

PARENTS AND TEACHERS OPINIONS ON INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL, TAIPING DISTRICT.PERAK.MALAYSIA.

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Abstract

Inclusive philosophy has its own power in the process of "normalization" of children with special needs. This study discusses the perceptions of inclusive education in a school. It is a case study to explore the opinion of regular teachers and parents towards inclusive practice. The research method is through individual interviews with regular teachers, special educators and the parents of the special student. The findings show that regular teachers and special educators maintain their roles and responsibilities, while parents and teachers have a positive outlook on the learning outcomes in terms of social development and integration. Discussions were focus on reforming education practices and strategies for collaboration and sharing of tasks among teachers to promote an inclusive environment in school.

Keywords: Inclusive education, parents' opinions , special educators

Changes towards inclusive education in Malaysia started with the involvement of these countries in international conferences and workshops under the Organization of the United Nations, in particular UNESCO's activities. Society's commitment to education at all levels of society, including children, have been strengthened at the "Sub-regional Seminar on Policy, Planning and Organization of Education for Children with Special Needs" by Unesco in Harbin, China in 1993. It features the importance of the inclusive orientation at the conference 'Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education' held in Salamanca, Spain in June 1994 (UNESCO, 1994) • All children should have equal and appropriate education. The education system should be developed and implemented taking into account the diversity of students. The effects from the conference which was held over a span of five years, was the acknowledgment and recognition of the 'Education for All' principle. The concept of integration brings the assumption that children with special needs need to make adjustments to fit into the school system that does not cater to their needs, while the concept of inclusive aims to restructure and renovate schools so that learning needs of all normal children, including children's special needs are met. Inclusive has its own philosophy and strength in the process of "normalization" of children with special needs. Inclusive education is one of the

programs provided for students with special needs as enshrined in the Education Act 1996 (1998) where the term 'special needs means: students with visual impairments or hearing impairment or learning disabilities. Special students are educated together with their normal peers using regular curriculum, which is customized to cater to the needs and achievement of the respective students. Kamariah Jalgi, (1994) in the presentation at an Education Seminar on Special Rehabilitation says "Inclusive education involves students with special needs in regular classes where appropriate help is given to them to enable them to follow the teaching and learning along with their peers.

Inclusive education is one of the programs provided for students with special needs as enshrined in the Education Act 1996 (1998) where the term 'special needs' and 'inclusive education' has been introduced. Inclusive education was introduced as a continuum of services provided to students with special needs. Education Act 1996 (1998: 148) defines a special education program as: 1. program offered at a special school for pupils who have a

visual impairment or hearing impairment; 2. merger in a regular school program for students with disabilities vision or hearing impairment or with learning difficulties; 3. inclusive education for students of special needs can attend the regular classes in conjunction with the regular students. Criteria for special education placement is based on the children as judged by a team of professional experts. In the Education Act 1996 (1998: 48) states: A student with special needs is to be educated if he is able to take care of themselves without relying on the help of others and approved by a panel of medical practitioners, officials of the Ministry of Education and officials from Social Welfare Department, as capable of following the educational program. Education for all has been an aim for UNESCO for more than sixty years (Hughes, 2009) and inclusion is regarded as the most effective means of achieving education for the majority of students (Dempsey, 2005). As inclusion falls into paradigm of equal opportunity and normalisation it is important to understand these fundamental foundations that underpin inclusion.

The teachers attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream settings may be also influenced by the severity of the disability experienced by such students (Agran et al.,2002; Kuester,2000) The inclusion of student with behavioural and emotional disorders appear to attract the least favourable responses from mainstream educators (Agran et al. , 2002, Kuester, 2000). There have also been fears that the dynamics within inclusive settings may impact on the academic progress of non-disabled students (Forlin, 1998) According Zalizan Mohd Jelas (2000) in primary schools around Kuala Lumpur, find a special parents' perception towards an inclusive program is expecting equal treatment through out the program. Parents also expect special children to be accorded placement in a regular classroom with normal children. Duhaney and Blend (2000) conducted a study on the perception of parents of normal and special children on inclusive education program in a regular classroom. Results found that many among parents of special children supported this educational program. The parents believe the program will help the development of children with special needs in terms of social, emotional and academic achievement. Parents also believe that the normal child will inadvertently be a role model to children with special needs in the real world situation. Based on the findings by Zalizan Mohd Jelas (2000) in which parents expect the typical placement of children in regular classes despite the regular classroom teachers having to face many hurdles between the normal students and special students. Parents also expect a good relationship between regular classroom teachers and special education teachers to educate

children in such special setting.. Parents put a high value on the role of school administrators as a social institution.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted in a secondary school. The school has a student population of 600 ranging from Form 1 to Form 5. A total of 95% of the student population are Malays, 1% Chinese and 4% Indian students. The school has seven special classes with 49 students. Two pupils have been placed into an inclusive classroom.

Interviews were conducted in an informal and partially structured format to obtain information about responsibilities, collaboration between teachers and their views about the placement of special students in the regular classroom. The interviews were recorded and researchers continually check with the subject to verify information and to seek feedback for proper understanding and for data interpretation during interviews. Term review and an interview is 1 month and all interviews were conducted at the school, including interviews with parents. Data collection focused only on personal perceptions and experiences of respondents involved. Classroom observations were also made. Table 1 shows the questions that are addressed to the teacher to explain the perceptions and experiences about inclusive student placement. Interviews were held during the period and it was divided into an interview early the first week and another during the last week.

Questionnaires

Table 1

First Interview questions to teacher : view towards an inclusive student placement

1. How are students with special needs placed in regular classes?
2. How will the placement of students with special needs in class affect you as a teacher and as an individual?
3. How does the inclusion of pupils with special needs in your classroom affect student?
4. How inclusive of students with special needs in the class you influence other students?
5. Do special student take up too much of teacher's time in classroom setting?
6. Can normal students learn with special children in the same classroom?
7. Do teachers have difficulty in classroom control with special student?

Final interview questions to teachers : Share assignment

1. Since the typical student in your class has been included, do special education teachers still play a role?
2. What is the most important responsibilities of inclusive classroom teachers and special education teachers?
3. How do you decide on your responsibility as a teacher and the learning needs of students?
4. Parents and teachers have an important role to meet the educational needs of students. are the roles and responsibilities understood by all involved?

Interview questions parents: Effect placement

1. Normal classes provide learning opportunities that are more meaningful to your child as opposed to special classes. Do you agree?
2. Do you worry whether your child can adjust to regular students or vice versa?
3. Do you believe that an inclusive setting will enable a special student to be independent and sociable?

Result

This section discusses the response categories that appear based on views and feedback on the questions of the interview to subjects. As the interview questions closely relate to each other and are repetitive in nature, interview transcripts and notes have been carefully appointed to produce analytical categories. Three categories of theme-based interview questions are as follows: (1) outlook toward an inclusive student placement; (2) The view of the teacher's job-sharing and (3) of the views of parents on the effects of student placements in inclusive classroom.

Views On Inclusive Student Placement

Regular teachers and special education teachers in the study were asked how students with special educational needs are placed in ordinary classes. Two special education teachers agree that the placement of the student in the regular classroom is able to establish new learning opportunities and to foster competitiveness for special students. Teachers select two students based on academic and social development to be placed into regular classes. Both teachers expressed "joy' and satisfaction" as pupils with special needs were given the chance to be with their regular peers; this effort is a commendable attempt for the school.

Both regular teachers received the inclusive student placement as it was a direction from the school principal. Though they felt that the directive is a challenge to their abilities but they believe they can handle it as an experienced teachers. A group of regular teachers:

"I have all kinds of students in my classes and I'm assuming that every student has their own specialty, so a typical student was not much different".

Teachers in group B did not feel the "pressure, although somewhat worried, because this is just a trial deployment and not necessarily permanent. The initial reaction of the teachers involved in this study have shown a number of assumptions about their role. Both ordinary teachers have never been trained in special education, but without assistance and training in accordance with the practice of inclusive, regular teachers are fully responsible for the inclusive students. In response to the question to what extent does the presence of typical student behaviors affects teaching, regular teachers in Group B state:

"I do not think that I needed to give individual attention to the inclusive students. I was too busy focusing attention on 36 other students and being in a regular classroom, the special student has to learn to be abreast with the rest of the group".

Ordinary teacher in Group B have the following comments:

“I accept Prem in my class. It is my responsibility to ensure Prem behaves like other students. So far no problems. Prem was helped by his friends. I have 35 pupils in one class, and while teaching I do not to pay attention to Prem only because this is not a special class setting”.

However, teachers in Group A showed a flexible approach:

“I give the same job to all students, but for Chee Seong, I give him less work, hence he can complete his work just like the other students”.

Both teachers agreed that once a special students leave their classroom, they are no longer responsible for these students. They argue that regular teachers do not need special training because students selected to participate in inclusive education should have the potential to cope with lessons in a regular classroom. However they argue that collaboration between regular teachers and special teachers need to be carried out formally .

Both mothers interviewed would prefer their children to be placed in a regular classroom. Mothers in Group A summarize their feelings:

“Special teacher told me that my child learns best in a special class. I decided to talk to the principal to recommend that my child be placed in regular classes and be allowed to take exams (PMR). I've never heard of inclusive education and I do not understand what it is. But I am satisfied when the school allowed my child to learn in a regular classroom, because I wanted other people to treat my child like normal children”.

However, mothers in Group B, when asked about the typical child’s quality of learning in a regular classroom stated:

“Whether I am satisfied or not, I have to accept whatever opportunities given to my child. It is worth the while. I will make sure my children do their homework and talk to the teacher about it”.

The teachers in this study have shown that they accept full responsibility and respect each other's roles border. This responsibility has motivated and sustained a sense of obligation based on professional and career responsibilities. Parents also show the boundaries of acceptance and respect for the role shown by teachers. They show positive attitudes toward inclusive practice and basic consideration in deciding the placement of students.

Effect Of Placement In Regular Classrooms

Regular class teachers report a positive impact on themselves and on their students due to the involvement of special students in their class. The following is a description of their experience. Both women showed a positive perception of inclusive practices and putting a high value on the role of the school in the development of social skills among their children:

“I do not really care if my child does not get individual attention from the teacher. My older son is in a regular classroom, he has more opportunities to be treated like ordinary boys . I know my son weaknesses..... .If he remains in a special class, I was not sure whether he can pass the examination. Now he's motivated to go to school because there are new friends”.

The reaction of the parents also show there is a change in the expectations of the learning outcomes of their children. They are more interested in getting a chance for their children in terms of social skills development. Regular classroom teachers have the perception that the inclusion of students has increased awareness and adaptation to the routine and the requirements class.

“At first, Prem did not want to cooperate. I left him alone. Then he realized that other students were busy doing something and talking. Sooner or later, he felt the need to be part of the group”.

Various benefits that can be felt by students who participate in inclusive classrooms such as development in communication, social and expressive skills. In conclusion, this study has described a feeling of obligation and responsibility and commitment of teachers and parents to practice inclusion of students with special needs into regular classrooms.

Discussion

The focus of this study is to discuss the placement of students with special needs in the regular classroom-based on reference from teachers and parents who experience it. Although, issued raised may have implications for anyone interested in issues of inclusive practice in schools, the findings and analysis based on the findings reflect only the perceptions and experiences of six people interviewed; Then there are limitations to this study. Both special students in this study has unique features, and approaches used by the regular teacher, that is "to treat them as any other pupil in the class " which in turn is consistent with the principles of normalization and parental expectations. Formal boundaries and the role of teachers is clear. The role played by special teachers belittles the skill and ability of ordinary teachers are cannot be accepted. Type of special assistance offered should take into account the context of the regular classroom and ensure that the necessary support and the need to respect the normal classes, teachers and pupils. Based on the data collected, one aspect that is noted in the implementation of inclusive education in schools are that the regular teachers do not have adequate training in preparation to teach special students in their classroom. Teachers and mothers in this study place a high value on the development of social skills and are willing to sacrifice the benefits that can be obtained from special education services and support such things as (1) a special curriculum, (2) service and support of specialists and (3) individual teaching as has been stated.

Conclusion

The survey showed perceptions of teachers on their role in the implementation of inclusive education and the views of parents on their children's placement in a regular class. This case study is not intended to present a model of inclusive education but is intended to show support arising out of inclusionary practices in Malaysia. Further research to study the implications of inclusive practices and the impact on professional relationships, perceptions of the role and confidence in the effectiveness of these practices at the school level is important to strengthen the policy initiatives that aim to reform education practices. The concept of inclusive education has come to mean many things: from the very specific for example , the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, to a very brood notion of social inclusion as used by governments and the international community as a way of responding to diversity among learners (Ains cow, 2007)

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