas during meetings.

Culturally Responsive Materials: Utilize visual aids to show complex processes, including a flowchart displaying the initial referral sequence with less text for English learners.

Multiple Formats: Using various representations such as printed handouts, other formats such as videos, visual aids, and audio recordings provides parents with opportunities to access content in preferred ways.

Conclusion

This framework illustrates all previously outlined concepts. The fairness and equity principle were implemented to allow special education resources and information to become equitable. The cultural humility and responsiveness principle is demonstrated by utilizing customized communication methods and culturally relevant examples. The idea of accessibility and universal design is shown by offering a variety of resources like visual materials and audio options. The social justice principle is demonstrated in the form of identifying and changing policies and practices that are inherently biased against marginalized families.

At the core, the USE framework aims to reframe special education as a collaborative and inclusive process in which families play an active role and are valued partners in planning and designing the proposed plan. By addressing the cultural, linguistic, accessibility, and systemic problems that face underserved communities, the core elements also result in enhancing engagement levels and a sense of worthwhile partnership for marginalized parents. Empowered participation allows for improvements, such as more accurate data for assessment, expanded interventions, and increased understanding and trust among families, schools, and different communities. To conclude, this framework creates a roadmap for the measures that a school can take to target cooperation rather than confusion in special education.

Chapter Four

Introduction

This chapter presents an infographic for parents with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to utilize in the decision-making process of the child's IEP. IDEA mandates that schools collaborate with professionals and the student's family to develop personalized goals within the IEP for students with disabilities, ensuring a tailored approach to their education. This infographic outlines 10 steps regarding the education process of an IEP. Research has highlighted the effectiveness of educators' collaboration with parents and families in interpreting assessment data and making informed decisions regarding IEP goals and services. IDEA mandates that parents actively participate in the development of IEPs for their children, ensuring that each child's unique needs are addressed (Anderson, 2020).

The infographic serves as an effective communication tool that simplifies the IEP process into digestible visual steps, making it more accessible to parents who may face language or literacy barriers. By presenting information graphically, it caters to the needs of parents who are better able to understand visuals rather than text, ensuring that they can effectively engage with the content. The translation of the infographic into multiple languages addresses the needs of non-English speaking parents, promoting inclusivity and ensuring that language is not an obstacle to understanding children's educational rights and the procedures involved. This approach aligns with IDEA's emphasis on parental involvement by facilitating a clearer understanding, which is crucial for informed decision-making and active participation in the IEP process. This ensures the commitment to providing equitable access to information for all parents, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their child's education.

Interpreting the infographic and providing a QR code to facilitate access for parents unable to read is essential. The QR code can be scanned using a smartphone, which then plays an audio version of the content, allowing parents who are illiterate or have difficulty reading to

listen to the information in their native language. This method ensures that all parents, regardless of literacy or language proficiency, can receive and comprehend the vital information regarding their child's education plan. The infographic is divided into two parts, each featuring its own QR code. This segmentation ensures that the content is presented in shorter, more digestible segments, making it easier to follow and engage with.

Part 1 of the infographic outlines the testing process for special education, starting with identifying a child who may need special education and related services through the "Child Find" process. The child is then tested in areas related to their suspected disability. The school team, including the parents, reviews the evaluation results to decide on the child's eligibility for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). If eligible, an IEP is created within 30 days, and a meeting is scheduled to develop the plan. The meeting involves contacting participants, informing parents of the meeting's purpose, and sending a draft of the IEP to parents before the meeting, so that they can review the document and note down any questions or concerns they may have.

Part 2 outlines the steps in which services are provided according to the IEP. During this phase, teachers are informed of their roles and responsibilities, and an IEP meeting is held to develop the plan. Parental consent is required for services, and due process hearings may be requested in case of disagreements. The progress of the child is measured and reported to the parents every nine weeks, and necessary adjustments are made accordingly. Finally, the IEP is reviewed annually to involve parents in assessing their child's progress, and children with IEPs are reevaluated at least every three years to ensure they are on track and receiving the appropriate support.

Infographics

Part 1:SPECIAL EDUCATION-The Testing Process

KEY Takeaway:

Before we dive into your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), it's important to understand how they are identified as needing extra support in school. It begins with recognizing if your child has a disability and requires specialized education and services. Once identified, an IEP is created to outline the support your child will receive to help them succeed in school.

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Step 1

Child is identified as possibly needing special education and related services.

"Child Find" is a process where school districts are required to test all children for their academic abilities. It the scores are below standards, the child will receive help in the classroom. This ensures that no child slips through the cracks and that every child who needs help gets the support they need to succeed in school.

Step 2

Child is tested.
During the testing process, your child will be tested in every area that could be related to their suspected disability. This step helps the school team understand how to support your child.

Step 3

Eligibility is decided.
School team and parents review evaluation results to determine if a child qualifies for an IEP. Parents can request a hearing to disagree with the decision.

Step 5

IEP meeting is scheduled.
- contact the participants, including the parents
- notify parents early enough to make sure they have an opportunity to attend
- schedule the meeting at a time agreeable to parents and the school team
- tell the parents the purpose of the meeting and a draft of the document will be emailed/sent home closer to the IEP meeting date
- tell the parents who will be attending
- encourage parents that they may invite family members or support people to the meeting.
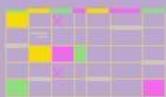
Step 4

Child is found eligible for services.
-Once your child qualifies for special education, the next step is to create their IEP.
-Within 30 days of eligibility, a meeting will be scheduled with the IEP team, including the parent to develop the plan that meets your child's unique need.

Part 2: SPECIAL EDUCATION-The IEP Process

Step 6

IEP meeting is held and the IEP is written.

The IEP team, including parents, meets to discuss the child's needs. Parents must also be involved if placement is decided separately. Consent from parents is required before the child can receive special education services. If there's disagreement, parents can discuss concerns with the team first, or request a due process hearing (formal legal meeting where parents and the school district resolve disagreements about the services provided to a child). Due process is only used when all other options have been tried and not worked.

Step 7

Services are provided.

The school makes sure that your child's personalized learning plan is followed just as it's written. You'll get a copy of it, and the teachers and other staff know what they need to do to support your child, including any extra help or changes that are listed in the plan.

Step 8

Progress is measured and reported to parents.

Your child's special education teacher will keep you updated on how your child is doing with their IEP goals. The goal is to report how your child is progressing EVERY 9 weeks and if there are any adjustments we need to make to support them better.

Step 9

IEP is reviewed.

Every year, your child's IEP will reviewed. It's important that parents are involved in these meetings because your input is valuable. Most importantly, you're able to see the progress your child made and needs to continue working on.

Step 10

Child is retested.

Children with IEPs must have a follow up testing at least every 3 years under IDEA to check their progress and educational needs. This helps make sure your child is on track and receives the support they need to do well in school. Your input as a parent is valued!

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Chapter Five

Research Question

What strategies and resources can be provided to parents to enhance their understanding of the IEP process and their ability to effectively advocate for their children? To address the research question, I adopted an approach to create an infographic that is accessible for parents utilizing simplified language, visual aids, and audio resources. These infographics serve as invaluable tools for breaking down complex IEP concepts into easily digestible components for the parents. Additionally, recognizing the diversity within communities, efforts have been made to translate IEP materials into multiple languages to ensure linguistic accessibility for non-English-speaking parents. By employing these strategies and resources, parents can gain the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively advocate their children's educational needs within the IEP process.

Infographic Strengths and Weaknesses

The strengths of the infographic project include its focus on addressing the obstacles that parents from various backgrounds face in special education, enabling them to advocate effectively, and foster a deeper comprehension of the IEP process. This project emphasizes collaboration, adheres to legal requirements, and strives to promote inclusivity and excellence in special education through informed parental engagement. However, the project's potential weaknesses could arise from the absence of easily accessible resources for multilingual parents, which might hinder effective advocacy efforts. To address this weakness, disseminating this resource across districts could enhance accessibility and comprehension for diverse parents. Additionally, the current limitations in language translation services may further weaken the project's efficacy, as many families may not be able to take advantage of this resource.

Therefore, expanding language translation services and actively encouraging broader participation among families could help address this limitation.

Future Steps and Dissemination

Future steps for the project could involve disseminating the translated parent infographics widely to reach a diverse audience, including non-English-speaking parents. Utilizing multiple communication channels such as school websites, community centers, and multilingual resources can enhance accessibility. Expanding translation efforts to include more languages is a crucial future direction of this initiative. Collaborating with community organizations and schools to host workshops or information sessions on the IEP process can further empower parents. Additionally, seeking feedback from parents on the effectiveness of infographics and making necessary revisions based on their input can improve its impact. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of the project based on feedback is crucial for its success in promoting informed parental involvement and creating a more inclusive special education environment.

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