

## INTEREST AND SKILLS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN INTEGRATION PROGRAM ON LEARNING DISABILITIES AT PRIMARY SCHOOL, PENANG

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### ABSTRACT

*Teachers of Special Education Programs Integration (PPKI) on learning disabilities categories are special teachers or specifically for students of special needs with learning disabilities. The main goal of this program is to nurture and build the students to be independent, able to self manage, self protective and blend well with the community. Although varied facilities and provisions are allotted in the process of implementing this integration program for learner of special need in primary and secondary schools, nevertheless the role and commitment of teachers in special education program is crucially important in realizing the vision and mission of the Integrated Special Education Program. Hence, the aim of this study was to determine the level of interest (enthusiasm) and skill of teachers of Special Education Programs Integration on Learning Disabilities at primary schools from the state of Penang. The findings of study found that the level of teacher enthusiasm are at high level ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ). While the level of skills are at a medium level ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ). The findings of this study indicate that there is a strong positive correlation between the level of interest and skill and special education teachers on teaching and learning. There were some suggestions made in this study to increase the level of skill by the parties responsible.*

**Keywords:** *Special Education Programs Integration (PPKI), Interest, Skill.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Special Education Integration Program in Malaysia is provided for special needs students with learning disabilities, hearing and vision. This program are implemented for school performed in the ordinary course of primary and secondary schools and technical secondary schools or vocational training which provided the approach of teaching and learning in the isolation and semi-inclusive. Hallam and Kauffman (1997) state that special education means teaching specially designed to meet the extraordinary needs of an extraordinary child. Samuel (1993), explain the definition of children with special needs as children who are different from modest children or ordinary in the characteristics of mental ability, nerve, muscle or physical in social behavior and emotional capabilities.

Special education teacher is a qualified teacher and have expertise in handling special education students, especially in teaching and learning methods (T&L). Teachers who taught in special education classes are using a different approaches and methods from other teachers who teach at normal schools. Training and skills in conducting and managing special students is a very important element for special education teachers (Crow and Crow, 1983). In addition, special education teachers should also have a specific characteristic such as high level of emotional and mental control, sincere feelings of affection and honest dedication of work for personal interests of special students.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Special education is an education for students with special needs or known as special students. In Malaysia, special education is one of the areas of education offered by the Ministry of Education particularly under the Special Education Division which specialize through the provision of special schools for children who have problems in vision, hearing and learning. Special education is conducted in special education schools and also through integration program in a regular stream of primary and secondary schools. Furthermore there also secondary schools which provide special vocational subjects such as graphic arts, music, carpentry, entrepreneurship and physiotherapy for disabled students (Department of Special Education, 1998). Initially special education integration program was introduced in the National School and begins in year 2010; this program has been introduced in the Chinese National Primary Schools (*SJKC*).

Special education is needed in order to expand the capability of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical fitness among students with disabilities. Special education is provided for children such as hearing impaired, blindness, mental retardation, physically handicapped, and includes students who are gifted (Chua Tee Tee, 1998). Special education students with learning disabilities comprise of inert students (slow learner), Down syndrome, hypoactive, hyperactive (ADHD), cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy and dyslexia.

To meet the needs of every special students, teaching and learning programme (T&L) formed is flexible in accordance with the rules of education (Special Education, 1997) which states "teachers can transform the methods and techniques of teaching and learning, do time management for each activities, subjects and teaching aids in order to achieve the objectives and goals of Special Education". Special education students have different characteristics in terms of the level of mental and emotional as well as resistance to the environment is different. Therefore special education teachers should play an important role in educating and guiding the students according to their needs by using the most effective methods of teaching and learning (T&L) and carefully monitoring the progress of students.

Further, special education students need a lot of guidance and support at all times, especially in terms of self management, cognitive aspects, social and emotional as well as its confidence that they become noble and respected in society. Thus, special education teachers need to have special personality and noble for reaching out to the hearts of the students so as to assist them in learning effectively in accordance with their needs.

## 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Special education teachers need to have interest and so that all contributions in managing and guiding these special students done sincerely and honestly. This is due to a number of teachers from special education options or from other options who teach special education feel not interested and forcing themselves to teach or manage these special students until find the way out from teaching special education. In addition, most schools that have a Special Education Integration Programme had to involve special education teachers in all school management and activities. This is an issue of special education teachers as their concentration and commitment to special education particularly to special students could not be fully implemented.

Training or skills of special education teachers is an important element in managing and changing the behavior of special students towards their self-perfection in line with the philosophy of special education. Controls and methods of teaching these special education students are different according to their categories. Therefore, teachers need to have specialized knowledge and skills in handling these students so that the objectives, mission and vision of special education school reached. In Malaysia, special education teachers only acquire training and knowledge regarding special education in Teacher's Education Institute (*IPG*) while training specialized in a specific type on special categories of students is not implemented. National Research Council, USA (2001), training for teacher is the weakest element in the effort to provide effective services for children with autism and their families.

Therefore this study aimed to identify the level of interest and skills on special education teachers in handling the teaching and learning for education

students. In addition it is also intended to look at the relationship between the two variables and how these variables affects the teaching and learning for special students with learning disabilities.

#### 4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to investigate:

- 4.1 Identify the level of interest in special education teachers in handling the teaching and learning for education students.
- 4.2 Identify the skill level of special education teachers in handling special education students.
- 4.3 Investigate the relation between interest and skills on special education teachers with teaching and learning in the Special Education Intergration Program.
- 4.4 Investigate on how interest and skills on special education teachers affects the teaching and learning to special students with learning disabilities.

#### 5.0 RESEARCH QUESTION

- 5.1 What is the level of interest in special education teachers in handling the T&L for special education students?
- 5.2 What is the level of skills of special education teachers in handling special education students with learning disabilities?
- 5.3 What is the relation between interest and skills of special education teachers in teaching and learning on the Special Education Integration Program (*PPKI*)?
- 5.4 How can interest and skills of special education teachers affect the teaching and learning for special education students with learning disabilities?

#### 6.0 HYPHOTHESIS

- 6.0 There is no statistically significant difference between the level of interest and skill level for special education teachers in handling the teaching and learning for special education students.
- 6.1 There is no significant relationship available between the level of interest and skills of special education teachers for teaching and

learning in the Special Education Integration Program.

#### 7.0 DEFINITION OF TERMS

##### 7.1 Interest in Special Education Teachers

Interest shall mean the feeling of love or desire to do something with a tranquil heart and closely with nature. Passion is the source of motivation that drives a person to do what they want when they are free to choose (Hurlock, 1995:144). Interest is an important aspect of the teacher in the discharge of its duties wholeheartedly in line with the Philosophy of Education. According to Thorndike, Weics and Danis (1968), in which Hashim (2000), overall interests could be considered as variables of motivation. While Holland (1973) stated that interest play a very important and motivate someone to make career selection.

For the purposes of this study, the word of mean is the feeling of love interests or special education teachers desire to do his job with calm hearts and high commitment. For special education teachers, interest is the main factor in operating and managing the special students. Willingness to teach honestly and the desire to pour affection will maintain them and also increase the momentum of the feeling of interest in special children.

##### 7.2 Skills of Special Education Teacher

In this study, skills shall mean an expertise or knowledge of an item as a result of training or experience that is traversed by special education teachers. Teachers' skills in handling and managing students especially in teaching and learning are important so that a situation or problem can be dealt systematically. Kauchak and Refused (1989), argue that effective teaching requires skills and in-depth knowledge of the subjects and a wide understanding of aspects of learning. According to Ryan, D.G. (the Crow Crow &, 1983), quality teaching can be attributed to those who have the knowledge and skills required at some of the disciplines.

For special education teachers, the skills required are diverse because the teachers are faced with special students from a variety of categories. Every student has a different characteristic in terms of its physical, behaviour, emotional and health problems

that need to be managed and maintained with different methods and techniques. Thus, skills either through training or courses are needed or always been applied by special education teachers to ensure the management processes and the handling of special students can be implemented properly.

## 8.0 METHODS

### 8.0 Design

The design of the study was qualitative as well as quantitative and based random survey. Study on the quantitative basis is usually used to describe the current situation, study the relationship and see the impact and consequences of the phenomenon (Ariasian & Gay, 2003). This research is using questionnaire to gather data. The questionnaire method was chosen because it provides an opportunity for researchers to obtain feedback from respondents more widely and comprehensive. Furthermore the use of the questionnaire is more practical if the study sample is large (Mohd. Majid Konting, 1990).

This study uses qualitative methods, namely interviews to further strengthen the facts. The interview method conducted on three special education teachers from different schools to get their perceptions on the level of interest, and skills in school. In this study, researchers only use partial interviews as a structured interview involving questions that more open and giving freedom to the respondent for addressing their response. According to Merriem (1998) structured partial interview is flexible and allows the respondent describes what he thinks to researchers.

### 8.1 Participants

The study population consisted of special education teachers in primary schools around the Penang that has a Special Education Integration Programme (PPKI). A total of six primary schools around Penang were chosen by simple random for purposes of review. The samples were 60 special education teacher schools around the Penang that was selected as respondents. This study involves randomly selected samples and involves teachers who vary in age, gender, race, and their level of academic. Simple random means choosing a random sample and the population based on the circumstances and characteristics of each unit of the sample having the characteristics of a population (Leedy, 1993).

## 8.2 Instruments

### 8.2.1 Questionnaire

A total of 60 questionnaires were distributed to ensure the amount required in this study would be fulfill and only complete response made the sample in this study. The set of questionnaire used in this survey was based on questionnaires designed by Schwartz and Drager (2008) in his study entitled "Training and Knowledge in Autism among Speech-Language Pathologists: A Survey". The questionnaire was changed accordance by teachers in Malaysia and easily understood by the respondents in this study. Each item is based on the Likert scale with a score of four points 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), and 4 (strongly agree). The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed by using SPSS Version 15.0 program. This study uses descriptive statistics to see the distribution frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to describe demographic and survey questions presented.

### 8.2.2 Interview Method

The interview is one of the instruments used by the researcher to obtain qualitative data. The data obtained will help researchers supports the findings of interviews that have been conducted on the respondent. John and James (1998) say that the interview could explain one's thought patterns. The sources of information obtained from the interviews are also more rich and deep, especially when discussing about the thought process of a respondent. In this study, researchers only use half of the interview as a structured interview involving questions that more open and giving freedom to the respondent for addressing their response. The expected answers are not provided and all possible answers from the respondents accepted. To assist the implementation process of interviews in this study, various word that reactant the manufacturer response from respondents such as "in your opinion", "how", and etc.

### 8.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was submitted by researchers to special education teachers in six primary schools that have integration program around Penang. Before answering the questionnaire, researchers gave a short description

for the purpose of the study and how to answer them to the teachers involved. Each survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete and then surrendered to researchers.

In addition, the study also involves the method of interview for a number of special education teachers who are randomly selected to reinforce the findings of the study. Interview method involves 3 special education teachers from 3 different schools. All conversations were recorded and transcribe in the form of a statement (Attached in annex). Before starting the interview, the researchers meet the principal or senior assistant to obtain permission for conducting interview sessions. Interview session was held in special education classes and conducted by researchers themselves.

Table 1 below is a decentralized evaluation used for evaluation findings based on the average percentage of the total for each research question.

Table 1 : Category Analysis Review Assessment

Mean	Percentage (%)	Evaluation / Interpretation
0 – 1.9	0 - 49.9	Low
2.0– 2.9	50.0 - 74.9	Medium
3.0 – 4.0	75.0 – 100	High

While Pearson correlation coefficient for finding 'r' instead, researchers use the evaluation expressed by Hinkle, Wiersma and Jurs (2003).

Table 2: Assessment category for Findings Pearson correlation

R	Interpretation
0.91 to 1.00 (-0.91 to -1.00)	The positive correlation (negative) is very strong
0.71 to 0.90 (-0.71 to -0.90)	The positive correlation (negative) is strong
0.51 to 0.70 (-0.51 to -0.70)	The positive correlation (negative) is moderate

0.31 to 0.50 (-0.31 to -0.50)	The positive correlation (negative) is weak
0.01 to 0.30 (-0.01 to -0.30)	The positive correlation (negative) is weak

9.0 RESULTS

Based on table 3, an overall mean score obtained for interested special education teachers integration program of learning problems in the category national schools for Penang District is (M = 3.19, SD = 0.45). This finding demonstrates the level of interest in special education teachers is high because every item that involves the aspects of interest showed high mean score, i.e. more than 3.0. This shows that there are number of respondents are less fond in the field of special education. The conclusion is the aspects of the level of interest in special education teachers as a whole is high and particularly have a positive impact on the management of special students.

Table 3 : The mean score and standard deviation for items of interest on Special education teachers

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Special education is an option and I never feel regret choosing the option	3.17	0.78
2. Special Education Integration Program (PPKI) is my passion	3.00	0.74
3. I carry out with dedication and honestly in order to realize the mission and vision special education.	3.27	0.46
4. I feel calm and able to give high commitment in educating special education students	3.22	0.49
5. I carry out my duties Wholeheartedly		

in line with Philosophy of Special Education.	3.22	0.45
6. My motivation is always consistent and increasing in educating special education students.	3.13	0.60
7. I feel comfortable and enjoy teaching special education	3.28	0.61
8. I will stay in this program in order to assist those with disabilities.	3.23	0.70
<b>Overall Interest</b>	<b>3.19</b>	<b>0.45</b>

the skills of handling special students with my colleagues	3.20	0.40
5. I'm always sensitive to all changes on the method of development of special education students.	3.02	0.50
6. I have the skills to produce and operate teaching aids to special education students	2.90	0.63
7. I have ICT skills		
8. in handling P&P process.	2.95	0.57
9. I have the skills to motivate the parents of special education students	2.77	0.56
<b>Overall Skills</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>0.42</b>

For special education teacher's skills category learning problems, researchers using 8 items and findings as follows:

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation for items of skills on special education teachers

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. I have enough skills in handling P&P process for a special education students.	2.50	0.70
2. I have skills in handling special education students from various categories of learning disabilities.	2.58	0.67
3. I always practice the appropriate P&P methods with special needs students.	3.13	0.43
4. I always share		

Based on table 4, overall mean score obtained for special education teachers skills in school integration program is national (M = 2.88, SD = 0.42). These findings have shown that the level of special education teacher's skills was at a moderate level. Then the conclusion is the skill level of teachers is insufficient and need to be introduced to the training or knowledge of operation of P&P process for special education students.

Correlation analysis was used to show the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables. The Pearson correlation studies using 'r' to see the relationship between the level of interest and special education teacher's skills of teaching and learning (T&L). The findings indicate that there is a strong positive correlation values and statistically significant between interest with skills

( $r = 0.728$ ). Then where if the skill level is increased then the interest levels will also be increased and vice versa.

The findings on partially structured interview of special education teachers on learning category for national school integration program on the selection of special education option as the first option, feelings and motivation to teach special education students. The study found that although all special education teachers interviewed was not from special education options, but they feel fun and interested to teach special students. This is due to the factor of flexibility in the management of T&L and the feeling of pity and love of special students.

Interview results also shows on the techniques used by these three respondents were different in handling students with autism, ADHD, slow-learner and down syndrome, especially during the process of teaching and learning. The 3 respondents stated that they only follow training or courses not more than 3 times a year. This shows special education teachers have less knowledge and skills in handling or develop special needs students. Analysis of the findings found that teachers have a high level of interest in special education. In terms of skill level, special education teachers feel they needed to be introduced to the many courses or training so that the knowledge and skills can be extended. In conclusion it was found that the level of interest and skills has a direct link between positive relationships in other.

## 10.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that there is a strong positive correlation as well as significant between the level of interest on special education teachers skills on teaching and learning for special education teachers in the National School (SK) around Penang. This study was consistent with the study by Hasnah Mohd Tohran. Hanafi, Mohd Mokhtar During & Salleh (2010) a session which also found a majority of respondents (74%) are interested in teaching children with autism. Therefore, courses and training need to be more robust and comprehensive in order to produce efficient special education teachers to educate children who suffer from autism.

This study carries implications that special education teachers in the learning category have

high level of interest. This show most of them has a feeling of fun and are interested to teach special education students. The study found high levels of interest due to sensitivity of teachers towards selection on their career direction and comprising special education teacher's options. This level of interest must be maintained and improved through plans and the development of special education programmes accordance with current developments. In addition, the Ministry is also expected to put the teacher according to their real options. This is because the teachers will be more equipped for the teaching and learning in future.

Based on this finding of this study it is apparent that the ministries, departments or special education division must play an important role in planning and organizing additional training in special education. This additional training must be increased in order to improve knowledge and skills on special education teachers and thus be able to enhance confidence in the teaching and learning process. The findings also shows the skill level of special education teachers is moderate and this means the teacher still less exposure with particular skills in handling students from various categories of learning disabilities. Special education teachers training either during formal education or in-service training (*LDP*) should be enhanced in order to produce quality teachers who are competent and skilled in educating special students from a wide range of categories. In addition, a practical training must be increased in order to provide opportunity for trainee teachers gain direct experience or 'hands-on' with children from various categories. In-service training also can be upgraded its quality by using the method of consultation and not just through the workshop only (Scheuermann et al. 2003).

## 11.0 CONCLUSION

This study has shown a clear finding on the level of interest and skills on special education teachers in schools that have a Special Education Integration Programme (*PPKI*) for the learning disabilities category. The findings of this study showed that the level of interest is high while the skill level was at a moderate level. While the relationship between the level of interest and skills show a positive correlation. This implies that if the skill level is increased then the interest levels will also be increased and vice versa. The researchers

hope the study could help teachers, counselors, parents and the school to see the level of interest and skills on special education teachers and its relationship to the teaching and learning process. By knowing the problem statement and the findings, it is hoped that the various improvements can be made to increase the level of skills among teachers of special education in learning disabilities.

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