

**Contextualizing Historical Education Policy
Formation Through the Use of Online Access
to Parliamentary Debates: Managing
Documentary Data**

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Abstract

Many countries keep official records of parliamentary debates. In the UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Singapore, these transcriptions are referred to as Hansard, providing a rich resource for researchers exploring the historical and contextual background of governmental policy and legislation. This case study draws on the original doctoral thesis exploring the experiences and issues of concern of students with special educational needs and disabilities reflecting on their first year at university in Singapore. The historical background and recent developments were examined through data collection and analysis of historical and current local policy documents, parliamentary records, and information collated from university websites. Twenty-six semi-structured interviews were completed with participants recruited from five of the six publicly funded universities in Singapore.

This case study focuses on conducting online research of parliamentary debates with the use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to organize data and assist discourse analysis.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this case, students should be able to:

- Consider the range of resources that can be found in public domains and the importance of search words
- Understand the benefits of using spreadsheets, for example, Microsoft Excel, Google Sheets, or Apple Numbers to manage and sort nonnumerical data for qualitative research
- Learn how to use descriptive headers to aid meaningful sorting of data

Introduction

The research project was a phenomenological collective case study using modified methods of grounded theory. Having worked at the tertiary level for a number of years, the study unfolded from personal experience of working with postsecondary learners in Singapore. I work with both local and international students teaching the English language and running academic support services in a contemporary arts college in Singapore. As I increasingly became aware of the growing numbers of students presenting with varying learning differences and mental health conditions, I became fascinated to find out whether numbers were actually increasing, why this might be, and listen to the lived experiences of these students.

To set the context of the study, I investigated the historical development of education policy and support provided to students with special needs and disabilities transitioning to university in Singapore. This entailed collecting both local and global policy documents, searching through parliamentary debates, and analyzing university websites.

Project Overview and Context

The small city-state of Singapore is relatively young, having gained full independence in 1965. Lacking natural resources and space, the government has always invested heavily in its citizens, gradually transitioning from an education system that was efficiency-driven to streaming by academic ability; from quantity to quality (OECD, 2011). This unique context led me to explore the historical background to the education of learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) at the postsecondary level, both locally and globally to provide a comparison.

Since the implementation of the Compulsory Education Act of 2000, inclusive education has increasingly appeared on the political agenda with support progressively incorporated into mainstream schooling. The Singapore government has steadily augmented educational pathways resulting in larger numbers of students with SEND gaining access to postsecondary education. Each publicly funded Institute of Higher Learning (IHL) has established a Disability Support Office (DSO) and created webpages outlining the support available for students with SEND since the government made announcements in 2014 (Republic of Singapore, 2014a). At the same time, additional support for students with sensory impairments and physical disabilities was established to offer financial grants toward the cost of assistive technologies and support services for learning through the SEND Fund (Republic of Singapore, 2014b).

Having the opportunity to pursue doctoral studies, I decided to focus my research on the experiences of students with SEND but was advised not to use my own college to recruit participants due to the risk of bias and power imbalances when working with young adults considered potentially vulnerable. The central research question was “As a result of changes in education policy in Singapore, what are the theoretical underpinnings to the perspectives of learners with special educational needs reflecting on their first year of studies at university in Singapore?” Wanting to explore the lived experiences of learners with SEND, a qualitative approach using phenomenological case study methods seemed most applicable. The aim of exploring a phenomenon is to “depict the essence or basic structure of experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). Case study methodology was appropriate for understanding experience sought within the “bounded context” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 28) of students with SEND studying at publicly funded universities in Singapore. Exploring the historical progression of policy changes in education for students with SEND added context to the experiences and issues of concern presented by the interviewees.

Section Summary

- Exploring the historical background to events can provide context to the experiences of participants who take part in qualitative studies.
- Ensure you choose the most suitable research methodology to achieve the aims of your study.

Research Design

The study's strategy and design were a holistic and contextual analysis using qualitative methods from an interpretivist paradigm; that is, interpreting meaning by using multiple methods to discover and reflect on aspects of issues and human experiences (O'Donoghue, 2018; Punch & Oancea, 2014). Using inductive methods, I started with empirical observations, looked for patterns, and finally created theories based on these patterns, with the aim of discovering "how participants 'manage', 'deal with', or 'cope with' a phenomenon" (O'Donoghue, 2018, p. 13). I utilized multiple data sources as the strategy of inquiry taken from two broad categories: documents and interviews. Merriam (2009) states that since the researcher's presence has no impact on what is being studied, documents are considered stable because they can be reviewed multiple times. Charmaz (2006) discusses the importance of studying texts to give "insights into perspectives, practices, and events not easily obtained through other qualitative methods" (p. 39).

For this case study, I focus on the data that I collected and analyzed from Hansard, the traditional name given to transcriptions of parliamentary debates, since this involved extensive reading and research using keyword searches. Conducting searches of parliamentary debates, I used purposive sampling to ensure the sampling plan met the research goals, resources, and timelines (Tracy, 2013). Silverman (2006) describes purposive sampling as allowing "us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested" (p. 306), helping to find information-rich cases (Hoepfl, 1997; Letts et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009). One form of purposive sampling is criterion sampling where I considered cases that met the specific predetermined criterion of importance (Miles et al., 2014). Therefore, sampling of parliamentary debates based on the collation of keywords used for searches provided an overview of changes in policy and attitudes over time.

I borrowed methods from grounded theory for data analysis which stems from Glaser and Strauss's (1967) seminal work into tips and methods for building theory out of qualitative data. The development of the theory was grounded or rooted in the original data that came from a series of coding cycles. Also known as the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), inductive approaches were used to identify patterns and make discoveries to allow the generation of theory.

As I analyzed data I collected from parliamentary debates, I focused on the discourses that shaped discussion and changes in political direction. Spreadsheets were invaluable for storing and organizing this information where a number of options exist, such as Google Sheets and Apple Numbers. I chose to use Microsoft Excel spreadsheets due to the wide-ranging features such as freezing panes so that the headers remained visible at all times. Using spreadsheets allowed me the flexibility to sort and filter information easily.

Section Summary

- Consider including document analysis in your research methodology to add contextual and historical insights.
- If you choose to use purposive sampling, set out your criterion for picking documents so that you are

selective in your approach.

- Decide how you will store and organize the documentary information you collect.

Research Practicalities

Collecting Document Data

Dating from 1955, verbatim transcripts of government debates are available to the public via the parliamentary website of Singapore ([Parliament of Singapore \(n.d.\)](#)). Ease of access to Hansard, via the internet ([Bowen, 2009](#)), allowed me to gain a historical perspective of education policy and developments in the education of students with SEND ([Bailey, 1994](#)). Analyzing parliamentary debates at the time of educational reform gave me a greater understanding of the reform process and prevailing attitudes at the time.

Data Analysis Process

The development of the theory was grounded or rooted in the original data that came from a series of coding cycles. Therefore, coding was central to this process, where a phrase or symbol is assigned to the language-based data. The codes provided a translation of the data by detecting patterns and categories, “solidifying our observations into concrete instances of meaning for further analysis” ([Saldaña, 2014, p. 13](#)). I prefer [Richards \(2014\)](#)’s description of the three stages to the coding process for her choice of plain English descriptors: descriptive, topic, and analytic coding. She defines descriptive coding as the data that identifies. In terms of parliamentary debates, this would include information such as date, sitting, title, and keyword. Topic codes are the initial patterns that are seen in the data that need little interpretation. Analytic coding is the process of creating and assigning categories. Each stage was analyzed until possibilities had been saturated, indicating no further data needed to be collected ([Charmaz, 2006](#)).

[O’Leary \(2014\)](#) highlights two significant issues with document analysis. The first is the problem of bias in the creator of the document and the researcher. The second issue is latent content, referring to the style, tone, agenda, facts, or opinions that exist in the text. I applied a number of strategies to counter concerns, which included developing a management scheme; assessing the authenticity of the document; exploring the documents’ agendas, biases, and background; asking questions; and exploring the content by cross-referencing with debates, policies, and events.

Alongside this work, I used memoing as a method to capture the “analytical conversations” as themes started to emerge ([Lempert, 2007, p. 247](#)). Memos are more than descriptions since they are the “creative speculative” ideas that become evident to the researcher as they code ([Punch, 2014, p. 177](#)). Memos created the link between systematic coding and the development of propositions.

Section Summary

- Identify the types and purpose of documents you need to collect.
- Be aware of the limitations of document analysis in terms of detail and possible bias.

- As you sort and analyze data, write memos to capture thoughts, ideas, and questions which may help as you move from coding to developing propositions.

Method in Action

Keyword Searches of Hansard

In Singapore, parliamentary debates are organized in batches based on ranges of years. I selected and built on my keywords, initially searching and recording the number of debates that contained the keywords. [Figure 1](#) shows the tabulated information collected during initial searches. As I read debates, I added words and phrases to my list of keywords, such as “many helping hands”; terminology that is unique to Singapore.

Figure 1. Numerical data of initial keyword searches of parliamentary debates.

To be included the term must relate to education and/or disability.

<https://www.parliament.gov.sg/parliamentary-business/official-reports-%28parl-debates%29>

| Date Range | Keyword Searches | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|----------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|---------------|--------|---------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|------|--------------------------|----------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| | handicapped | disabled | special needs education | special education | disability support AND education | disability AND post-secondary | cripple | incapacitated | retard | invalid | many helping hands | enabling masterplan | education act | institutes of higher learning | CRPD | University Sector Review | Tertiary | Disability support office | Compulsory Education |
| 1955-1965 | 18 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 08/02/65 – 08/02/68 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 06/05/68 – 16/08/72 | 13 | 15 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 0 |
| 12/10/72 – 06/12/76 | 16 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 0 |
| 07/02/77 – 04/12/80 | 15 | 16 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| 03/02/81 – 03/12/84 | 18 | 14 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 0 | 2 |
| 25/02/85 – 16/08/88 | 15 | 21 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 26 | 0 | 1 |
| 09/01/89 – 13/08/91 | 22 | 22 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 46 | 0 | 3 |
| 06/01/92 – 15/12/96 | 27 | 45 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 61 | 0 | 7 |
| 26/05/97 – 17/10/01 | 33 | 40 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 14 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 74 | 0 | 10 |
| 25/03/02 – 20/04/06 | 64 | 84 | 1 | 19 | 0 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 4 | 8 | 35 | 0 | 11 | 20 | 0 | 2 | 97 | 0 | 19 |
| 02/11/06 – 19/04/11 | 41 | 118 | 5 | 36 | 1 | 16 | 7 | 13 | 5 | 10 | 74 | 17 | 15 | 21 | 1 | 0 | 103 | 0 | 13 |
| 10/10/11 – 25/08/15 | 40 | 126 | 4 | 52 | 7 | 18 | 9 | 16 | 1 | 8 | 15 | 38 | 16 | 62 | 13 | 0 | 140 | 4 | 13 |
| 15/01/16 – present (1/10/19 | 19 | 127 | 6 | 68 | 2 | 24 | 13 | 27 | 1 | 19 | 18 | 39 | 15 | 172 | 5 | 0 | 129 | 0 | 22 |

Once I had tabulated the initial research, I returned to the website to review which debates might be relevant. Using the search word within each document helped me decide if the debate was relevant to my research question. The criterion for selection was the debate had to relate to education and disability. I recorded information that would allow me to easily locate the debate, such as the date range, URL, and summary notes, as seen in Figure 2. As a backup, I also downloaded and filed each possible debate by year in PDF form.

Figure 2. Example of selected and tabulated possible relevant keyword searches using the word “incapacitated.”

| Date Range | No. results | No. Relevant | Search word | Webpage | Debate Title | Sitting Date | Notes | |
|------------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|---|---|--|--|---|
| 1955-1965 | 7 | 1 | incapacitated | https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/report?sittingdate=03-10-1956 | LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL: SINGAPORE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL | 3-10-1956 , Vol:2 , Start Col :244, End Col :245 | "if he is able to speak, and, unless incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause, to read and write with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable him to take an active part in any proceedings as a member of the local authority". | Lee Kuan Yew discussing amendments to who to stand for local government: Under clause 21 (b) a person is eligible to be a candidate. Mostly used to refer to people who are left disabled due to work accidents |
| 08/012/65 – 08/02/68 | 2 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | Also used to describe people who are mentally incapacitated |
| 06/05/68 – 16/08/72 | 6 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 12/10/72 – 06/12/76 | 0 | | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 07/02/77 – 04/12/80 | 10 | 1 | incapacitated | https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/report?sittingdate=17-03-1980 | ANNUAL BUDGET STATEMENT | 5-3-1980 , Vol:39 , Start Col :608, End Col :608 | "I appreciate the granting of a tax relief of \$750 if a taxpayer maintains a brother or sister who is incapacitated by physical or mental infirmity and who does not earn any income and continues to depend on the taxpayer. Although the amount granted is not really substantial, something is better than nothing." | Referring to tax relief: |
| 03/02/81 – 03/12/84 | 8 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 25/02/85 – 16/08/88 | 4 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 09/01/89 – 13/08/91 | 4 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 06/01/92 – 15/12/96 | 9 | 1 | incapacitated | https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/report?sittingdate=02-05-1996 | WOMEN'S CHARTER (AMENDMENT) BILL | 2-5-1996 , Vol:66 , Start Col :62, End Col :71 | "The amendments also allow an application for protection order to be made by another person on behalf of a child below 21 years of age or an incapacitated person." Referring to maintenance payments: "They also expand existing provisions to: (1) allow a child of any age to receive maintenance from the parent if he is unable to maintain himself, for example, if he is incapacitated;" | Referring to family violence: |
| 26/05/97 – 17/10/01 | 7 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 25/03/02 – 20/04/06 | 8 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 02/11/06 – 19/04/11 | 13 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 10/10/11 – 25/08/15 | 16 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |
| 15/01/16 – present (1/10/19) | 27 | 0 | incapacitated | | | | | |

Analyzing the Data

Once I had identified the debates that were relevant to my case study, I copied and pasted significant parts of speeches into the spreadsheet and added memos that summarized the main point of the debate, questions I mulled over, or links to other debates. I created separate tabs in the spreadsheet for each keyword or

expression. So that I could piece together the trajectory of the development of debate and policy in the field of educational provision for students with SEND, I then copied all this information into one sheet, allowing me to merge duplicates. It was important to ensure that header information was detailed enough to allow me to sort and filter data without losing information such as the keyword.

Figure 3 is a sample of combined data resulting from searches conducted of parliamentary debates using a range of keywords. I used colored fonts in the table headers to help me differentiate between descriptive words (in purple) and the topic words (in green) used for keyword searches. The selected keywords were gathered over time as themes became evident during the reading of debates. Some words, which today are considered politically incorrect, were chosen due to historical usage, while others were terms particular to Singapore. The list of search words included the following: cripple, compulsory education, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disabled, disability support office, disability AND post-secondary, disability support AND education, Education Act, Enabling Masterplans, handicapped, incapacitated, institutes of higher learning, invalid, many helping hands, retard, special education, special needs education, tertiary, university sector review.

Figure 3. Sample of collated data from parliamentary debates.

| Debate Title | Volume | Year | Month | Date | Sitting No. | cripple | incapacitated | handicapped | disabled | education act | compulsory education | special education | tertiary | Institutes of higher learning | many helping hands | special needs education | disability & post-secondary | CRPD | enabling masterplan | University Sector Review | Analytic Code | Memo | Quotes |
|--|--------|------|-------|------|-------------|---------|---------------|-------------|----------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---|--|
| HEAD I – MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT (COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY) | 93 | 2015 | 3 | 12 | 15 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | Lack of publicity of the enabling masterplan & the need to start preparing the 3rd plan | <p>Ms Denise Phua Lay Peng: Sir, Singapore signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), a strong signal by the PAP Government to show our country's commitment to do more for persons with disabilities in Singapore. The way by which the vision of the UNCRPD is realised is through our Enabling Masterplan in our country.</p> <p>However, in my dealings with the special needs community, many families, professionals and persons with disabilities are hardly aware of the Enabling Masterplan and its progress. Some called it the "best-kept secret". It is a pity that as a result many missed out on the services available and/or remain anxious, worried or even angry over the years.</p> <p>I would like to seek the Ministry's update on its achievements to date and the challenges it faced for the Enabling Masterplan. I would also like to ask the Ministry to invest in resources to develop and implement a Strategic Communications Plan for the disability community, with its own micro-site in multiple languages and in multiple media forms. [...] Sir, in conclusion, the current Enabling Masterplan for the Disabled will soon come to an end. It is now time to start pondering over the underlying attitudes, assumptions and perception of persons with disabilities in our country. We should learn from the United Nations Convention about respecting the right of every person with disability – not pity them – respecting their rights to lead a dignified life with access to important aspects such as health, physical environment, education and employment</p> <p>Every baby born to Singapore is our very own and precious, whichever form</p> |

Finally, I created a document that mapped out events chronologically, using a color code to differentiate the source. Figure 4 shows the first part of this document with the main themes extracted at the top of the page. The color code used was green for parliamentary debates, blue for Acts, red for Enabling Masterplans, and purple for other sources such as newspaper articles.

Figure 4. Sample of the chronological overview of document analysis.

Chronological overview of document analysis

Analytic Codes

Provision for PWDs

Many helping hands approach

Compulsory education 2000

SEN schools outside remit of MOE

SEN students outside scope of CE Act

Increased spending on education including tertiary education

Increased spending on SEN education: facilities, training

More students making it to IHL

Support for SEN SS at IHL

Funding support for SEN SS at IHL – scope increases to include learning difficulties in 2020

SEN SS included in scope of CE Act 2019

Disability added in census data 2020

Color Code

Parliamentary debates

Acts

Enabling Masterplan

Other sources

2005-Present

| 2005-2009 | 2010-2014 | 2015-2000 |
|--|---|--|
| <p>2005</p> <p>President's Address – A place for everyone</p> <p>Unis to become autonomous</p> <p>Funding for IHL will be based on the no. of graduates produced as opposed to the number enrolled. (Did this have an impact on the no. of disabled SS admitted to Uni?)</p> <p>Q of legislation raised, but negated by Govt: difficult to enforce and implement anti-discrimination laws</p> | <p>2010</p> <p>Denise Phua requests systemic consistent support for SEN learners at IHL & suggests Govt studies models in other countries</p> <p>Denise Phua argues for SEN learners to be covered by the Compulsory Education Act</p> <p>Mental Health Blueprint report published: Aims to train more psychiatrists, increase knowledge base in GPs, move to community based treatment (appears there has been no follow on to the 1st blueprint. Is this due to a lack of voices in parliament to push the agenda?)</p> | <p>2015</p> <p>Update on work of DSOs: Access, SEN Fund, staff training and awareness</p> <p>Denise Phua highlights the lack of publicity of the Enabling Masterplan and highlights the need to start preparing the 3rd EM</p> <p>Mention of mental health as a disability and Mental Health Blueprint</p> <p>Minister for Social and Family Development admits stopping using the term "Many Helping Hands" – negative connotations</p> |
| <p>2006</p> <p>Subsidy for AT Fund increased: 75% to 90%</p> <p>"Levelling up through education": SEN learners with mild to moderate needs to be supported in mainstream school.</p> <p>Denise Phua challenges concept of Many Helping Hands</p> <p>Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee set up</p> <p>Mental Health Blueprint 2007-2012 launched</p> | <p>2011</p> <p>SG considers signing the CRPD</p> <p>Sylvia Lim highlights SG falling short of some of the benchmarks: Article 7 & 24</p> <p>Govt response is that SG is doing more for disabled than many other countries: transport, education, funding ...</p> <p>Denise Phua asks again about support for SEN SS at IHL</p> <p>Continuing to Contextualizing Historical Education Policy Formation Through the Use of CE Act Online Access to Parliamentary Debates: Managing Documentary Data</p> <p>2nd Enabling Masterplan underway</p> | <p>2016</p> <p>Since 2014 \$250K in SEN Fund has been dispersed to SEN SS</p> <p>2nd EM Progress report: SEN Fund at IHL, DSO in all IHLs to provide a one-stop centre to support SS with SEN, better planning for support for incoming SS with SEN at IHL through exchange of info between sec schools and IHL</p> <p>MOE announce compulsory education for all special needs children from 2019</p> <p>More support for HI in designated schools</p> |
| <p>2007</p> | <p>2012</p> | <p>2017</p> |

Section Summary

- Be methodical in your approach to searching for and selecting documents by ensuring you record necessary relevant information.
- The steps involved working from broad ideas to honing in on relevant information before returning to a broad overview to provide a holistic picture.

Practical Lessons Learned

Reading through parliamentary debates, although fascinating was daunting because of the volume of material. Using an approach that broke down the stages into steps helped me to immerse in the data, as seen in [Figures 1–4](#).

Keywords

If you decide to use Hansard to provide historical context to your study, start noting keywords. For example, since I was exploring the experiences of students with SEND and wanted to research the historical development of education policy, I investigated and deliberated words that may have been used in the past that are no longer considered politically correct, such as *incapacitated*, *cripple*, and *handicapped*. I soon found that the word *cripple* was not applicable to this project as it was usually used in the context of the *crippled economy*. However, as I read through debates, I was able to add to my keywords, as I came across terms that were unique to Singapore. The Singapore Government does not operate a welfare state but works alongside charities and community organizations to support those in need, using the approach they term “many helping hands” ([Republic of Singapore, 1991, p. 11](#)).

As I collected data, I used criterion sampling to help me decide if a debate was applicable. The criterion was very broad at the start, in that the debate had to be on the topic of education and disability. The keywords helped to narrow the search as I used words associated with disability, special needs education, and postsecondary education. Once I merged the data collected from the keyword searches, this provided a further mechanism for accepting or rejecting data. For example, if the debate appeared more than once using different keywords, this helped me decide whether it provided insightful information for the study.

Headers for Sorting Material

Using a spreadsheet was very helpful in managing and sorting the data collected from Hansard. However, the headers you choose are very important; a process that took some trial and error. For example, to effectively sort by date, the headers for date, month, and year need to be separated. I also used features such as bold text or different color fonts so that I could easily spot quotes that could be applied to the study.

Section Summary

- Investigate and consider keywords for searches and add them to the list as you gather data.

- Spend time experimenting with headers in your spreadsheet to allow you flexibility in sorting data.

Conclusion

Although spreadsheets are associated with numerical data, they are extremely beneficial for working with qualitative data. Taking the time to learn how to use the available features can save time when sorting data. The main point is to ensure that key information is separated into different headers so that you can merge, delete duplicate, or sort information flexibly, for example, chronologically by date, by search word, or topic. This may take trial and error choosing the most useful headers and will inevitably mean you have to finely separate descriptive words to allow the degree of flexibility that you need.

Exploring the historical context of educational provisions for students with SEND studying at IHL in Singapore gave me many insights into attitudes and behaviors. Until recent decades, educational policy and practices had created barriers for students with SEND reaching postsecondary education, accounting for the low numbers of such students gaining entry to university in Singapore. It also helped to set the context for many of the views expressed and issues of concern raised by participants interviewed as part of this study, such as the need for improved training of support personnel and a broader scope of financial support.

Classroom Discussion Questions

1. What are the advantages and limitations of using parliamentary debates when exploring the historical context of a topic?
2. How can you manage large amounts of documentary data?
3. Why are column headings important when managing data using spreadsheets?

Further Reading

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Web Resources

Hansard Society: <https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/>

Hansard Australia: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard

Hansard Canada: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/documentviewer/en/35-2/house/hansard-index>

Hansard Singapore: [https://www.parliament.gov.sg/parliamentary-business/official-reports-\(parl-debates\)](https://www.parliament.gov.sg/parliamentary-business/official-reports-(parl-debates))

Hansard South Africa: <https://www.parliament.gov.za/hansard>

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