‘How does gaining additional qualifications benefit teaching assistants?’
Abstract

Over the last decade the composition of the teaching assistant workforce has changed dramatically (Morris, 2009). There is an abundance of research that depicts the effectiveness and impact of the teaching assistant. However, limited research has been conducted into the qualifications and personal benefits of academic development among teaching assistants. This research project focused primarily on the historical and changing context of the role of the teaching assistant and the benefits of additional qualifications on the teaching assistants themselves. It acknowledges the benefits for both the setting and pupils.

This project investigated the levels of qualifications held by teaching assistants and how qualifications were viewed by teaching assistants and settings. Findings identified that there is limited career progression for teaching assistants despite 91% of the workforce sample holding a level 3 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) or above. 21% of these hold a full BA honours degree.

Preface

Throughout this dissertation paper the term ‘teaching assistant’ will be used to describe the role of a non-teaching member of support staff. These members of staff may include ‘learning support assistants’, ‘one to one special needs assistants’ or ‘classroom support assistants’.
Introduction

The (2003) government workforce reform introduced an increased amount of teaching assistants into schools. It was envisaged that teaching assistants would support teachers to help to lighten their workload. When teachers and teaching assistants work together as a team pupils experience more effective learning (Rose, 2005). According to the DfES (2004) teaching assistants provide support to teachers, pupils and the schools. Longer serving teaching assistants identified a large change in their roles follow the reform (Tan, 2006). Foundation degrees and NVQ's designed to support the role of a teaching assistant were introduced in response to the (2003) workforce reform. Government funding was provided to cover the cost of specialist foundation degrees. However this funding was later revoked (Morris, 2009).

An investigation into the provision and impact of foundation degrees for teaching assistants concluded, teaching assistants gain personal and professional benefits by gaining additional qualifications. Although foundation degrees were devised with employer engagement in mind the study found that most head teachers lacked knowledge and understanding of course content and as a result many teaching assistants felt unsupported (Morris, 2009)

Previous research by the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) Project showed that teaching assistants were overall found to be ineffective in advancing the attainment of pupils. Nutbrown’s (2003) review highlighted that many early years staff are not equipped with the correct qualifications to carry out the role effectively. This paper will look at the qualifications held be teaching assistants, focusing on their deployment and personal perspectives.
Aims

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of additional qualifications, on teaching assistants and schools. This research project is important considering the small amount of current research surrounding this subject.

In order to achieve the aims of this research, the researcher deemed it necessary to explore; the background of the average teaching assistant and the reasons for their career choices, views of the head teacher and of a large sample of teaching assistants. The specific aims for this research are as follows:

- To critically analyse literature discussing the historical role of a teaching assistant
- To investigate a Head Teachers perspective of Foundation Degrees and a graduate workforce
To explore the personal perceptions of a sample of the teaching assistant population

To evaluate the perception of a more qualified workforce

To uncover what support is offered to staff (who study for additional qualifications) by settings

**Literature Review**

**Introduction**

This literature review provides an in-depth discussion of the role of the teaching assistant. In view of the reconsideration of the early years provision and the subsequent changes in the primary curriculum in the last decades, the issue of the role of the teaching assistant has evoked much discussion and debate (Kay, 2005, Whitby, 2005). In accordance with the reconsidered vision, the early years staff are considered to have the greatest impact on the quality of care and teaching (Nutbrown, 2012). In their overall development and academic achievements, children significantly depend on skills and knowledge of teaching assistants, especially if taking into account the fact that the number of teaching assistants in England has increased from 79,000 to 243,000 over the last fifteen years (Alborz et al., 2009, Sharples, Webster, and Blatchford, 2015).

**Roles of the teaching assistant**

The teaching assistant is required to fulfil a range of roles in a modern early years setting. Kay (2005) specifies that the teaching assistant should educate and take care of
children, engage in planning, counselling, and assessment, possess computer skills, develop and effectively use numeracy and literacy strategies, and conform to the requirements of the curriculum. Lee (2002) and Whitby (2005) point out that other roles of the teaching assistant include the support of teachers, the preparation of different materials, and the fulfilment of administrative tasks. To successfully fulfil all these roles, the teaching assistant needs to possess specific personal and professional skills, including communication skills, an ability to deal with children, patience, subject knowledge, and general pedagogical knowledge (Whitby, 2005).

According to Nutbrown (2012), it is essential for the teaching assistant working in an early years setting to delve deep into the essence of the child’s development and thus become aware of how to positively affect the child’s physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being. Nutbrown (2012) also asserts that the teaching assistant should constantly observe children to identify their individual traits and individual learning styles. Such observations provide the assistant with an opportunity to develop and use different approaches to teaching and communication. In view of the mentioned roles, the teaching assistant provides support for children, teachers, and schools (Lee, 2002).

**Effectiveness of the teaching assistant**

Although teaching assistants fulfil numerous and complex roles, Kay (2005) acknowledges that they are not adequately paid and often spend extra hours at schools without additional payment. It is for this particular reason that teaching assistants are reluctant to receive professional qualifications or university degrees (Morris, 2009). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) survey conducted in 2004 revealed that the effectiveness of teaching assistants was significantly impeded by the lack of accurate definitions on the roles of the teaching assistant and by the inadequate cooperation between the teacher and teaching assistant (Whitby, 2005). According to the results of the NFER survey, the effectiveness was also hindered by the low status of the teaching assistant; as one respondent acknowledged, teaching assistants were often
regarded as failed teachers (Whitby, 2005). Moreover, Lee (2002, p.iv) asserts that many teachers tend to view teaching assistants as “creating extra work rather than reducing teacher workload”. In view of such a low status, schools rarely develop a career structure for the teaching assistant (Whitby, 2005). This is a really frustrating aspect of the teaching assistant's work.

Previous investigation into the effectiveness of teaching assistants found, regardless of teaching assistants’ experience and qualifications, they are often “used as an informal teaching resource for low-attaining pupils” (Sharples, Webster, and Blatchford, 2015, p.4). However, limiting the role of the teaching assistant to a work with low-attaining pupils, a school tends to exclude the teaching assistant from “the school community, where both teaching assistant and learner are equally devalued” (Whittaker and Kikabhai, 2007, p.125). The DISS (Deployment and Impact of Support Staff 2003-2008) project revealed that teaching assistants have a negative impact on children’s development and academic achievements (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster, 2012). Drawing on the findings of the DISS project, this negative impact stems from the lack of cooperation from the side of teachers and the focus of teaching assistants on task completion instead of close interactions with children. Moreover, Webster and Blatchford (2012) acknowledge that teaching assistants are allowed to directly intervene in the teaching process for less than 40 minutes a day (out of 4 hours). In view of such poor deployment, teaching assistants fail to apply their knowledge and skills and acquire appropriate experience in working with children. As a result of the lack of experience, teaching assistants are often over-protective, provide too much supervision, and fail to engage in effective relationships with children (Alborz et al., 2009). In addition, due to children’s greater dependency in an independent teaching assistant, some difficulties may occur with children’s inclusion in the learning process (Alborz et al., 2009).

**Policy political agenda**
It is necessary for policy makers to pay special attention to defining the roles of the teaching assistant, to developing a clear career structure, to increase salaries, and to engage assistants in further training (Lee, 2002, Whitby, 2005). Blatchford, Webster, and Russell (2012, p.3) acknowledge that these issues should be resolved at the national level “to establish consistency and avoid the role ambiguity”. In 2008, the School Support Staff Negotiating Body made an attempt to implement a national pay scale for teaching assistants and other support staff for 2009-2010 (TES, 2012). Unfortunately, this attempt was not supported by the government; the organisation was soon dissolved by the Education Secretary Michael Gove.

Despite the lack of consistency in the role and deployment of teaching assistants, some recent government policies have been implemented to extend the roles of teaching assistants and improve their positions within a school (Alborz et al., 2009). For instance, the guide ‘Working with Teaching Assistants’ produced by DfEE (2000) accentuates the need to involve teaching assistants into the process of planning, provide them with enough freedom in their interactions with children, and widely engage them in staff meetings. Additionally, the National Agreement Raising Standards and Tackling Workload (2003) enabled teaching assistants to lead the lesson if the teacher is absent for a short period of time (Alborz et al., 2009).

While the extension of the roles of teaching assistants is a positive change, low salaries and poor status have a negative impact. Many teaching assistants are hired on a temporary basis and are forced to interact with teachers and work on lesson plans without pay. To a certain extent, poor conditions for teaching assistants are explained by the reluctance of policy makers to take responsibility for teaching assistants (Lee, 2002). In 2014, the DFE produced a review of professional standards for teaching assistants in an attempt to increase the status and position of teaching assistants in a school. A crucial recommendation of this review is the school’s support and financing of teaching assistants’ training (DfE, 2015). In addition, the new standards specify that the major role of the teaching assistant is to engage in close interactions with teachers “to raise the learning and attainment of pupils while also promoting their independence” (DfE,
2015, p.5). However, the government refused to publish these standards, claiming that each school should develop their own standards for teaching assistants (Scott, 2015). At present, employment conditions and remuneration for teaching assistants are developed by a school or, in rare cases, by local authorities (TES, 2012). What thus stems from the government’s reluctance to seriously discuss the status and working conditions of teaching assistants at the national level is that teaching assistants will continue to work under unfavourable conditions and in the atmosphere of inequality and disregard.

Workforce reform

Previous research considers that qualifications held by early years practitioners have an explicit impact on the quality of teaching, especially on such aspects of the child’s development as thinking, reasoning, creativity, communication, literacy, and language. The higher the level of qualification, the more specialist knowledge the practitioner possesses. A new workforce reform should be implemented within an early years setting with a focus on long-term effects and an improved qualifications system (Nutbrown,
In the viewpoint of Simpson (2010), Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) status is valued more than Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) within an early years setting. The researcher cites an example of the early years practitioner, who possesses EYPS and whose recommendations are not accepted by early years practitioners with QTS status. Moreover, they are not actively involved in the teaching process. Simpson (2010) acknowledges that the qualifications system should not cause inequality and division. EYPS was later replaced by early years teacher status (EYT) in a bid to heighten its status (N.C.S, 2016). Practitioners with QTS status have a better position than practitioners with EYPS. A similar opinion is expressed by Nutbrown (2012), who asserts that early years practitioners experience significant dissatisfaction with their lower position compared to practitioners with QTS. Moreover, Nutbrown (2012) acknowledges that practitioners with EYT have lower salaries and worse conditions than practitioners with QTS.

Recently, Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) has been introduced for graduates who want to receive more specialist knowledge in working with children up to five years (Learner, 2015). EYITT is equal to QTS; both qualifications are graduate professional statuses which are not awarded to practitioners with a foundation degree. A significant benefit of EYITT is that it provides teaching assistants with an opportunity to choose either a full time or part time course (Learner, 2015). More importantly, EYITT programmes are funded by the government (Learner, 2015); the only requirement is that teaching assistants should undertake a Professional Skills Test to demonstrate his/her numeracy and literacy skills. However, teaching assistants with EYITT have worse remuneration packages than teaching assistance with QTS, despite the fact that teaching assistants with EYITT and QTS possess the same levels of skills and knowledge (Learner, 2015). Some English schools stimulate teaching assistants to receive QTS; however, this is a rather rare phenomenon (Lee, 2002).
**HLTA training programmes and knowledge**

Teaching assistants working in early years settings express significant mistrust in the existing training programmes and qualifications. This is explained by the fact that the qualifications system does not endow assistants with appropriate skills and knowledge. Although the number of qualifications has greatly increased since the 1980s, Nutbrown (2012, p.17) points out that only some qualifications can be regarded as “full and relevant”. What is stated in the report is that assistants should possess at least Level 3 qualifications “to be considered ‘qualified’ for such work” (Nutbrown, 2012, p.6). However, there is no consensus among policy makers, teachers, and early years practitioners as to what qualifications should be chosen. Moreover, assistants often receive qualifications, even if they have poor results in maths and English (Nuttbrown, 2012).

HLTA training programmes have been developed to increase the number of qualified early years practitioners (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004, Garner, 2010, Watkinson, 2013). While initially teaching assistants received grants on HLTA training, the recent elimination of grants deprived many teaching assistants of the opportunity to increase their skills and knowledge with HLTA programmes (Garner, 2010). As teaching assistants receive significantly lower salaries, they are often unable to pay for their training (Garner, 2010). However, the obvious benefit of HLTA status is that it provides the teaching assistant with the proof that they possess appropriate knowledge and skills to “lead learning with whole classes” (Alborz et al., 2009, p.5). As Watkinson (2013, p.1) acknowledges, with HLTA status, the role of the teaching assistant “is no longer invisible”. Acquiring an HLTA status, a person appears in a privileged position compared to teaching assistants with lower statuses. On the other hand, HLTA programmes do not endow a qualification to the teaching assistant; this status proves the person’s competence in working with children. To receive this status, a person should have a Level 2 or Level 3 qualification in numeracy and literacy and participate in a specific training needs assessment (Chambers, 2015). In addition to these requirements, the
teaching assistant should be prepared to be observed by the external assessor (Chambers, 2015).

Early Years

As each early years setting is unique, it is especially crucial for the teaching assistant to receive practice in different settings to provide effective care and teaching (Nutbrown, 2012). Within an early years setting, the teaching assistant is responsible for shaping children’s numeracy and literacy skills and for satisfying special and individual needs of children (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004). The latter factor is especially crucial in view of the recent increase of pupils in early years settings with special educational needs (Kay, 2005). Teaching assistants are also required to develop and submit Individual Education Plans (MacLeod-Brudenell, 2004). However, in practice, as Nutbrown (2012) specifies, the roles, which teaching assistants perform within an early years setting, are significantly confusing. According to Nutbrown (2012, p.44), “there is a lack of clarity about what skills are needed for different roles, and which qualifications will provide these skills”. Whalley (2010) expresses a similar viewpoint, claiming that there are significant uncertainties about teaching assistants' roles and positions within an early years setting. Whalley (2010) also specifies that while policy makers constantly talk about better working conditions for teaching assistants within an early years setting, there is a great gap between their words and reality.

In accordance with Children’s Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2007), teaching assistants working in early years settings were encouraged to receive EYPS (Hevey, 2014). The
standards developed for EYPS were similar to the standards of QTS (DfES, 2007). Unfortunately, despite expectations, teaching assistants who received EYPS did not occupy an equal position with those early years practitioners who possessed QTS (Hevey, 2014). While early years practitioners with QTS are able to find high-paying jobs in both nursery schools and primary schools, those with EYPS “had no guarantee of pay and conditions commensurate with their graduate qualifications or professional responsibilities” (Hevey, 2014). Actually, the teaching assistant without EYPS, but with appropriate experience, works under the same conditions as the teaching assistant with EYPS. As such, the need to receive EYPS is perceived by teaching assistants working in early years settings with great doubts.

**A ‘Mums Army’?**

In 2010, Michael Gove made a proposal to substitute teaching assistants for teachers (Garner, 2010). This proposal was aimed at saving £4 billion; this sum was spent on training and supporting teaching assistants. However, Gove’s suggestion that teaching assistants were ‘a mums army’ was negatively perceived by the public and teachers’ trade unions (Garner, 2010). According to the public opinion, teaching assistants fulfil crucial roles within the school setting and contribute much to the effectiveness of the teaching process (Garner, 2010). In contrast to Gove, Blatchford, Webster, and Russell (2012, p.2) express a view that the teaching assistant can “add value to the teacher’s role”. In this regard, the researchers accentuate the need to preserve teaching assistants. Their Effective Deployment of TAs project, which was conducted in 2010-2011, demonstrated that the effectiveness of the teaching assistant’s work was reinforced when teaching assistants were given an opportunity to be more actively engaged in the teaching process and when they were allowed to work with higher attaining pupils. Due to a more close interaction with pupils, confidence and satisfaction of teaching assistants increased. However, the project revealed that the changes in the status and deployment of teaching assistants were a direct result of cooperation among all school members.
Summary

As the literature review has clearly shown, the roles of the teaching assistant within the modern early years setting are significantly varied. However, the effectiveness of the teaching assistant's work is hindered by low salaries, a low status, the lack of a career structure, a poor cooperation with teachers, and inadequate motivation. To improve the conditions of teaching assistants, these barriers should be removed. Moreover, the qualifications system should be considerably changed to provide teaching assistants with more opportunities for growth, thus increasing assistants' confidence and satisfaction, on the one hand, and the quality of teaching, on the other hand.
Research Findings and Discussions

5.1 Presentation and Analysis of Data

In carrying out data analysis, two approaches were used. Firstly, the results of the survey questionnaires were analysed quantitatively; secondly, thematic analysis was carried out on the interview transcripts in order to identify common themes. Colour-coding was used in order to achieve this; the colour-coded transcripts are included in Appendix 14. The themes identified from the transcript will be used to discuss both qualitative and quantitative findings.

5.2 Validity of Results

In considering the results of the online survey, the comparatively large sample size of 152, and the sampling strategy that was used, mean that results can, in most regards, be reasonably considered as representative of the National workforce. However, the results of question 8 demonstrate that the majority of respondents were from the primary workforce, with only 1.33% working in the secondary sector. The results should therefore be considered as being representative of the primary workforce only, and will be discussed in this light.
5.3 Working class, feminized workforce

It can be seen clearly from the results of question 1 that the workforce sampled in this study was overwhelmingly female, with only 1.33% of respondents being male. In addition, 73.83% of respondents considered themselves to be working class.
There are a range of possible reasons for this feminization of the workforce. One possible reason for this is that the low pay-scale makes the role unattractive to men. However, the head teacher interviewed for this project disagreed and felt that the over-riding factor was the perception of the role as being feminine. In addition, she raised the point that men are often reluctant to work with young children, as they perceive that this may lay them open to allegations; she pointed out that,

“I think there’s also a concern over what people would think. People always think of something a bit suspect about men wanting to work with small children which is absolutely ludicrous. Unfortunately, I think that those fears can sometimes stop people from considering it as an option which is a shame” (Head Teacher Appendix 3)

It should be noted that the primary school workforce as a whole is very female-dominated; the interviewee alludes to this when she says that ‘luckily’ her school has two male teachers. She refers to a presentation given by a male teaching assistant in a very positive manner, and is obviously enthusiastic about attracting more men into the profession.

Although the results of the survey clearly show that the primary school workforce is highly feminised, this cannot be taken to apply to the secondary school workforce due to the lack of respondents from Key Stages 3 and 4.
Figure 3. A Table to Show Key Stage Deployment of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>50.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key stage 1</td>
<td>32.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key stage 2</td>
<td>15.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key stage 3</td>
<td>0.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key stage 4</td>
<td>0.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Of the three individuals who gave profile interviews, two gave clear indications of being from a working-class background. One stated that his mother was a cleaner and school dinner lady, while his father was a factory worker; he refers to growing up in a terraced house without much money. Another states that her father was a milkman and that her mother was a stay-at-home mum; again, she refers to not having much money in the family home. The third respondent refers to her father being a physiotherapist, which indicates a professional occupation which supports a middle-class background; however, since she has five sisters and her mother did not work, it is unlikely that this was an affluent household.

In all three cases, there are indications that background and upbringing had a significant effect on their career choices, and in particular the decision to become teaching assistants rather than teachers. However, only in one case does the respondent specifically cite lack of money as being influential; she mentions that her parents could not have afforded for her to go to university, and that this was a factor in her going to college to study Nursery Nursing instead. In one case, the deciding factor was poor performance in his A-levels which ruled out University; in the case of the third respondent, cultural and family influences were the deciding factor, since her parents were not in favour of her going to university and had an expectation that she would get married young.
5.4 Job Role

As has been discussed in the literature review, the role of the teaching assistant has changed and evolved over recent years. The Workforce Reform of 2003 set out a range of tasks that teachers were no longer expected to perform, such as display preparation and various administrative tasks; there was some expectation that some of these roles would fall to teaching assistants, thereby diminishing their active role in the classroom (Gunter, 2008). However, the results of the survey would indicate that this has not been the case. According to the results of Question 9, the respondents' time is spent in tasks that involve direct interaction with pupils, and not in administrative tasks. The bulk of their time is spent in classroom support (55.33%), with 14% of time spent in one-to-one support, 18.67% with small groups or intervention, and 12.00% in HLTA tasks.

Figure 4. A Chart to Show how the Participants are Deployed.
These findings are enhanced by comparing the teaching standards and job description of the teaching assistant role. Current job roles contain elements of the teaching standards such as contributing to planning and liaising with social workers and health professionals. This is in complete contrast to the early evidence of changing displays. In considering the role of the teaching assistant, two clear elements emerge: that of supporting the teacher, and that of directly supporting children’s learning. According to the head teacher who was interviewed, the ability of a teaching assistant to influence children’s learning is dependent on their skill set; for example, whether they are skilled in questioning. She points out that simply keeping children on task does not necessarily move their learning forward.

Both the researcher and interviewee highlight the fact that effective deployment of teaching assistants is crucial. There needs to be stability and consistency in the ways in which teaching assistants are utilised, but there also needs to be a degree of flexibility so that each practitioner’s skill set can be used effectively. Both deployment in the whole school and deployment within the classroom need to be effective in order to ensure that there is value for money. This is highlighted in the guidance ‘Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants’ (Appendix 14) based on finding by the DISS project (Appendix 13) which found teaching assistants were often used as replacements for teachers.

Deployment was also highlighted as an important issue by the results of the survey. 37.58% of respondents felt that they were not deployed effectively; this is a significant proportion. In addition, 45.33% felt that poor deployment was the reason why teaching assistants were not effective in raising pupil attainment.

*Figure 5. A Chart to Show Participant’s Views on why Teaching Assistants were found to be Ineffective*
In supporting children, two distinct roles emerge: that of supporting with behaviour, and that of moving children’s learning forward. The interviewee points out that a teaching assistant who is primarily concerned with supporting behaviour, for example by keeping a child on task, may not necessarily be moving that child’s learning forward.

When considering the influence of qualifications (such as a foundation degree) on the role of the teaching assistant, the head teacher argues that while it is a factor, there are other aspects that must be taken into account. Although certain roles require specific skills which a foundation degree delivers, personality and teaching style are also important.

5.5 Training and Qualifications

The results of Question 10 show that the majority of respondents have at least a Level 3 qualification, with only 8.66% having no qualifications beyond GCSE/ Level 2. A comparatively high proportion have degrees, with 13.33% having foundation degrees.
and 21.33% having BA(Hons) degrees; this means that overall, 24.66% (i.e. nearly one quarter) of the teaching assistant workforce are graduates.

Figure 6. A Chart to Show the Level of Qualifications Held by the Participants

Regardless of the results of Question 13, 40.27% of respondents do not wish to pursue further qualifications and only 14.77% have an interest in a foundation degree.
The head teacher who was interviewed was very clear about the fact that teaching assistants need effective training. In particular, she highlighted the importance of knowing when to intervene and when not to; this was a skill that she felt was delivered by foundation degrees. However, she expressed a significant degree of scepticism towards proposals that teaching assistants should hold a level 3 qualification at a minimum, since this might exclude people from the workforce who would be highly effective in the role. She was also cautious about deploying practitioners based solely on their level of qualification, stating that,

“You can have a person who on paper has the best qualifications but they may lack the ability to engage with children. It is definitely a balance we encourage but it is important to make sure they have the right skills”. (Head Teacher. Appendix 3).

She was clear that teaching assistants should be encouraged to undertake additional training, and was particularly enthusiastic about foundation degrees, giving a high level of support to staff undertaking such courses.
The teaching assistants in the profile interviews also indicated that they had received a good level of support from their employers when undertaking additional training or qualifications, as did those who took part in the survey. However, one spoke about the challenges of doing so while working full time and caring for a family. One respondent expressed the view that having a higher qualification allows a better rapport to develop between the teacher and assistant, since the teacher can have confidence in the assistant’s judgements.

Respondents in the survey indicated that undertaking additional training had helped them to improve in knowledge, self-confidence and practice. However, only 9.93 felt that there had been an improvement in how they were perceived. Only 25.35% felt that they were more valued as a result of obtaining additional qualifications.

Figure 8. A chart to show how valued staff felt as a result of gaining additional qualifications
5.6 Career Progression

Career progression for teaching assistants was highlighted as a major issue by the head teacher and by the teaching assistants themselves. Currently, once teaching assistants acquire HLTA status, there is no further career progression possible other than teacher training; both the researcher and the head teacher highlighted this as a reason why people leave the profession. Although the role of unqualified teacher is still possible, in practice it is becoming less common.

The head teacher stated that a possible solution would be to add a further layer into the workforce, such as a graduate role; however, this would need to be debated nationally, particularly with regard to the setting of pay and conditions. One of the teaching assistants pointed out that due to the lack of career progression, many highly qualified and experienced workers were on low salaries, and this was causing them to leave the profession.

According to the results of Question 13, only 18.12% of respondents had any wish to pursue teacher training as a career move.

Figure 9. A Table to Show the Number of Participants Wanting to Advance their Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>11.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation degree</td>
<td>14.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Honours degree</td>
<td>9.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Status</td>
<td>17.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>151</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the three respondents in the profile interviews, only one is embarking on teacher training. One of the others cites high workload and poor work-life balance as the reason why she does not wish to pursue teaching; the other is looking to leave education altogether.

5.7 Workforce Reform

This issue of workforce reform is inextricably bound up with considerations of the teaching assistant role, and of career progression. In the opinion of the head teacher, deployment is a crucial aspect of this, and schools may need to make changes in order to ensure that their teaching assistants are deployed in the most effective ways.

In terms of reforms to qualifications, the head teacher was very cautious about placing requirements on existing staff, since this might put people under pressure to obtain qualifications they would find very difficult. She was also cautious about being too prescriptive in the qualification levels required of new staff; she believed that the critical factor was experience with and aptitude for working with children.

The head teacher expressed the view that the status of teaching assistants needed to be raised, and that it needed to be classed as a professional role. None of the teaching assistants themselves mentioned this, being more concerned with low pay and lack of career progression.

In considering workforce reforms, the head teacher felt that foundation degrees have a significant impact in giving the teaching assistant additional skills. Some of the teaching assistant respondents were, however, concerned that obtaining additional qualifications led to an increase in workload and responsibilities without any increase in pay.
5.8 Political Agenda

It was noticeable that political considerations were largely absent from the responses of participants. The head teacher was highly aware of political issues, referring to the Endowment Foundation research, and also to the report by Nutbrown (2003) which recommended that teaching assistants in the Early Years should hold a minimum Level 3 qualification. Her biggest concern was that the political agenda places limitations on what schools can do in terms of giving their teaching assistants more status and greater pay; she stated that this was impossible to do as it would leave other schools open to equal pay claims.

Conclusion

Following the (2003) workforce reform, the role of the teaching assistant changed dramatically. With these changes came more opportunities to gain specialised training and qualifications. Although these qualifications are beneficial to the knowledge and development of the teaching assistant there is little incentive for staff to advance their learning. Despite a high proportion of teaching assistants gaining NVQ’s and foundation or BA honours degrees, there is little evidence to suggest that they are being deployed to make the best of their skills. The overall lack of effective impact on children’s academic achievements is detrimental to the perception of the workforce. This has direct impacts on the stature and ultimately the pay scales of the teaching assistant workforce.

This project provided evidence that overall the teaching assistant workforce is appropriately qualified and knowledgeable. It is a reasonable explanation that deployment of staff has played a significant part in their overall impact and effectiveness. The new guidance from the Education Endowment Foundation should be used by settings to highlight and make the best use of the skills that each member of staff possesses. Overall, other than advancing
knowledge and practice which ultimately provides benefits for settings and pupil, there are limited benefits or incentives to engage practitioners in additional learning.

**Key Recommendations**

**Based on the Findings:**

- The evidence concludes that the qualifications and skill sets of teaching assistants are widely varied. Academic qualifications can enhance levels of knowledge and practice among teaching assistants although they are not the only skills required to be an effective teaching assistant.

- Deployment needs to be consistent and make the best use of the teaching assistant’s skills. The researcher recommends that settings carry out skills audits to assess the qualifications, training and skill sets of their staff. This would allow staff to be deployed in a way that makes the best use of their knowledge and provides more effective practice.

- There needs to be adequate use of guidance that supports schools, teaching assistants and pupils. This guidance should be evident in documents such as job descriptions. This will help consistency and sharing of good practice.
Further Research:

- The researcher recommends further research using a larger range of participants from both primary and secondary schools.

- Compare the deployment of teaching assistant on an international level to identify example of effective practice.

A larger Perspective:

- Both settings and teachers would benefit from training on how to deploy teaching assistants to achieve maximum impact.

- The findings conclude; it would be beneficial for policy makers to raise the stature and pay of the workforce. Teaching assistant’s job descriptions contain several components that match that of a teacher yet the pay is significantly less.

- The researcher believes it would be beneficial to the profession to introduce progressive pay scales based on career progression and not just length of service. This would provide incentives to enhance and acquire addition training and skills.

References


