Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine (a) current training content and practice for paraeducators as perceived by the special education teacher and the paraeducator, (b) perceived training needs for the paraeducator as viewed by the special education teacher and the paraeducator, and (c) the differences that exist between the special education teacher and the paraeducator concerning perceived current training content and practice and perceived training needs for paraeducators who work with special education students in special education programs in the District of Columbia. Special education teachers and paraeducators who work in special education programs in the four quadrants in the District of Columbia Public School System were surveyed in reference to their perception of paraeducator training. Eighty-five percent of special education teachers and 93% of paraeducators returned surveys for an 89% overall return rate. The data were then analyzed and recommendations were recorded using SPSS. A Series of Chi-Square Analyses and three Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA) were used for statistical analysis. The findings indicated that there was no significant difference between perception of current training content and practice and perceived training needs for paraeducators who work in special education programs in the District of Columbia. The findings also noted discrepancies when the expectations for current job role and responsibilities were compared between the special education teacher and the paraeducator. It became evident that both special education teachers and paraeducators have similar views concerning 27 remaining areas reviewed in this study. These areas include: current practices and perceived needs for initial training provided by an educational agency, ongoing training/in-service being provided by the educational
agency, paraprofessionals attending training/in-service, school policies, legal/ethical issues, knowledge of disabling conditions, behavior management/physical control, tutoring techniques, observing/recording and reporting student behavior, instructional materials, equipment operation, first aid/safety, and job specific skills, and perceived job role expectation and responsibilities. Based on the results gathered from the data in this research study, the following types of research work are recommended. First, a similar research study should be conducted adding the perceptions of school administrators to those of the teachers and paraeducators. Second, a longitudinal study should be conducted, one that is run over several years to see if paraeducators’ views change over a period of time. Third, it is also recommended that this research study be replicated, using a larger sample size (including other school districts both public and private). Fourth, there must also be a study to identify the reasons why the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the efficacy of paraeducators in improving student learning is significantly less than the perceptions of the paraeducators themselves. Finally, a study that uses Knowles’ Learning Theory and Andragogy to train paraeducators should be conducted to determine perception of effectiveness before and after training.