

Special Education Teachers' Understanding Of The Implementation Of Year One Transition Program For Special Needs Students With Learning Disabilities In Primary School

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Abstract: The implementation of the year one transition program helps special needs students with learning disabilities (LD) to transition from informal schooling in kindergarten to more formal education setting in primary schools. This study is aimed to identify the level of teacher knowledge and the relationship between special education teachers' gender, teaching experience and the implementation of the transition program. This study used Cognitive Development Theory pioneered by Jerome Brunner and the Aisberg Competency Model. This study is a quantitative study in the form of a descriptive review. The instruments used is a questionnaire adapted from Mohonan, Marino and Miller (2006) and validity was tested using Cronbach's Alpha (0.947). The study's sample comprises of 45 teachers who were selected using the simple sampling technique. The data were analyzed using software (SPSS) version 23 and the analysis used is mean comparison and descriptive analysis. The findings show that teachers' knowledge level is at a moderate level (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.806) while the correlation analysis results ($r = 0.168$, $p > 0.05$) showed no significant relationship between special education teachers' gender, teaching experience and the implementation of the year one transition program. Overall, the Year One Transition Program for special needs with LD can be effectively implemented by providing more training to special Education teachers on how to handle the Year One Transition Program. Furthermore, a Year One Transition Module for special needs with LD could be developed to help increase the Special Education teachers' level of knowledge and competency.

Keywords: Students with special learning needs, transition program, Special needs teachers, Teachers' knowledge level.

INTRODUCTION

The transition of special needs student education (SNE) from preschool to primary is an educational journey that all special needs must go through before entering high school. According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE 2018), all special needs entering primary school need to learn to adapt to the changes in physical development, daily life, experiences and relationships between parents, teachers, friends, and the community as part of their life transition. According to MOE (2002), The Year One Transition Program is a program specifically designed to help Year One students to cope with a wide range of changes from informal education at home or in kindergarten to the more formal primary education setting.

The implementation of an effective transition program can have a positive impact on special needs because it provides them with the educational exposure and academic programs that can provide them with an early impression of the school environment. (Sirrko, R et al. 2019). It is argued that transitions from kindergarten to more structured and formal schooling environment require adequate planning and organization so that the students can learn to control their attention, reaction and emotional behavior while in school (Magnuson, Duncan Lee & Metzger 2016). The transition program provides students with an early exposure

to the concept of school-based education and this can benefit the students and stimulate them to face life challenges and become self-reliance in addition to teach them ability to obey school rules to ensure that students are able to adapt to living in a community (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox 2000: I. M. Zambrana et al. 2019).

As such, a special education teacher should be competence and knowledgeable so that he/she can implement an effective Year One Transition Program for special needs in primary schools. The development of special needs is strongly influenced by the level of readiness, ability and skills of special education teachers in schools. (Nor Erma Abu & Leong Kwan Eu 2014). Teachers' competency is also integral in ensuring that the students can cope with the changes in the environment and the interaction patterns between the students in the classroom. (Burchinal, M2018). Therefore, this study was conducted to determine Special Education teachers' level of knowledge on the implementation of the transition program conducted among special needs students in their respective schools.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

This aims to examine the extend of special education teachers' knowledge on the implementation of the Year One Transition Program. The study objectives are as follow;

- i. To examine the extend of special education teachers' knowledge on the implementation of Year One Transition Program to special needs with learning disabilities (LD).
- ii. Identifying the relationship between special teachers' teaching experience, gender and the implementation of the Year One Transition Program for special needs with LD.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses the Cognitive Development Theory introduced by Jerume Brunner. This theory is very relevant to this study because it posits that an individual's natural desire to learn could drive him to enhance his knowledge acquire the skills he require in his life. According to Sutarto, H.P & Jaedun M.P.D (2018), this theory has positive implications for individuals that strive to enhance their learning as it explains that their inner motivations can give them a deep desire to master something.

Meanwhile, according to the Aisberg Model (Spencer & Spencer 1993), the entire component of competency is influenced by an individual's level of knowledge, especially when performing a given task. This fact is also supported by Saedah Siraj & Mohamed Sani Ibrahim (2012), who used the Aisberg model in their study. The study made a comparison between the competencies of overseas teachers and teachers in Malaysia. The study found that that teachers' level of knowledge mastery reflects the highest level of teachers' competency.

This study uses the survey research design where a survey questionnaire was used as the study's instrument. The questionnaire used was adapted from Mohonan, Marino and Miller (2006) and modified to probe information regarding special education teachers' level knowledge regarding the implementation of the year one transition program for Special needs with LD , and in turn, answer the research questions. All data were collected and consolidated before being analyzed using the Likert method according to respondents' responses.

A set of questionnaire was submitted to Prof Mohd Hanafi bin Mohd Yasin, a lecturer in the Faculty of Special Education, National University of Malaysia and Mr Mohd Asari bin Haji Omar, a special education teacher with more than 30 years experience to obtain expert advice to ensure that the items are appropriate with the purpose and aim of the study. The reliability of the instrument was determined by conducting a pilot study in the researcher's school in the Petaling Perdana area. The pilot study involved 10 special education teachers. The reliability value (α) of each tested aspect shows a high reliability of between 0.942 and 0.975 . Hence, the instrument has a high reliability of more than 0.05.

A total of 50 special education teachers from five primary schools in the Petaling Perdana district in Selangor were selected as the study population. The sample of this study comprises of permanent and qualified special education teacher who are teaching special needs with LD. The number of sample was determined according to the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table and the minimum sample size of 44 people was obtained. However, according to Othman Talib (2016), a minimum sample size of 45 is required to avoid any problem in analyzing the data.

Section A: Demographic Information of Respondents: In this section, respondents are required to provide personal information such as gender, age, education level, teaching experience and information about transition program courses. Section: - A 5 point Likert Scale was used for the items in this section. The respondents were asked to express their agreement for the statement in each item by choosing a number based on the descriptions of the scale given. By using a questionnaire, the researcher was able to encode and analyze the data. The responses were collected through *google* form and links were provided to sample through the

whatsapp application. The results obtained were analyzed descriptively and the mean comparison was conducted via the SPSS Version 23 software.

FINDING

Respondents' demography distribution

The study focused on Special Education teachers' who are involved in the Year One Transition Program for special needs with LD. A total of 45 respondents were involved in this study. Five demographic aspects, including gender, age, highest academic qualification experience in teaching the integrated special education Program and training received regarding the year one transition program. The data were obtained based on the number of percentage of the respondents. The demographic distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Demographic Distribution Of The Respondents.

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	19	42.2
Female	26	57.8
Age group		
20 - 30 years	3	6.7
30 – 40 years	37	82.2
40 - 50 years	5	11.1
Highest academic qualification		
Bachelors' degree	38	84.4
Masters	7	15.6
Years of teaching		
1 - 5 years	1	2.2
6 - 10 years	27	60.0
11 - 15 years	13	28.9
16 years and more	4	8.9
Attended course of year one transition program		
Yes	6	13.3
No	39	86.7

Teacher's Level Of Knowledge In Implenting The Year One Transition Program To Special Needs With LD.

The findings obtained in this session will be used to fulfill the first study objective which is to examine special education's teachers level knowlegde in implenting the Year One Transition Program for special needs with LD. To give a clearer picture, the result of the descriptive analysis are shown in Table 2 below;

NO	ITEM (KNOWLEDGE)	Mean	SD	Int
31	I know about the transition program for special needs with learning disabilities. (LD)	3.42	.621	Moderate
32	I know the purpose for conducting the transition program for special needs with LD.	3.36	.743	Moderate
33	I know how to the imeplement the transition program for special needs with LD.	3.29	.757	Moderate
34	I understand the importance of the Year One transition program for special needs with LD.	3.51	.695	Moderate

NO	ITEM (KNOWLEDGE)	Mean	SD	Int
35	I can implement transition program for special needs with LD.	3.38	.777	Moderate
36	I am always involved in implementing transition program for MBK with learning difficulties	3.18	.806	Moderate
37	I apply different teaching approaches when implementing transition program for special needs with LD.	3.33	.640	Moderate
38	I can detect learning problems while implementing transition program for special needs with LD	3.31	.701	Moderate
39	I always improve the implementation of the transition program.	3.36	.743	Moderate
Grand Total		3.	.984	Moderate

Table 2: The Item (Knowlegde) In The Questionnaire In Section A

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage scores for each item pertaining teachers' knowledge in implementing the year one transition program for the special needs with LD.

This variable was measured using 9 items. The results showed that all nine items have moderate scores. The results also showed that the items with the highest scores are '*I understand the importance of the year 1 transition program for special needs with LD* (mean = 3.51, SD = 0.695), followed by '*I know about the transition program for special needs with LD* (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.621), '*I can implement transition program for special needs with LD* (mean = 3.38, SD = 0.777), '*I know the purpose for conducting the transition program for special needs with LD* (mean = 3.36, SD = 0.743), '*I always improve the implementation of the transition program* (mean = 3.36, SD = 0.743), '*I apply different teaching approaches when implementing transition program for special needs with LD* (mean = 3.33, SD = 0.640), '*I can detect learning problems while implementing transition program for Special needs with LD* (mean = 3.31, SD = 0.701), '*I know how to the impelement the transition program forSpecial needs with LD* (mean = 3.29, SD = 0.757) and lastly, '*I am always involved in implementing transition program for Special needs with LD* (mean = 3.18, SD = 0.806).

Based on this result, it could be summarized that item B4 which is "*I understand the importance of the year 1 transition program for Special needs with LD*" recorded the highest mean 3.51 and the standard deviation of 0.695. Meanwhile item B6, "*I am always involved in implementing transition program for Special needs with LD*" recorded the lowest mean yang with 3.18 and standard deviation of 0.806. In all, the level of teachers' knowledge in the implementation of the year one transition program is at a medium level (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.806) .

The Relationship Between Special Education Teachers' Teaching Experience, Gender And The Implementation Of The Year One Transition Program For Special Needs With LD.

The result in this section will the fulfill second objective of the study which is to identify the relationship between special education teachers' teaching experience, gender and the implementation of the year one transition program for Special needs with LD. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 2: -

Table 3 : The correlation between special education Teachers' Teaching Experience, Gender and the Implementation of the Year One Transition Program for special needs with LD

	Gender	
	r	Sig. P
Teaching experience	-.164	.270

The result in Table 3 above shows the direct effects. This presents a significant finding that special education teachers' teaching experience and gender ($r = 0.164$, $p > 0.05$) do not have any significant link to the implementation of the year one transition program for Special needs with LD.

DISCUSSION

The research conducted shows that the level of special education teachers' knowledge on the implementation of the transition program is at a moderate level (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.806). In this light, the knowledge of facts reflects the knowledge of events that have occurred or the circumstances in which they exist (Richmond & Morgan 1977).

This study proves that most special education teachers have a minimum or intermediate level of knowledge on the implementing the transition program of Special needs with LD in year 1. Thus, specific guidance are needed make these teachers more competent to implement the program more effectively. According to Anuar Ahmad & Nelson Jingga (2015), teachers' competence is reflected through the skills of teaching and includes the use of high-level thinking skills that bring value to their teaching, knowledge, and skills.

Muhammad Hafizan Suhairi & Anuar Ahamad (2017) also stated that high knowledge is an important competence for a teacher. Possessing a high level knowledge allows a teacher to translate the knowledge into classroom practices. Stronge et al (2017) mentioned that a high quality teacher possess the maximum level of knowledge that should be mastered when dealing with his or her students.

According to Low Suet Fin et al (2014) teachers need to have a high level of knowledge because holistic knowledge can create a fun classroom environment and foster a caring culture. This indicates that a special education teacher must possess high level of knowledge in the field of special education to carry out facilitate the learning activities in the special education program. This finding is supported by Ntombela (2009) which showed that the success and effectiveness of special education teachers depend on the knowledge they acquire in teacher training. The study by Medina Mohd Yusof & Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yasin (2016) also stated that the teachers' level of knowledge is important to master specific field of Special Education. Furthermore, specific skills are required to ensure the program can be implemented more effectively.

The result of the correlation analysis on their relationship between teachers' teaching experience, gender and in the implementation of the transition program is insignificant ($r = 0.164$, $p > 0.05$). This finding shows that the gender of the special education teacher does not influence the implementation of the year one transition program. This is supported by Norhasliza Abdullah & Hazalizah Hamzah (2016) who found no significant relationship between teachers' gender in the the success and effectiveness of learning in the classroom.

Therefore, the findings of the study show that there is no difference in the implementation of the transition program by teachers with different genders. In this light, the gender of the special education teachers does not influenced the effectiveness of the transition program, and the main focus should be on the level of knowledge needed for a teacher to implement the program. Anie Eyer (2015) in her study also found that gender of teachers is not related to the management of special needs students. special education teachers, regardless of their gender, have their own way of managing the diversity of special needs students which also include gender differences. special education Teachers need to efficient and knowledgeable in dealing with MBKs in the classroom so that they can control the classroom environment more effectively. This statement proves that the gender of a teacher does not influence the implementation of the special education program.

Overall, based on the discussions and various findings that support the study's argument, the researchers would like to suggest that the planning and implementation of the year one year one transition program for the MBK with learning difficulties is essential. Hence, developing a specific module for MBK programs could help teachers to conduct a more effective program and create an alignment between special education programs across all states in Malaysia. The provision of an integrated model could increase special education teachers' will efficiency and competency to implement the transition program more efficiently and systematically.

The module can provide guidance and reference to special education teachers. This can be further enhanced by the provision of training workshops related to the management of transition programs. Teachers will become gain more skills to increase their efficiency in managing transition programs. The intensive training provided could be extended to all special education teachers to allow them to manage issues that may arise when managing special needs with LD. Extensive exposure to the right knowledge could help teachers implement effective transition program.

Courses such as 'In House Training' provide a platform for teachers to share their knowledge of transition programs as well as the create an opportunity for scholarly discussions between teachers and teacher

trainers. special education teachers can also expand their knowledge of transition programs through scientific readings, specifically on the management of transition programs abroad. Teachers can see the effectiveness of the transition programs abroad and make comparisons to find strategies that can be used to manage special needs with LD.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, to increase the competencies of special education teachers there is a need for more courses and training on the implementation of the year one transition program for special needs with LD. Proper guidance can ensure that the transition program achieves optimum effectiveness not only for the students, but also for the parents and the surrounding community. (Jenny Wilder & Anne Lillvist 2018).

There is a high need to implement transition program for special needs with LD in Year One as the primary school is their first step in preparing for self-awareness and learn to cooperate and socialise with other special needs as well as typical students. special education Teachers should be prepared to increase their knowledge in the field of Special Education, which is essential when dealing with special needs (Monishah Md Shah & Mohd Mokhtar Tahar 2016).

The information provided throughout the transition program can serve as a key medium for parents to understand their children's needs. Therefore, the MOE should provide more specialized workshops to enhance the knowledge of special education teachers in this aspect. It is hoped of modules and manuals can be developed to guide special education teachers to implement year one transition programs for special needs with LD. Furthermore, having a national module or guideline can help align the programs all across the nation. Robust planning can provide a constructive view to the surrounding community that special needs with LD also have a focused educational path to help them become more independent in the future.

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