

The Readiness of Special Education Trainees to Teach in Inclusive Program

Safani Bari¹, Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yasin¹ & Mohd Nazri Hamzah¹

¹ Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

Correspondence: Safani Bari, Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. Tel: 603-8921-6464. E-mail: safani@ukm.edu.my

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Abstract

The training of Special education teachers have been given attention by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. Since 1996 Special education was given the same priority as other areas in the development of education in Malaysia. In order to implement effective teaching and learning in inclusive program, teachers should be prepared and understand about the program. Therefore, this study is aimed to investigate the knowledge and attitude of special education student teachers to teach in inclusive education programs. This study used questionnaires as an instrument and a sample of 80 trainees from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. The design of this study was descriptive by using Likert Scale which is tabulated in percentage, frequency and mean score. Based on the data analysis, it is found that the percentage and the readiness of special education trainees are at a high level. However, innovation in teaching and practical training still need to be provided sufficiently in order to provide an opportunity for trainees to get hands on experience.

Keywords: special education, inclusive education, trainees

1. Introduction

Teaching is a noble profession and honored by the community for the tremendous role in developing knowledge and behavior of the society. According to Sufean (2004), the effectiveness of teaching is closely related to the ability and efforts of teachers to accomplish their responsibilities towards students, schools and communities. The effectiveness of this profession should be enhanced in the aspect of knowledge in a particular field as well as teachers' attitude in teaching.

Therefore, the role of trainees is essential to ensure students with special needs in mainstream class gain the opportunity to experience positive changes in education. This is in line with the concept of education for all by providing opportunities and services for all students with special needs such as those having visual impairment, hearing problems and learning disabilities. Inclusive education program has been a goal to provide equal educational opportunities to all students regardless their disabilities. The objective of Ministry of Education through the Education Development Master Plan is to ensure that all schools and students have equal opportunities and capabilities to excel. The Ministry of Education has identified the frailty that need to be revised to allow improvement in access, quality and equity of education.

Inclusive education in the context of special education is the education given to students with special needs who are learning together with normal students, in the same class and are taught by regular teachers (Sabri, 1996). In addition, inclusive education focuses on streaming the students with special needs in normal schools. The goal is to expose the students with special needs to teaching, learning and joining activities in school together with the normal students. Another objective is also to ensure that students with special needs could adapt in all aspects of society that are available in schools and in local communities with the aim of making them more independent and able to contribute to the society (Awang, 1996).

Inclusive education means providing all students in the premier class with meaningful and challenging educational program which will then enhance their capabilities through various sources, support and assistance. For schools that implement inclusive education program, they need to put on extra effort to provide a good quality of inclusive education. School is the place where all of its members are accepted, supported and assisted by their peers and communities in the effort of gaining education necessities (Nind & Hewett, 2005).

2. Statement of Research Problem and Objective

The Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated approach to create balanced and harmonious individuals in the aspect of intellect, spirit, emotion and physical. This effort is to produce Malaysians who are knowledgeable, competent, honorable, responsible and capable to contribute to the society and nation. In order to achieve the Malaysian National Education's philosophy, the role of teachers is very important in ensuring that students with learning disabilities have equal access to education as their other friends. The potential of students with special needs can be developed by implementing inclusive education program.

Profession related to special education is now categorized as a challenging profession as teachers need to teach students with various types of disabilities. Therefore, teachers need to be fully prepared with knowledge, skills and appropriate attitude to educate students with special needs. These three components are very important to determine the readiness of teachers to teach in inclusive education program. Sufficient knowledge is essential for trainees to teach students in inclusive program. Without knowledge, it would be difficult for trainees to teach in inclusive program. According to Collien (1999), it is found that trainees began their career with the feeling of insecurity and fear. There is also a higher possibility that the trainees have a mixed feeling of curiosity, high expectation and anxiety.

Proficiency is important for the trainees to teach in inclusive program. According to Abdul-Rahman and Zakaria (1995), trainees have problems in grabbing the attention of students for a certain duration, choosing the right teaching aid and technique as well as overcoming anxiety. Special education teachers need to always have the interest towards the profession in special education. Without positive attitude, teachers will be facing difficulties to teach well in inclusive education program. The combination of attitude, knowledge and skills will give a positive impact on inclusive education.

3. Objectives

The study conducted is based on the following objectives:

To determine the level of knowledge of trainees towards the implementation of inclusive education program.

To determine the readiness of trainees in the aspect of attitude towards inclusive education program.

4. Methodology

The design of this study is descriptive in which questionnaires were used. A descriptive study will provide ideas and information about a situation at a particular time, as well as to describe the future plans (Wiersma, 2000). It is also the most popular method among researchers. This is because questionnaires are easy to be administered after they have been constructed. Besides, the data is can also be easily processed for analysis. According to Mitchell (1991), the questionnaire method is the most appropriate technique to collect data in a research that uses survey. The data collected will then be processed and analyzed. All data from respondents' feedback will be compiled for analysis by using Likert method. According to Gay (1981), survey method in education involves gathering information from students, teachers or those involved in the educational process.

In this study, researchers chose final year special education trainees under the Special Education course in the Faculty of Education and Human Development, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, as population. A total of 80 trainees under special education program were selected as samples. The purpose of this study is to identify the extent of readiness of special education trainees of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris to teach in inclusive education program.

A questionnaire were developed based on research objectives and a pilot study has been conducted to 10 respondents which include the teachers of Integrated Learning Disabilities of Special Education Program in 3 schools located in Nilai before the real study is conducted. The main goal of conducting a pilot study is to test the level of reliability in every item constructed in the questionnaires. According to Mohamad (1999), the instrument constructed by researchers is in the form of pilot study is to test the objectivity, validity and reliability of the instrument. Through the pilot study, the reliability of a survey can be determined in which it indicates the degree of consistency of the instrument used. Instrument with a high degree of reliability will give a consistent result.

The process of data analysis is done based on the sections in the questionnaires made by the researcher. In part A, the data is analyzed to determine the percentage. In part B, the data is analyzed to determine the percentage and the mean for each item marked by the respondents. The data obtained will be analyzed descriptively. The results will be expressed in the form of a frequency table. According to Mohamad (1999), occasionally, researchers will

use their own theories and formulas to produce a distinctive index based on the objectives of a study. Thus, to classify the mean into high, low and medium level, the researchers have categorized the mean score as follows:

Table 1. Mean score's scale

| Mean Score | Indicator |
|------------|-----------|
| 0–2.49 | Low |
| 2.50–3.49 | Moderate |
| 3.50–5.0 | High |

5. Results and Discussion

This section provides an overview of the background of the respondents who participated in this study. The sample consists of 80 final year students of special education programs from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). They are selected based on gender, race, age and academic qualifications to enter the Faculty of Education and Human Development (UPSI). The respondents selected are based on Table 2.

Table 2. Respondents' profile

| Demographic background | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 32 | 40.0 |
| Female | 48 | 60.0 |
| Age | | |
| <=25 years | 62 | 77.5 |
| >25 years | 18 | 22.5 |
| Race | | |
| Malay | 71 | 88.8 |
| Chinese | 4 | 5.0 |
| Indian | 3 | 3.8 |
| Others | 2 | 2.5 |
| Academic Qualification | | |
| Matriculation | 16 | 20.0 |
| STPM | 64 | 80.0 |
| Total | 80 | 100 |

5.1 The Knowledge Level of Trainees on the Implementation of Inclusive Education Program

Teacher's knowledge is important principles in improving the potential that exists in every individual, especially students with special needs. Thus, schedule 3 shows the results obtained on the knowledge level of UPSI's special education trainees towards inclusive education program.

Table 3. Trainees' level of knowledge

| Item | N | Mean |
|---|----|--------|
| I generally understand the philosophy of Special Education especially on the inclusive education and its goals | 80 | 4.4250 |
| Students with special needs who join inclusive education program can be encouraged to be independent | 80 | 3.8250 |

| | | |
|--|----|--------|
| I feel that I can help students with special needs to reach their potential through the implementation of inclusive education program | 80 | 3.6275 |
| I know that students with special needs are different from normal students in terms of mentality, communication ability and behavior | 80 | 4.4125 |
| I know that there are students with special needs who can participate in inclusive education program conducted in normal classes based on specific criteria | 80 | 3.8375 |
| I know that there are many types of inclusive education program in Malaysia | 80 | 3.8250 |
| I know that all parties including special education teachers, premier class teachers, administrators and parents need to cooperate in order to make inclusive education program a success | 80 | 4.6750 |
| I know that inclusive education program in Malaysia places student with special needs with normal students to learn together in a class | 80 | 3.8875 |
| I know that in order to run an all-inclusive program, teachers must get permission from students' parents | 80 | 4.3625 |
| I know how to make learning objectives complement to students' ability | 80 | 4.3125 |
| Average Mean | 80 | 4.1190 |

5.2 The Readiness of Trainees to Teach in Inclusive Education Program: The Aspect of Attitude

The readiness of trainees to teach in inclusive education program in the aspect of attitude is very important because the success of a program depends on the attitude of the trainees. In studies conducted by Noraida (2006), she states that trainees should show a positive attitude in order to become a good teacher such as being cooperative, tolerant, cheerful, and hardworking and presents an admirable personality.

Table 4. The readiness of trainees in the aspect of behavior

| Item | N | Mean |
|---|----------|-------------|
| I'm ready to diversify teaching methods according to students' requirement in inclusive classes | 80 | 4.5250 |
| I am interested to introduce inclusive education program towards students with special needs who have the same performance or ability as other normal students | 80 | 3.5250 |
| I am interested to teach in inclusive education program | 80 | 3.4625 |
| I am willing to work with normal teachers to ensure the success of inclusive education program | 80 | 3.6125 |
| I am willing to gain extra knowledge on inclusive education program from time to time | 80 | 4.4000 |
| I am ready to be a reference teacher for students with special needs | 80 | 4.0500 |
| I will give full attention towards the students with special needs in learning sessions conducted in inclusive classes | 80 | 3.8875 |
| I accept the responsibility to teach students with special needs without any negative feelings | 80 | 4.1250 |
| I feel that it is a burden to teach students with special needs | 80 | 3.7250 |
| I would like to see a students with special needs able to master skills as normal students in inclusive classes | 80 | 4.4125 |
| Average mean | 80 | 3.9725 |

Table 5. Distribution of overall average mean objective of the study

| No | Item | Mean | Level |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------|-------|
| 1. | Trainees' knowledge | 4.1190 | High |
| 2. | Trainees' attitude | 3.9725 | High |
| Average mean | | 4.0458 | High |

Table 5 shows the overall average for the two objectives of this study according to mean values. After it has been analyzed, it is found that the overall average mean for both research questions is in a high level which is 4.0458. The first objective is related to the trainees' level of knowledge with the mean value of 4.1190 which represents a high level. Meanwhile, the second objective of the study is regarding the readiness of the trainees to teach in inclusive education program in the aspect of attitude which also shows a high mean value of 3.9725. Overall, the respondents need to have both aspects in order to teach in inclusive education program. The result of this study shows a positive response on the level of knowledge and attitude of trainees. This means that trainees are prepared to teach in inclusive education program.

Based on the results obtained from the first objective, it is found that the trainees' knowledge is at a high level as shown by the overall average mean value in Table 3. This shows that the majority of special education trainees are prepared to teach in inclusive education program. Trainees show full support towards the availability of the items that will assist in achieving learning objectives according to students' ability. This statement is supported by the research conducted by Norliza (2006), the effective and appropriate teaching requires proper planning and adequate preparation. Lesson plan must contain the right objective that complements the lesson content as well as students' background. A lesson must be planned thoroughly to ensure the previous lesson taught can be related with the next lesson. Teaching aids must be in a good condition to gain full attention from students during a lesson.

In a study conducted by Esah (2003), teaching style represents the personality of a teacher. Therefore, it is up to the teachers to select any teaching techniques as long as it is effective and able to attract the attention of students. Teaching techniques are used to achieve learning objectives with arranged steps from the induction set, content and the conclusion so that students can receive the knowledge delivered by the teachers effectively. This is supported by Hamidah (2002), trainees must be mentally and physically prepared to ensure the teaching process runs smoothly and fully utilized. They will be given exposure on how to prepare teaching material as well as lesson plans before they start to teach a particular lesson.

Meanwhile, according to the data analysis of the second objective in Table 4, it is found that the overall average mean is at a high level. This indicates that the majority of special education trainees are ready to teach inclusive education program. Trainees shows support towards the item of diversifying teaching methods that suits students' requirement in inclusive classes, accepting the responsibility to teach in inclusive classes without any negative feelings, seeing students with special needs able to master skills as normal students, ready to gain extra knowledge on inclusive education program from time to time and willing to become a reference teacher for students with special needs.

In a study conducted by Noraida (2006), she states that trainees are required to show a positive attitude towards being a good teacher, such as being cooperative, tolerant, cheerful and hardworking. This is also supported by Abd-Rahim (2005) who states that a high motivation will enable teachers to always be ready to perform their duties productively. In studies conducted by Zulfahmi (2008), he states that the teacher is a manager who must have a good personality to enable them to perform their duties and responsibilities effectively characteristics to enable it to discharge its duties and responsibilities effectively in school. Teachers need to have a good personality to allow them handling any problems faced in the class easily. A teacher with a good personality is someone who is patient, thoughtful, fair, friendly, and able to accept comments, hardworking, dedicated, creative and innovative.

Therefore, teachers should diversify assessment of either by formative or summative. Students' assessment can be useful in identifying difficulties, the effectiveness of teaching and to ensure a solid foundation for further progress. After completing a lesson, a teacher is encouraged do a reflection and an assessment to trace the weaknesses in teaching, time and effort that has been done in an orderly manner as to improve the quality of teaching in future.

6. Conclusion

This study involved the teachers' readiness in preparation of providing services to special education students in inclusive education program in Malaysia. The samples involved in this study were 80 trainee teachers from an institution of higher learning in Malaysia. The findings show that innovations need to be made to ensure the success of inclusive education. It is acknowledged that changing teachers' attitude towards the acceptance of inclusive education program for students with special needs is not that easy. In order to make this program a success, regular teachers and special education teachers need to improve their communication skills as well as being honest and open-minded in handling any problems that might be faced. All teachers involved in inclusive education program should be ready to face any problems and obstacles that lie ahead. They also need to learn to compromise and make something totally different than planned. In addition, regular teachers and special education teachers should work together and accept students with special needs who have different disabilities. Implementation of inclusive education program requires the cooperation from all parties to ensure this program could give positive results. Inclusive education program provides an opportunity to integrate special education students in mainstream society; hence, this will strengthen the education system for students with special needs in Malaysia and propelling Malaysia's education system worldwide.

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