

Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Their Attitudes towards Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities

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Abstract: Malaysia's development plan in education through the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 is in tandem with the global education agenda. Following the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, those with special needs must have access to mainstream schools with an inclusive orientation which are the most effective means of overcoming discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities and building an inclusive society. This study aims to investigate the readiness of pre-service teachers towards the inclusion of special needs students in mainstream classrooms. A total of 56 pre-service teachers from one institute of teacher education participated in this study. Data were collected through The Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) scale. The statistical analysis showed that pre-service teachers had moderate readiness towards inclusive education. Implications of the findings are discussed and further suggestions are made as to how institute of teacher education may engage pre-service teachers more effectively with their program to promote better inclusive practices.

Keywords: Inclusive education, pre-service teacher, attitudes, students with disability, readiness

I. INTRODUCTION

The Education For All (EFA) movement is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children regardless of their background and capabilities. Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education stated that those with special needs must have access to mainstream schools. The Statement recognising the necessity and urgency of providing education for all children regardless of their background. Inclusive orientation in regular schools is a great alternative as an effort to combating discriminatory attitudes, creating a welcoming community, build an inclusive society and achieve education for all. The majority of children will receive effective education, improve efficiency and ultimately the effectiveness of the overall education system.

Globally, governments of most of the country are increasingly in favour of inclusion as the ideal standard for education and as a result, legislation and policies are being implemented internationally (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Richler, 2012). The past few decades has seen a shift away from educating children with special needs in segregated settings towards greater inclusion in mainstream classrooms, ensuring

that all individuals belong to a community. The Inclusive Education Program (IEP) has been recognized internationally as a philosophy of achieving equity, fairness and quality education for all children, especially those who have traditionally been marginalized from mainstream education due to their inability. Educating children with disabilities together with their normal peers in the mainstreams classroom has increased dramatically over the last four decades, involving all aspects of schooling (Cook, Cameron, Tankersley, 2007; César & Ainscow, 2006.).

In line with the global focus towards inclusive education, Malaysia officially made serious efforts to include students with special needs in the mainstream education and it was stated in Malaysia Education Blue Print (2013 – 2025). The enrolment for IEP was projected 75% of students with special needs by year 2025. In 2016, 30.26% of students with special needs enrolled in inclusive programmes (MOE, 2017). To accommodate the increasing number of students with special needs in IEP, more mainstream teachers are required and needed. The teachers are considered as the main feature in inclusive education because they have a key role in the establishment and sustainability of inclusive education.

IEP has a significant impact on the mainstream teachers as they are increasingly faced with the challenges to meet the various needs of the students. They are required to understand the various abilities, manage a diverse classroom, implement different teaching strategies and meet individual needs. The importance of the teachers' role is clear since they are the ones who interact directly with the students in a school setting. Therefore, the teachers are usually expected to be competent in teaching and assisting diverse students' needs in the learning process. Not surprisingly, it is found that mainstream teachers have a profound impact on the success of IEP (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011). This makes the preparation of teachers for IEP is critical in ensuring that teachers for inclusive setting are prepared for the challenges of educating students with disabilities.

Most of the studies on exploring attitudes of pre-service teachers towards inclusive education have been carried out in other countries (McNamee, 2016; Lang, 2014; Cramer, 2014), and relatively no study on pre-service teachers of Malaysia has been found. Studies that have been carried out are more

geared towards in-service teachers (Nurul Husna dan Nik Suryani, 2016; Lucy, Nomanbhoy, Alefiya & Tida, 2014; Abdul Rahim & Muhammad Khairul, 2013; Rosniza & Mohd Mohktar, 2011; Noriah & Zalizan, 2011). This indicated that there is a gap in Malaysia perspectives on inclusive education. Therefore, objective of this study is to explore readiness of Malaysian pre-service teachers towards inclusive education for students with disabilities that has never been conducted. This study will be limited to the factors of sentiment, attitude and concern of pre-service teacher towards inclusion.

II. METHODOLOGY

The respondents of this study were final year pre-service teachers from one of the institute of teacher education. They never attended any special education or inclusive education courses during their studies in the institute.

A two-part survey questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Part 1 was designed to gather information relating to demographic data. The demographic data also included the pre-service teachers perceptions towards their confidence level for teaching students with special needs. The confidence levels were divided into four group, very low, low, moderate and high. Part 2 was an instrument of the Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education Revised (SACIE-R) scale developed by Forlin, Earle, Loreman & Sharma (2011). SACIE-R consists of 15 items, five items of each of the three constructs with 4-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The scale was designed to measure pre-service teachers' perception in the three constructs of inclusive education. The three psychometric constructs underpin aspects of inclusive education which are considered as central to the rationale underlying a teacher's beliefs and support for and engagement with inclusive practices. The three components identified as necessary to this construct were: Sentiments about engaging with people with disabilities; Attitudes towards acceptance of learners with special education needs; and Concerns about inclusive education. For the negative statements, the scale will be reversed in order to align with the direction of scaling for items associated with the attitudes constructs. In order to determine the attitudes of pre-service teachers regarding inclusive education, their response on SACIE-R were analysed and the mean score for each of the constructs were computed and translated.

III. FINDINGS

The Cronbach's alpha for the total SACIE-R (in this study) was .74, while the Cronbach's alpha for the Attitudes, Concerns and Sentiments subscales were .63, .74 and .60 respectively. A total of 56 final year primary pre-service teachers participated in this study. 23 (41%) participants were male and 33 (59%) were female. 51 participants (91%) had regular contact with a family member or people with additional support needs. 16 participants (29%) had previous teaching experience in inclusive classroom. Results showed that mean scores of confidence levels of pre-service teacher

for teaching students with disabilities conditions were rated as moderate ($M=2.61$, $SD=.60$).

The analysis of the SACIE-R scale showed that the overall mean score of the constructs were 2.43 and standard deviation were 0.36, therefore, it can be concluded that the pre-service teachers in this study had a moderately positive attitudes towards implementing inclusive education practices. The results indicated that the highest level of pre-service teachers' response scores is on the construct of Sentiments followed by Attitudes and Concerns as shown on Table 1. Although pre-service teachers' sentiments towards disabilities were generally positive, many of them had some concerns about implementing inclusive education in their own practice.

TABLE 1

OVERALL SCALE SCORES AND SUB-SCALE SCORES

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sentiments	56	2.67	.57
Attitudes	56	2.47	.39
Concerns	56	2.13	.50
Overall Mean		2.43	.36

Independent sample *t* test analysis showed that no major differences between male ($M = 2.51$, $SP = .31$) and female participants ($M = 2.37$, $SP = .39$), $t(54) = 1.41$, $p = .16$. This indicated that gender factor do not affect pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.

The result of analysis on variable of teaching experience in inclusive classroom showed that no differences between participants who had experienced in inclusive classroom ($M = 2.32$, $SP = .43$) and participants without experiences in inclusive classroom ($M = 2.48$, $SP = .29$), $t(50) = -1.49$, $p = .14$. This may not seem so surprised when considering that the respondents never learned or have been trained in inclusive classroom setting.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study showed an overall moderate positive attitudes and sentiments towards disability and special educational needs. As inclusion becomes the norm in today's school, general education pre-service teachers find themselves need to know how to meet the needs of a myriad of diversity in terms of students with different learning styles and abilities. Many pre-service teachers have little or no experience in working with students with special needs and as a result feel inadequately readied for their future classrooms. Limited exposure and preparation increases anxiety and fear to them to involve in inclusive classroom setting. It can be concluded that the readiness of pre-service teacher in this study to participate in the inclusive classroom is relatively low.

The results of this study also indicated that more attention should be paid to teachers' lack of confidence regarding inclusive practice. While there is no doubt that teacher

attitudes influence the success of students with disabilities in their classrooms, attention must be given to the importance of pre-service teacher training programs in shaping these attitudes through positive education experiences. It is suggest that the institution of teacher education should organize the training in which pre-service teachers can involve with inclusive classroom and develop collaboration skills as well as inclusive pedagogy. Relevant courses are needed and more effort is required to support their learning and to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Further studies needs to be conducted on pre-service teacher of institute of teacher education who will take an Inclusive Education course to provide a more detail and comprehensive framework with respect to sentiments, attitudes and concerns towards inclusive education for students with disabilities in Malaysia.

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