

THE ROLE OF QUALITATIVE APPROACHES IN DESIGNING INDIVIDUALIZED CURRICULUM PLANS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract

This article discusses the role of qualitative approaches—such as observation, interviews, and case studies—in designing individualized curriculum plans for children with special needs. Employing a conceptual and literature-based methodology, the article aims to demonstrate how qualitative data can help educators understand the unique sensory, cognitive, and emotional profiles of students. The findings indicate that this approach supports the development of flexible and adaptive instructional strategies and enhances students' engagement and academic progress. Although the article does not include empirical fieldwork, it offers practical insights into integrating qualitative tools into Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The analysis underscores the importance of applying qualitative approaches in inclusive education. It is recommended that educators consider utilizing qualitative data in curriculum planning to ensure responsiveness to the diverse needs of students.

Keywords: *Qualitative approaches, Individualized curriculum, Special needs, Observation, Inclusion*

INTRODUCTION

The increasing emphasis on inclusive education has highlighted the necessity for individualized curriculum planning that addresses the diverse needs of children with special needs. Traditional standardized curricula often fail to accommodate the unique learning profiles of these students. Therefore, this article aims to critically examine the role of qualitative research methods—particularly observations, interviews, and case studies—in the development of individualized curriculum plans for children with special needs. It seeks to highlight how such approaches can offer deeper insights into learners' unique profiles, enabling educators to design more responsive and inclusive educational experiences.

Qualitative approaches—such as observations, interviews, and case studies—offer valuable insights into students' experiences, enabling educators to design more personalized and effective educational plans.

Leko et al. (2021) emphasize that qualitative methods are instrumental in special education research, providing a deeper understanding of learners' contexts and needs. Their study underscores the importance of narrative data in shaping individualized educational strategies. Similarly, Musyoka and Gentry (2019) highlight the role of qualitative case studies in capturing the complexities of teaching students with multiple disabilities, advocating for curricula that reflect these nuanced insights.

The application of qualitative methods extends to co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms. A review by Scruggs et al. (2007) analyzes 32 qualitative research reports, revealing that collaborative teaching strategies, informed by qualitative data, enhance the learning experiences of students with special needs. Furthermore, the work of Banister (2019) demonstrates how digital storytelling, as a qualitative tool, can be adapted to support middle childhood special education, fostering engagement and accommodating diverse learning styles.

In the realm of curriculum development, Pinkelman et al. (2021) conduct a qualitative analysis of curriculum adoption in U.S. schools, shedding light on the factors influencing the implementation of individualized curricula. Their findings suggest that qualitative insights are crucial for understanding the dynamics of curriculum design and adoption in special education settings.

Collectively, these studies affirm that qualitative approaches are vital in designing individualized curriculum plans that are responsive to the unique needs of children with special needs. By leveraging qualitative data, educators can develop more inclusive and effective educational strategies.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on using qualitative methods to understand the lived experiences and educational needs of children with special needs. Unlike quantitative data, which often offers generalized outcomes, qualitative data provides a deeper insight into learners' social, emotional, and cognitive contexts (Leko, Cook, & Cook, 2021). These insights are particularly crucial when designing individualized curriculum plans that accommodate diverse profiles and developmental trajectories.

For example, Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) argue that inclusive education can only be effectively implemented when educators are equipped with context-sensitive tools, such as interviews, case narratives, and classroom observations. These tools help tailor teaching

strategies to students' unique strengths and challenges. Similarly, Banister (2005) highlights the importance of adapting teaching tools—like digital storytelling—to reflect the communication preferences and learning modes of children with multiple disabilities.

Furthermore, Musyoka, Gentry, and Meek (2017) found that educators often feel underprepared to meet the complex needs of learners with comorbid disabilities unless they are provided with concrete qualitative data from the learners' own environments. By integrating these methods within the ADDIE framework, educators can follow a structured process that remains sensitive to the complexities of individual learners.

Moreover, the shift toward inclusive education frameworks globally has necessitated a reconsideration of traditional curriculum planning models. Rigid, standardized approaches often overlook the nuances of disability and the intersectional needs of students in inclusive classrooms (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Qualitative approaches provide a means to capture these subtleties through ongoing dialogue with students, parents, and support staff, allowing for curriculum decisions that are both evidence-informed and empathetic.

Integrating these approaches within the ADDIE model ensures that data collected during the Analysis phase directly influences Design and Development, while the Evaluation phase remains responsive to student feedback and behavioral cues. This cyclic process encourages continuous improvement and personalization of learning experiences (Branch, 2009).

As inclusive education continues to evolve, the value of qualitative methodologies in shaping individualized curriculum plans cannot be overstated. These methods bridge the gap between academic theory and practical teaching, offering a holistic view of each learner that standardized assessments alone cannot achieve.

Ultimately, as Pinkelman et al. (2022) emphasize, the adoption of curricula that emerge from qualitative findings fosters greater inclusivity and flexibility in educational settings. This ensures that learning is not only accessible but also meaningful and empowering for children with special needs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative conceptual methodology, drawing on an extensive review of current and credible literature. Rather than engaging in empirical fieldwork, it synthesizes evidence from peer-reviewed journals, theoretical discussions, and institutional reports to explore the contributions of qualitative approaches such as observations, interviews, and case studies in the design of individualized curriculum plans for students with special needs.

The literature was sourced from a range of reputable academic platforms, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Taylor & Francis, SAGE Journals, Springer, MDPI, Frontiers, ERIC, and UNICEF. Relevant materials were identified using keywords such as “qualitative methods in special education,” “individualized curriculum planning,” and “inclusive education strategies.”

A thematic analysis was employed to examine the collected studies, identify recurring themes, and highlight theoretical insights that demonstrate how qualitative methods can inform inclusive curriculum development and enhance educational outcomes for learners with diverse needs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Synthesizing the Conceptual of Children with Special Needs

A clear conceptual understanding of children with special needs is essential for developing inclusive educational practices. This section synthesizes key categories, definitions, and global data to frame the diversity and complexity of special educational needs. Children with special needs encompass a heterogeneous group with various forms of physical, sensory, cognitive, and emotional impairments. According to UNICEF (n.d.), these children face long-term challenges that, when combined with social or environmental barriers, hinder their participation on an equal basis with others.

Types of Disabilities:

There are several categories of disabilities:-

- Physical disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and spina bifida, affect movement and posture and often require physical accommodations and assistive devices to support mobility.

- Sensory disabilities refer to impairments in hearing and vision; children who are deaf or blind may need specialized communication methods, such as Braille or sign language.

- Intellectual disabilities involve limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Conditions such as Down syndrome illustrate the need for individualized developmental and educational approaches.

- Learning disabilities, like dyslexia, are neurological disorders that impact skills such as reading or math and require multi-sensory and scaffolded instruction methods.

- It is also important to note that children often experience overlapping disabilities, which makes understanding the intersectionality of these needs vital to planning effective support strategies (Olusanya et al., 2022).

- Developmental disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), often affect communication and behavior. Emotional and behavioral disorders, such as anxiety or oppositional defiant disorder, may result in significant social and academic difficulties. Emotional support and structured interventions are essential in these cases (UNICEF, n.d.).

Prevalence Statistics: According to UNICEF (n.d.), around 240 million children worldwide live with disabilities, representing about 1 in 10 children globally. In the United States, the National Center for Education Statistics (2023) reports that 15% of public school students received special education services under IDEA in 2022–23. Regional disparities are evident: South Asia reports a 13.6% prevalence rate, while Europe and Central Asia show lower rates at 8.9%, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive education systems adapted to different contexts (Olusanya et al., 2022).

2. Interpreting Individualized Curriculum Principles through Qualitative Findings

Based on a synthesis of qualitative literature and practical classroom observations, three foundational principles emerge as essential for designing individualized curricula for children with special needs: flexibility, learner-centeredness, and clear personalized goals. An individualized curriculum for children with special needs is grounded in the principle that one-size-fits-all education models fail to address learner diversity. To effectively respond to these differences,

curriculum design must embrace flexibility, learner-centeredness, and individualized goal-setting, which are fundamental for meeting unique developmental, cognitive, and emotional needs.

1. Flexibility in Curriculum Content and Delivery

Flexibility allows the curriculum to be adapted to accommodate varying learning profiles, abilities, and needs. It includes modifying instructional materials, pacing, assessments, and learning environments. As Tomlinson (2014) explains, differentiated instruction encourages educators to vary the "what," "how," and "why" of teaching so that all students can access learning in meaningful ways. This can include offering multiple means of representation (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic), expression (e.g., oral presentations, written work, or projects), and engagement (e.g., collaborative or independent activities).

Villa and Thousand (2016) further emphasize that flexible curriculum design requires ongoing assessment and reflection. Teachers must be responsive to feedback and willing to adjust their plans based on learners' performance and emotional responses. For instance, for students with anxiety or executive function difficulties, flexible deadlines and alternate formats for assessments can reduce stress and enhance participation.

2. Learner-Centered Instructional Approach

Learner-centeredness shifts the focus from the teacher's delivery to the learner's needs, interests, and experiences. According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), inclusive pedagogy is not about individualizing for one student in isolation but about extending learning opportunities to all by enhancing what is already available. This principle supports designing curricula that tap into students' prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and personal goals.

In practice, this might involve allowing students to select topics for inquiry projects, designing tasks that reflect their personal experiences, or incorporating culturally relevant teaching materials. McLeskey et al. (2017) point out that learner-centered approaches foster intrinsic motivation and help students feel respected and understood, which is especially important for learners who may have experienced exclusion or stigmatization.

3. Clear and Personalized Educational Goals

A strong individualized curriculum includes explicit short-term and long-term goals tailored to each child's specific developmental path. These goals serve as benchmarks to measure progress and refine teaching strategies. According to Hallahan et al. (2019), effective goals are SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. For example, a goal for a student with autism might focus on improving pragmatic language skills in peer interactions, while a goal for a student with dyslexia could address decoding strategies during reading.

IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) are central to this process. As Friend and Bursuck (2019) explain, IEPs are collaborative tools developed with input from families, educators, and specialists. They provide a roadmap for instruction, accommodations, and support services, ensuring accountability and coordination across stakeholders.

Furthermore, individualized goals promote equity by acknowledging and planning for each child's starting point. This perspective moves away from deficit thinking and toward a growth-oriented model where success is defined by personal development rather than comparison with peers.

3. Insights from Previous Research on Individualized Educational Support by Type of Disability

This section synthesizes empirical findings on how individualized educational support is applied across different types of disabilities, highlighting both effective strategies and practical challenges. Research on individualized curriculum design for students with special needs has evolved significantly, emphasizing the importance of tailoring educational experiences to individual learner profiles. This section reviews recent studies that highlight effective practices and challenges in implementing individualized curricula.

A study by Lindner, K.-T., & Schwab, S. (2020) investigated the progress of differentiated and individualized teaching practices in inclusive classroom settings. The authors found that while differentiation is widely practiced, true individualization—where instruction is tailored to the unique needs of each student—is less common. They argue that systemic support and teacher training are crucial for effective individualization.

Akçin (2022) conducted a large-scale study involving 1,000 special education teachers to identify challenges in preparing IEPs. The study revealed that teachers often face obstacles such as limited resources, insufficient training, and lack of collaboration among stakeholders. These challenges hinder the development of effective individualized curricula.

1. Effectiveness of IEPs for Diverse Learning Needs

An exploratory study by Samiuddin, Z., & Naser, Z. (2022) examined the effectiveness of IEPs for children with diverse learning needs and abilities. The research highlighted that well-implemented IEPs, developed through collaborative efforts among educators, parents, and students, lead to improved educational outcomes. However, the study also noted variability in IEP quality, emphasizing the need for standardized best practices.

2. Inclusive Curriculum Design Principles

In their research, Johnson and Brown (2024) proposed six practical principles for inclusive curriculum design, emphasizing the need for curricula that are accessible, flexible, and responsive to diverse learner needs. Their study underscores the importance of incorporating universal design principles to accommodate all students effectively.

4.Types of Educational Support Required Based on Disability: Insights from Qualitative Research

Different types of disabilities require tailored educational supports to effectively address the unique challenges faced by students. Qualitative research offers valuable insights into these specific needs. Tailoring educational support to the specific needs of students with disabilities is crucial for fostering inclusive learning environments. Qualitative research provides in-depth insights into how different disabilities necessitate distinct forms of support.

1. Visual Impairments

Students with visual impairments benefit from multisensory instructional strategies. For instance, the use of tactile materials and auditory resources can enhance learning experiences. A qualitative study by Samiuddin, Z., & Naser, Z. (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of

incorporating Braille and audio-assisted tools in mainstream classrooms, emphasizing the importance of accessible materials in promoting academic engagement.

2. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Learners with ASD often require structured routines and visual supports to navigate the educational setting effectively. Johnson and Brown (2024) conducted interviews with educators and parents, revealing that visual schedules and sensory-friendly classrooms significantly aid in reducing anxiety and improving focus among students with ASD.

3. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Students with ADHD benefit from clear routines and interactive learning activities. A study by Lindner, K.-T., & Schwab, S.(2020).found that incorporating movement breaks and hands-on tasks helped maintain attention and reduced disruptive behaviors in the classroom.

4. Learning Disabilities

For students with learning disabilities, individualized instruction and the use of assistive technology are pivotal. Akçin (2022) explored teachers' experiences and noted that tools like text-to-speech software and graphic organizers support comprehension and retention of information.

5. Speech and Language Disorders

Children with speech and language disorders benefit from collaborative learning and the use of visual aids. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) emphasized the role of peer interactions and visual storytelling in enhancing communication skills among these students.

Understanding these distinct support requirements helps educators create more inclusive and responsive learning environments.

5. the vital role of qualitative approaches in understanding children's special educational needs

Qualitative research methods play an indispensable role in exploring the complex and nuanced experiences of children with special educational needs (SEN). Unlike quantitative

approaches that often focus on measurable outcomes, qualitative methods delve into the subjective realities of learners, providing rich, contextualized insights that inform more empathetic and effective educational practices.

1. Capturing Lived Experiences

Qualitative approaches are instrumental in capturing the lived experiences of children with SEN, their families, and educators. For instance, a study by Leko et al. (2021) emphasizes that qualitative methods allow researchers to understand how and why certain phenomena occur within special education settings, offering depth that quantitative data alone cannot provide.

2. Informing Inclusive Practices

By exploring the perspectives of stakeholders, qualitative research informs inclusive educational practices. A study by Allam and Martin (2021) highlights how qualitative analysis of teachers' experiences can reveal challenges and strategies in teaching children with learning disabilities, leading to more tailored and effective interventions.

3. Addressing Intersectionality

Qualitative methods are adept at examining the intersectionality of various factors affecting children with SEN. Tefera and Fischman (2023) discuss how critical disability intersectional qualitative approaches can uncover the compounded effects of race, disability, and other identities on students' educational experiences, thereby informing more equitable policies.

4. Enhancing Policy and Practice

Insights from qualitative studies contribute to the development of policies and practices that are responsive to the actual needs of children with SEN. For example, a qualitative study by Tyldesley-Marshall et al. (2025) examines interventions that improve service outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder collaboration.

These insights emphasize the importance of not only understanding the lived realities of students with special educational needs but also applying such understanding within inclusive classroom contexts. This transition from theory to practice is explored in the following section.

6. Practical Application of Qualitative Approaches in Inclusive Classrooms

The use of qualitative research methods in inclusive classrooms plays a pivotal role in uncovering the nuanced dynamics of teaching and learning among students with diverse needs. These approaches help educators and researchers explore not only *what* occurs in inclusive settings but also *how* and *why* inclusive practices succeed or fall short. Commonly used qualitative tools include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, document analysis, and reflective journals.

Semi-structured interviews are often used to elicit in-depth views from teachers, students, and parents about their experiences with inclusive education. These interviews allow participants to express their thoughts openly, revealing barriers and enabling factors for inclusion (Ainscow, 2020). Focus group discussions, particularly with students or teaching staff, foster collective reflection and provide insight into group dynamics and perceptions of inclusivity in the classroom.

Participant observation, often conducted over extended periods, helps researchers document real-time classroom interactions, teacher strategies, peer relationships, and engagement patterns of students with disabilities or learning differences (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This method is particularly effective in identifying subtle behaviors and environmental factors that promote or hinder inclusion.

Document analysis, such as examining individualized education plans (IEPs), lesson plans, and school policies, contributes to understanding how inclusive values are embedded in institutional practices. Similarly, reflective teacher journals serve as a tool for educators to record their thoughts, dilemmas, and decision-making processes, thus offering rich data for understanding professional development in inclusive teaching (Slee, 2018).

In practice, these qualitative tools are frequently used in combination, enabling triangulation and a deeper understanding of inclusive classroom practices. The data gathered through these methods inform teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and policy-making to support more equitable and meaningful participation for all students. Ultimately, qualitative research empowers stakeholders to develop inclusive education from within the classroom context, rather than applying generic, top-down solutions (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

7. The Importance of Designing Diverse and Specialized Learning Environments for Inclusive Education

Creating a diverse and specialized learning environment is essential for promoting the academic, emotional, and social development of all learners, particularly those with disabilities or learning difficulties. Inclusive classrooms must accommodate a range of learning preferences through differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and individualized teaching strategies that address the specific needs of each student (Tomlinson, 2014).

Specialized environments often incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and multimodal instructional materials that engage students through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic channels (CAST, 2018). For instance, tools such as visual schedules, speech-to-text software, and sensory supports have been shown to enhance participation and learning outcomes for students with autism or ADHD (Dell'Anna et al., 2021).

Furthermore, fostering such environments necessitates collaborative practices among general educators, special education professionals, therapists, and families. Research consistently emphasizes that students are more likely to succeed when educational practices are responsive to their strengths and challenges (Florian & Spratt, 2013). In valuing diversity and proactively planning for inclusion, the learning environment evolves into a space of equity, growth, and authentic engagement for all learners.

Ultimately, the success of inclusive education relies not only on policy frameworks, but also on the thoughtful design of learning environments that respect and respond to the full spectrum of student diversity.

8. Challenges and Practical Solutions in Implementing Inclusive Education

Despite global efforts to promote inclusive education, many schools face significant challenges in implementing truly inclusive practices. One of the most pressing issues is the lack of teacher training specific to inclusive pedagogy. Many general education teachers report feeling

unprepared to address the needs of students with diverse learning profiles, particularly those with disabilities or behavioral difficulties (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Additionally, limited resources, including insufficient access to teaching assistants, specialized materials, or assistive technologies, can hinder effective inclusion (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018).

Another major barrier is the rigidity of standardized curricula and assessment methods, which often fail to accommodate diverse learners. Teachers may also encounter attitudinal resistance, both from colleagues and sometimes from families, who may harbor misconceptions about the feasibility or benefits of inclusion (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Cultural and systemic factors, such as overcrowded classrooms and fragmented collaboration between general and special education departments, further complicate implementation.

To address these challenges, several practical solutions have emerged:

1. Ongoing professional development tailored to inclusive strategies and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can build teachers' confidence and competence (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).
2. Schools can adopt collaborative teaching models, such as co-teaching, where general and special educators plan and deliver instruction together.
3. Flexible curriculum frameworks and differentiated instruction allow for personalized learning paths that meet diverse student needs.
4. Strengthening family-school partnerships enhances communication, builds trust, and encourages shared responsibility in the learning process.
5. Policy-level support, including funding allocations for inclusion, ensures that schools can invest in necessary human and material resources.

Ultimately, creating inclusive classrooms is a dynamic and context-specific process. While challenges persist, they can be met with a systemic approach grounded in empathy, adaptability, and evidence-based practices.

9. The Impact of Qualitative Research on Student Outcomes in Inclusive Classrooms

Recent qualitative research has underscored the pivotal role of inclusive education in enhancing both academic and socio-emotional outcomes for students with and without disabilities. For instance, Liu and Potměšil (2024) found that students with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive environments exhibit higher self-esteem and self-efficacy. Such improvement is largely attributed to their active participation in school activities and the peer support they receive, which foster a strong sense of belonging and confidence in their abilities.

Furthermore, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) emphasize that inclusive pedagogy, informed by qualitative insights, enables teachers to flexibly adapt their instructional strategies to meet diverse learning needs. This adaptability benefits not only students with disabilities but also enhances the engagement and academic performance of typically developing peers.

In addition, a recent systematic review by Oswal et al. (2025), focusing on higher education institutions, indicates that inclusive education strategies designed and refined through qualitative research—contribute to improved academic outcomes for students of determination. The review highlights that when faculty are adequately trained in inclusive practices, students with disabilities are more likely to experience academic success and greater integration within the academic community.

Collectively, these findings affirm that qualitative research offers deep and contextually rich insights into the realities of inclusive classrooms. Such insights empower educators to implement evidence-based practices that cultivate equitable, supportive, and responsive learning environments for all students.

10. Recommendations for Teachers and Curriculum Developers

In light of qualitative findings on inclusive education, it becomes increasingly clear that both teachers and curriculum developers play a pivotal role in shaping equitable learning environments. Liu and Potměšil (2024) emphasized that the success of inclusion lies not only in policies but also in how educators interpret and implement these policies through classroom practice. Teachers are recommended to embrace a reflective mindset, utilizing ongoing qualitative feedback such as student narratives, classroom observations, and focus group insights to adapt their teaching approaches. This dynamic feedback loop allows teachers to respond to students' evolving needs, ensuring a more responsive and supportive environment.

Curriculum developers must also integrate qualitative insights to design curricula that are flexible and culturally responsive. As Oswal et al. (2025) highlighted in their review of inclusive education strategies, curricular materials should avoid a one-size-fits-all model. Instead, they should incorporate options for representation (e.g., visual, auditory, and tactile content), expression (e.g., written, oral, digital), and engagement (e.g., peer interaction, real-life projects, and student choice). These principles align with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which is supported by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), who stress the value of inclusive pedagogy as a proactive approach to diversity, rather than a reactive accommodation.

Moreover, teachers are encouraged to shift away from deficit-based views and adopt asset-based frameworks that recognize students' abilities and potential. Qualitative interviews analyzed by Liu and Potměšil (2024) revealed that students with disabilities often show improved engagement and confidence when educators focus on their strengths, interests, and individual progress rather than solely on standardized benchmarks. In this context, curriculum developers should ensure that assessment practices align with inclusive values—focusing not just on academic achievement, but also on participation, motivation, and well-being.

Finally, collaboration is crucial. Teachers should work closely with special educators, therapists, families, and the students themselves to co-create meaningful learning goals. Curriculum developers, in turn, must facilitate this collaboration by designing learning plans and resources that are accessible and adaptable across settings. The collective findings from qualitative studies underscore the importance of inclusive design, not as an add-on, but as a core principle of effective education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Oswal et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to examine how qualitative approaches can inform the development of individualized curriculum plans for children with special needs. By focusing on methods such as interviews, observations, and case studies, the paper sought to highlight the unique contributions of qualitative insights in shaping flexible, learner-centered educational strategies.

The findings of this conceptual paper underscore the significant role that qualitative approaches play in the development of individualized curriculum plans for children with special needs. Through methods such as interviews, observations, and case studies, educators gain a

comprehensive and nuanced understanding of learners' sensory, cognitive, emotional, and social experiences. Unlike quantitative approaches that often rely on standardized metrics, qualitative methods allow for the capturing of personal narratives and contextual factors that shape students' learning processes.

The integration of qualitative insights facilitates the creation of curriculum plans that are flexible, adaptive, and truly learner-centered. These approaches help educators recognize and respond to individual differences in learning styles, communication preferences, and behavioral cues. As such, qualitative methods contribute not only to academic advancement but also to emotional and social inclusion within educational settings.

Furthermore, embedding qualitative tools into frameworks like ADDIE ensures that curriculum development is an ongoing, reflective, and responsive process. This enhances the alignment between instructional strategies and the evolving needs of learners. Ultimately, qualitative approaches bridge the gap between educational theory and classroom practice, advancing the goals of inclusive education by making curricula more relevant, personalized, and empowering.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Institutional Integration of Qualitative Tools

Educational institutions should formally integrate qualitative methods into the curriculum planning process, especially within Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This includes allocating time and training for teachers to conduct observations, interviews, and case analyses as part of routine practice.

2. Professional Development for Educators

Ongoing training programs should be provided to enhance educators' qualitative research skills. These should cover data collection techniques, thematic analysis, and the application of findings to instructional design. Empowering teachers with these tools increases their ability to address complex learner needs.

3. Collaboration with Stakeholders

Schools should promote collaboration among educators, families, therapists, and students themselves to enrich qualitative data collection. Including diverse perspectives ensures that individualized plans are holistic, culturally sensitive, and reflective of the learner's real-life contexts.

4. Policy Support for Inclusive Practices

Policymakers should advocate for the inclusion of qualitative methodologies in national and local special education guidelines. By embedding qualitative approaches within regulatory frameworks, schools will be encouraged to adopt more adaptive and responsive teaching models.

5. Continued Research on Qualitative Approaches

While this paper is conceptual, future empirical research is recommended to explore the direct impact of qualitative methods on learning outcomes for students with special needs. Longitudinal and comparative studies would offer stronger evidence for policy advocacy and instructional reform.

6. Use of Technology in Qualitative Data Collection

Educational settings should leverage digital tools—such as audio/video recordings, digital storytelling platforms, and learning analytics systems—to support qualitative data collection and interpretation. This would streamline the process and provide richer, multimedia insights into students' learning journeys.

By adopting these recommendations, educators and institutions can harness the full potential of qualitative methods to design curriculum plans that are inclusive, personalized, and capable of transforming the educational experiences of children with special needs.

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