INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A PRELIMINARY STUDY AMONG TRAINEE TEACHERS IN INSTITUTE OF TEACHER EDUCATION, TECHNICAL EDUCATION CAMPUS

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ABSTRACT

In the age of globalization, Inclusive Education (IE) aims to foster engagement and provide opportunities for Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) to get involved in academic and extracurricular activities alongside mainstream students. However, there is still societal prejudice against an integrated education system that can help Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) succeed, particularly among trainee teachers. Therefore, this research was carried out to measure trainee teachers' level of understanding in terms of knowledge and readiness in implementing Inclusive Education. This study was conducted quantitatively using a survey involving 204 trainee teachers from Bachelor of Teaching Degree Program (PISMP) (June 2020, Year 3, Semester II) offered Inclusive Education course majoring in Design and Technology (RBT), Mathematics, Science, Islamic Education, Malay Studies and TESL. A set of questionnaires using 5-point Likert Scale was administered online using Google Forms and the data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics, namely mean and standard deviation through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 29. The most obvious finding to emerge from the analysis is that the level of knowledge (mean=4.44, SD=0.62) and readiness (mean=4.14, SD=0.81) in understanding of Inclusive Education (IE) is high among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT).The findings of this research will critically examine and provide deeper insights on improvements that can be made for both practitioners and policy-makers to achieve the goal to integrate 75% of Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) into Inclusive Education by 2025 as stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013 - 2025).

Keywords: Knowledge, Readiness, Inclusive Education, Special Education Needs (SEN), Quantitative, Survey

INTRODUCTION

A fair and equitable society is based on Inclusive Education (IE) and is considered as a fundamental human right in championing evolving diversity as a new norm (Forlin 2013; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2012). Since the United Nation's Salamanca Statement (1994) was endorsed by 92 member nations and 25 international organizations, the catchphrase has continued to gain tractions internationally and locally including Malaysia. It has promoted inclusive schools as the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all especially among the marginalized group. Drawing on an extensive range of sources, Inclusive Education is now firmly established as the main policy that is crucial with respect to students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or disabilities and further transforming the educational systems (Department for Education and Skills, 2001a).

This view is further supported by The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) as they prepared more pathways for teachers to play a critical role in Inclusive Education to impose this reform into practise (Finkelstein, Sharma & Furlonger, 2021; Rouse, 2017). Conversely, the likelihood of Inclusive Education actually being successful relies altogether on teachers' belief system, comprehension, knowledge and readiness in implementing Inclusive Education (Sharma, Sokal, Wang & Loreman, 2021; Morina, 2017). Taken together, these studies support the notion for teachers to be sensitive to the needs and strengths of their varied student body in order to give all students with a quality education that is fair, equal, and responsive in line with the Salamanca Statement (Woodcock, Gibbs, Hitches, & Regan, 2023).

Therefore, it is vital for teachers to be equipped with knowledge to be prepared ahead, create, and offer equal learning opportunities for all students using inclusive teaching strategies. This further reiterates that teachers should be focused on student outcomes and aim to ensure that all students can reach their full learning potential (Capp, 2020).
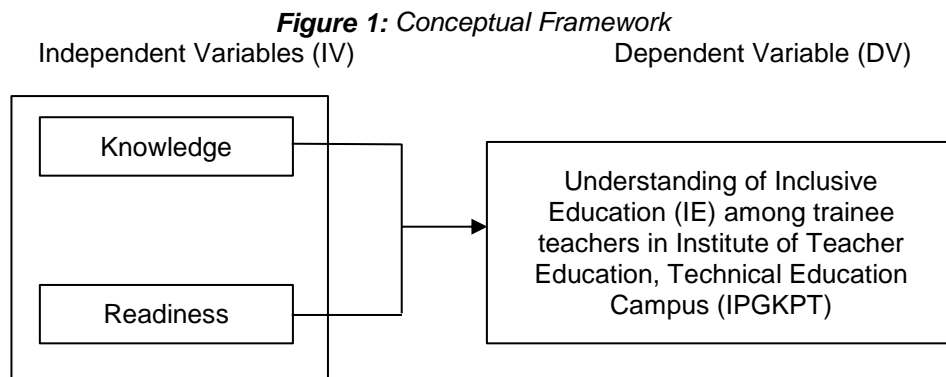
Objectives and Research Questions

The objective of this study is to investigate the understanding of Inclusive Education (IE) among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus. Information gained on trainee teachers' knowledge and readiness pertaining to Inclusive Education (IE) is fundamental as pre-service teachers must be equipped with good examples of Inclusive practices. Moreover, the information obtained from this study could be useful for policy-makers, Inclusive Education (IE) learning program designers and lecturers. In order to address the aforementioned research objective, this paper attempts to answer the following research questions:

i. What is the level of knowledge among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus pertaining to Inclusive Education (IE)?
ii. What is the level of readiness among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus pertaining to Inclusive Education (IE)?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used as an establishment in this paper is to analyse the understanding of Inclusive Education (IE) among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus. The conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1 comprises of independent variables (IV) which are knowledge and readiness meanwhile dependent variable (DV) is understanding of Inclusive Education (IE) among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT). This conceptual framework serves as a purpose of clarifying concepts and illustrates the expected relationship between variables in this study.

Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

Independent Variables (IV)   Dependent Variable (DV)

Knowledge

Readiness

Understanding of Inclusive Education (IE) among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT)

METHODOLOGY

The research design chosen in this study is quantitative approach as the researchers intend to ask specific narrow questions in order to measure the understanding level defined by knowledge and readiness in implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (Creswell, 2008). As a result, survey is carried out to gather quantifiable data from respondents. Several studies have documented, survey is the most practical approach to administer a set of questionnaires to a small group of people (sample) to identify trends in attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics of a large group of people (population) (Ghazali & Sufean, 2018; Creswell, 2008; Wiersma, 1991). It is considered, this kind of selection is advantageous since it lessens the labour load and expenses associated with examining the entire target group (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The data collected from survey was then analyzed using statistics in a neutral and unbiased manner.

Therefore, a survey is administered to observe the understanding of Inclusive Education among trainee teachers at Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT). The population of this study comprised of 409 trainee teachers Bachelor of Teaching Degree Program (PISMP) (June 2020 Intake, Year 3, Semester II) been offered Inclusive Education majoring in Design and Technology (RBT), Mathematics, Science, Islamic Education, Malay Studies and TESL. The sample size in this study was determined using Krejie and Morgan (1970) sampling table. Therefore, 205 respondents were selected using random sampling to take part in this study. A set of questionnaires were then administered to 204 respondents and the survey was conducted online using Google Forms. A major advantage of digital data collecting has been shown to be more efficient than pen-and-paper methods in terms of speedy data handling, less lost or incorrect data and general feasibility (Drummond, Ghosh, Ferguson, Brackenridge & Tiplady, 1995).

A set of questionnaires was used in this study. According to Sulaiman (2002), questionnaires are the easiest way to obtain information from a big group of respondents and has a number of attractive features compared to other methods in an effort to obtain quantitative information. In particular, the questionnaire in this study consist of Section A, B and C. Section A requires respondents' demographic information, meanwhile section B and C consist of items in regards knowledge (9 items) and readiness (10 items) variables. Total items administered in this questionnaire was 19 items altogether. The questionnaire was tested using 5 Likert Scale. The interpretation of mean score by Zolkepeli (2017) was used to determine the level of knowledge and readiness among trainee teachers at Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT) towards Inclusive Education (IE) as demonstrated in Table 1. Thenceforth, data were analysed by descriptive statistics namely mean and standard deviation (SD) using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 29. In general, this study was conducted with a focus on obtaining descriptive information to answer the research questions that have been stated.

Table 1: Interpretation of mean value

Mean Score	Interpretation of Mean Score
1.00 – 2.00	Low
2.01 – 3.00	Average
3.01 – 5.00	High

RESULTS AND FINDING

This study was conducted among 204 trainee teachers Bachelor of Teaching Degree Program (PISMP) (June 2020 Intake, Year 3, Semester II) been offered Inclusive Education majoring in Design and Technology (RBT), Mathematics, Science, Islamic Education, Malay Studies and TESL from Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT). Trainee teachers were selected randomly from 6 different majors. Table 1 lists the information on the respondents' background with 39 (19.1%) respondents are male meanwhile 165 (80.9%) are female. Based on the overall analysis of the respondents' demographic, it can be said that most of the respondents were female compared to male.

Table 2: Information of respondents' background (n=204)

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	39	19.1
	Female	165	80.9
Major(s)	Design and Technology (RBT)	26	12.7
	Mathematics	28	13.7
	Science	24	11.8
	Islamic Education	13	6.4
	Malay Studies	44	21.6
	TESL	69	33.8

Knowledge pertaining to Inclusive Education (IE) among Trainee Teachers of Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT)

Table 3 demonstrates the mean value of trainee teachers' level of knowledge pertaining to Inclusive Education (IE) in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT) is at high level (mean = 4.44, SD = 0.62). Based on normality test conducted using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the data of knowledge regarding Inclusive Education (IE) (df = 204, sig.> 0.05) were not significant. Hence, this indicates that the data is normally distributed. Findings revealed, most respondents pointed out that they will collaborate with mainstream teachers in implementing Inclusive Education Program (M=4.60) and understand about Inclusive Education as a course that was offered to them (M=4.57). The lowest mean recorded was that they know the problems and how to overcome them in implementing Inclusive Education Program at school (M=4.22). Based on Table 3 as shown below, the descriptive analysis found that the overall mean of trainee teachers' level of knowledge pertaining to Inclusive Education is high. Therefore, this finding suggests that the level of knowledge pertaining to Inclusive Education (IE) among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT) is at high level.

Table 3: Trainee teachers' knowledge regarding Inclusive Education (IE)

	Item	n	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation
B1	I understand about Inclusive Education as a course that was offered to me.	204	4.57	0.55	High
B2	I have received sufficient information and exposure about Inclusive Education course.	204	4.47	0.61	High
B3	The knowledge I have gained on Inclusive Education will help me to manage Inclusive Education Program at school.	204	4.38	0.66	High
B4	I know the vision of the students who will be placed in Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.47	0.61	High
B5	I know the suitability of either Full Inclusive Program or Partial Inclusive Program for Students with Special Needs (SEN).	204	4.27	0.72	High
B6	I know the characteristics and criteria of students that need to be included in Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.47	0.58	High
B7	I will give my very best if I am required to be involved in Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.55	0.58	High
B8	I will collaborate with mainstream teachers in implementing Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.60	0.63	High
B9	I know the problems and how to overcome them in implementing Inclusive Education Program at school.	204	4.22	0.71	High
	Total	204	4.44	0.62	High

Readiness in Implementing Inclusive Education (IE) among Trainee Teachers of Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT)

Table 4 demonstrates the mean value of trainee teachers' level of readiness to implement Inclusive Education (IE) in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT) is at high level (mean = 4.14, SD = 0.81). Based on normality test conducted using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the data of readiness regarding Inclusive Education (IE) (df = 204, sig.> 0.05) were not significant. Hence, this indicates that the data is normally distributed. Findings revealed, most respondents agreed that Inclusive Education Program will help to increase the level of self-esteem and bring positive changes among students with Special Education Needs (SEN). (M=4.55) and trying to form a deep understanding about Inclusive Education Program (M=4.50). The lowest mean recorded was they will never be pressured in implementing Inclusive Education Program (M=3.45). Based on Table 4 as shown below, the descriptive analysis found that the overall mean of trainee teachers' level of readiness to implement Inclusive Education is high. Therefore, this finding suggests that the level of readiness in implementing Inclusive Education (IE) among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT) is at high level.

Table 4: Trainee teachers' readiness regarding Inclusive Education (IE)

	Item	n	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation
C10	I will be responsible if I am given the opportunity to conduct Inclusive Education Program at school.	204	4.42	0.69	High
C11	I understand the implementation of Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.19	0.76	High
C12	I think Inclusive Education Program is hassle-free to be implemented in schools.	204	3.47	1.18	High
C13	I will never be pressured in implementing Inclusive Education Program.	204	3.45	1.12	High
C14	I am trying to form a deep understanding about Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.50	0.59	High
C15	I will have a good relationship with mainstream teachers involved in Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.06	0.93	High
C16	I am interested to explore in depth about Inclusive Education Program in the future.	204	4.44	0.66	High
C17	I am always looking for resources to expand my understanding related to Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.06	0.87	High
C18	I agree that Inclusive Education Program will help to increase the level of self-esteem and bring positive changes among students with Special Education Needs (SEN).	204	4.55	0.60	High
C19	I feel proud to be involved in Inclusive Education Program.	204	4.31	0.77	High
	Total	**204**	**4.14**	**0.81**	**High**

DISCUSSIONS

This study investigated the level of knowledge and readiness among trainee teachers in Institute of Teacher Education, Technical Education Campus (IPGKPT). Results derived from this study shows that level of knowledge and readiness among trainee teachers is at high level. Although the level of both knowledge and readiness is at high level in regards to Inclusive Education, Woodcock and Hardy (2017) supported that further specialist training may provide pre-service teachers to be able to meet the different demands of their students especially Students with Special Education Needs (SEN). Additionally, research points to the necessity for teacher preparation programmes and ongoing professional development will increase trainee teachers' knowledge and confidence in their abilities in instruction, student engagement, and classroom management especially in a challenging Inclusive Education (IE) education system (Fackler, Malmberg & Sammons, 2021).

Furthermore, trainee teachers will also be able to learn how Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) engage, how the subject is being presented in an Inclusive Education (IE) classroom, and how students communicate what they have learned among one another as all these aspects are very new to trainee teachers (Finkelstein, Sharma & Furlonger, 2021). These type of experiences to various teaching strategies that serve to accommodate learners with different needs and background can offer beneficial learning opportunities especially for preservice teachers. This section has attempted to provide a brief summary of Inclusive Education (IE) as trainee teachers can only succeed if they are catered with knowledge, resources and encouraging belief change by policy makers and training providers such as Institute of Teacher Education (IPG) if they are provided and equipped with good examples of inclusive practices (Woodcock, Gibbs, Hitches, & Regan, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

A few suggestions for educational practise and policy can be drawn. The value of inclusion is emphasised by educational policy in many nations including a country like Malaysia as well as forming positive ideas about Inclusive Education (IE) is key objective of teacher preparation especially among trainee teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). The evidence reviewed here seems to suggest, educational institutions must develop ways to support them trainee teachers in order for them to reflect their knowledge, readiness and values in regards to Inclusive Education (IE) and feel more at ease with their teaching in inclusive classrooms. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013 - 2025) vision to integrate 75% of Students with Special Education Needs (SEN) into Inclusive Education by 2025 must be a vision that is not far away from the reality.

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