

The Importance of Inclusive Education Course for Preparing Pre-Service Teacher to Teach Students with Special Needs in School

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of the Inclusive Education (KPK 3012) course for preparing pre-service teachers at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) to teach students with special education needs in schools. The four objectives of the study are based on the outcome of the course learning which is to identify the importance of teaching aspects of the characteristics of special needs students, inclusive education policies, attitudes concerned and teaching techniques. This case study was conducted at UPSI involving 30 pre-service teachers. The data collection period is for four months. Data collection methods used are observation, interviews and document analysis. The observation was conducted five times during KPK 3012 course lectures. Two sets of interview questions were set up and used in four interview sessions. The findings show that this course can provide respondents with knowledge about the characteristics of special needs students, inclusive education policies, attitudes concerned and teaching techniques. Research implications indicate that an inclusive education course can provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills required by teaching students with special educational needs. Inclusive education courses should be offered at all institutions with educational programs to enable potential teachers to teach special needs students in the future.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Pre-Service Teacher, Special Needs

Introduction

Teaching special needs is a challenging task for first-line teachers. The mainstream teacher should have sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to teach special needs students in an inclusive class. In order for the mainstream teachers to teach students with special needs, they need to have an early readiness before being instructed to teach at school. The willingness of teachers to teach special needs can be trained through inclusive-related training or courses. An inclusive education course can provide guidance and examples of how teachers can improve their practice and must be in line with the practice of teachers to effectively teach student with special needs (Boyle, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2013; Florian

dan Linklater (2010). This is because teachers' education courses focusing on inclusive issues have transformed self-perception and efficacy as well as providing basic knowledge to students towards inclusive education (Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky, 2014; Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013).

Teaching an inclusive education course is important to help pre-service teachers be prepared for teaching special needs in school. In Malaysia, the government makes Inclusive Education as one of the nation's development agenda (PPPM, 2013). This indicates that all schools that provide the Integrated Education Program (IEP) must implement Inclusive Education (IE) to the pupils at the school. In preparation for teaching IP programs, teachers and potential teachers should have the willingness to teach special needs students in school. Preparation of MBK's pre-service teacher in an inclusive program needs to be done before they graduate. It is important to provide teachers with the knowledge, skills and understanding of inclusive so they can play an effective role in school (Sharma, Simi & Forlin, 2015).

Literature Review

Inclusive education is an educational program provided to children with special needs along with the mainstream students. They are integrated into a class or classroom in the same setting and learn the same curriculum. Inclusive according to Lewis and Doorlag (2011) is a place where students with special needs learning alongside mainstream students in the same setting. Caldwell (2010) finds that the benefits of full inclusive programs are that students can improve development in social and academic aspects. When in the same setting, student with special needs has the opportunity to create effective communication and interaction with peers.

A study conducted by Shahazadi (2000) on the perspective of inclusive education found that teachers, administrators, professionals and parents had knowledge of the concept of inclusive education but were uncertain about how it would be implemented effectively. This is the cause of inclusive education less successful. By having adequate training, the attitude of teachers teaching inclusive programs is more efficient. But what happens is that most teachers who teach students with special needs do not have systematic specific training. This is evidenced in the study by Boyle et. al, (2013) found that 68% of teachers did not have the qualifications in Special Education. This study suggests that inclusive education policies should be consistent with the practice of teachers to effectively teach. Proposals are also made on the importance of effective inclusive education at the teacher training level. Based on the various issues that occur in inclusive education, efforts are needed to address the problems affecting the implementation of inclusive education. According to Armstrong, et al. (2010) curriculum adjustment needs to be made for students with special needs to be absorbed in an inclusive program.

To prove the importance of this inclusive education course, studies have been conducted by Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky (2014) on the existing teacher education courses and their impact on the attitude of teachers in inclusive education. The key focus is on inclusive issues in existing inclusive programs to explore the trust of prospective teachers and existing assumptions on inclusive programs. Florian and Linklater (2010) studies emphasize the importance of developing a course that can provide guidance and examples of how teachers can enhance more inclusive practices. Rational theory for course development is outlined and examples of how teachers may be involved in more inclusive practice. Inclusive strategies taught to pre-service teachers are insufficient to enhance positive attitudes,

effectiveness of teaching, or reduce anxiety without associating it with a broader context of inclusive education (Sharma, Simi and Forlin, 2015). The findings of Killoran et al., (2014) show that inclusive education courses have successfully changed the perception of pre-service teachers on inclusive programs and provide a solid foundation of knowledge to be practiced in future teaching.

Preparation of pre-service teacher training in an inclusive class needs to be done carefully. The study by Sharma, Simi and Forlin (2015) uses four indicators to identify the readiness of pre-service teachers through the consideration of four attitudes, efficacy, concerns and interests of pre-service teachers teaching an inclusive class. An effective way to improve the attitude of pre-service teachers to the inclusive is to ensure they are given opportunities along with special needs students (Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Forlin, 2003; Forlin & Chambers, 2011), learning about inclusive education policies and policies (Armstrong et al., 2010) and received support for inclusive education at school (Loreman et al., 2013). The knowledge and skills acquired in the course help prepare pre-service teacher readiness in an inclusive program.

Pre-service teachers pursuing inclusive education courses have succeeded in forming a more positive attitude toward special needs students in an inclusive class. The attentive attitude of successful pre-service teachers is to gain knowledge about how to collaborate with special education teachers, communication skills with students, know about support services and so on. Even research by Sharma and Nuttal (2016) proved through courses taken, attitudes and efficacy of pre-service teachers increased while their concerns decreased significantly and the level of concern for pre-service teachers who did not know the disabled had decreased.

Experience interacting with people with disabilities and collaborative practices based on mutual trust and commitment to teamwork should be thoroughly studied by pre-service teachers, providing effective teachers in inclusive programs requires system workshops and support for teachers (Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin 2013; Philpot, Furey & Penney, 2010; Walton et al., 2014). Pre-service teachers should also know about the services of various government agencies, medical and therapeutic services, social support services, and private agency services and non-governmental organizations.

Methodology

The design of this study is based on a case study. This study examines specifically on the teaching of Inclusive Education (KPK 3012) course to UPSI pre-service teacher (PST) as a preparation to teach students with special needs (SSN) in an inclusive program. This study uses purposive sample. The sample of the study is 30 pre-service teachers (UPSI students Semester 1 to Semester 8) who take KPK 3012 courses and 2 lecturers who teach KPK 3012 courses at UPSI. Participants of regular lecturers and pre-service teachers are not from the Special Education field.

For data collection, this case study uses interviews, observations and document analysis. An interview session was conducted to obtain qualitative data. Interviews were conducted individually with Respondents Lecturers (ResL), and focus groups with pre-service teacher respondents (ResPST). Observation is carried out during teaching and learning activities. Observation was conducted five times. Instruments used in collecting data are checklists, field notes, and video recordings. Four checklists are used as a data collection tool that is a Special Needs Student Characteristics Checklist (SNSC), Inclusive Education Policy Checklist (IEP), Teaching Method Checklist (TM), and Checklist on Attitude (AC). Documents

referenced are Course Framework (CF), Teaching Design (ID), lecture notes, and assignments. This case study was analyzed and reported descriptively and supported by reference statistics.

Results

The findings refer to the importance of the Inclusive Education Course (IEC) offered to UPSI's pre-service teachers in four main areas: (i) characteristics of students with special needs, (ii) teaching techniques, attitudes concerned towards special needs students, and (iv) inclusive education policies.

The characteristics of students with special needs in IEC

The importance of this course is based on the content of the Course Framework (CF) for learning outcomes describing the characteristics of special needs students. The findings of the observation score are based on the checklist marked by the survey participants during the observation session. Table 1 shows the findings of PST's knowledge on the characteristics of students with special needs.

Table 1.

Characteristics of students with special needs

No	Code	Student with special needs characteristic	Score		
			Yes	Unsure	No
1	DLI	Definition of low incidence	20	7	3
2	TLI	Type of low incidence	20	7	3
3	VI	Visual impairment	27	3	0
4	HI	Hearing impairment	28	2	0
5	POH	Physical and other health problem	30	0	0
6	DHI	Definitions of high incidence	20	5	5
7	THI	Type of high incidence	20	6	4
8	ASD	ASD / Autisme	20	8	2
9	DS	Down Syndrome	30	0	0
10	DYS	Dyslexia	22	6	2
11	ADHD	ADHD	21	7	2
12	GNT	Gifted and talented	24	5	1
13	MDD	Multiple disability definition	22	5	3
14	DB	Deaf-blind	25	3	2
		Total	329	64	27
		Percentage %	78.33	14.24	6.43

Table 1 shows that 78.33% of participants support the Inclusive Education (IEC) course to help them understand the characteristic of student with special needs. 15.24% of participants are unsure while 6.43% agreed that the course was not important to them. From the 14 subtopics studied, result showed the highest score were for other physical and health problems (POH) and down syndrome (DS). While the lowest score is knowledge of the definition of low incidence (DHI), type of low incidence (TLI), definitions of high incidence (DHI), type of high incidence (THI), and ASD / Autism.

Teaching techniques in IEC

The findings show that IEC are crucial in helping pre-service teachers (GPP) learn about teaching techniques for special education students in inclusive education programs at schools. Table 2 shows the findings of interest in teaching techniques.

Table 2.

Teaching techniques in IEC

No	Code	Teaching techniques	Score		
			Yes	Unsure	No
1	TnL	Teaching and learning	30	0	0
2	AESA	Assessment and evaluation of student achievement	25	4	1
3	CMH	Communication methods of hearing impairment students	18	7	5
4	SHI	Use of Software in the Teaching and Learning Process of Hearing Impaired Students	25	5	0
5	Br	Braille	10	10	10
6	OA	Optical and Non-Optical assistance tool for restricted visionary students	15	7	8
7	ICT	ICT for visual impairment students	23	5	2
8	AEM	Assessment and evaluation model	26	3	3
9	IEP	Individual Education Plan	27	3	0
		Total	199	44	29
		Percentage %	73.16	16.18	10.66

Table 2 shows the importance of teaching IEC on the aspects of teaching techniques. The findings show that 73.16% participants agreed that the IEC help them be prepared in teaching student with special needs. 16.18% of participants said they were unsure and 10.66% of participants said the course did not give importance to them. 100% of participants agree that IEC are important for them to learn about teaching and learning (TnL) techniques in an inclusive class. Teaching Braille subtitles were found to have the lowest score in which only 10 participants agreed the IEC helped them prepare to teach student with visually impaired.

Attitudes concerned in IEC

The preparation to teach student with special needs is also seen in the context of teaching aspects of attitudes of concern. Pre-service teachers needs to gain knowledge, experience and skills in student with special needs in the classroom. Attitudes are concerned with the need to be nurtured and this course can help the preparation of pre-service teachers to teach student with special needs with appropriate attitudes. Table 3 shows the importance of teaching aspects of attitudes in the IEC.

Table 3.

Attitudes concerned in IEC

No	Code	Attitudes concern	Score		
			Yes	Unsure	No
1	SCS	Social and communication skills	28	2	0
2	CSE	Collaboration with special education teachers	27	6	1
3	VIP	Vision and Implication Problems in Education	25	3	2
4	SS	Support Services	27	1	2
5	GAS	Government Agency Services	26	3	1
6	MTS	Medical and Therapeutic Services	23	1	2
7	SSS	Social Support Services	22	6	2
8	NGO	Private Agency Services and Non Governmental Organizations	21	5	4
		Total	195	29	16
		Percentage %	81.25	12.08	6.67

Table 3 shows the findings of the attitude concern in teaching in an inclusive class. Overall, 81.25% of participants acknowledged the importance of this course towards their preparation to teach student with special needs. 12.08% of participants were unsure whether this course is important to them while 6.67% of participants agreed that IEC is not important to them. The highest score is the importance of social and communication skills (SCS). While 21 participants said the course had an interest in the aspect of the services of private agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGO) and obtained the lowest score in this study. Collaboration with special education teachers (CSE) and support services (SS) are two subtopics of interest to learn.

Inclusive education policies in IEC

The importance of teaching policies of inclusive education is also given attention in this study. There are nine sub-topics that have the interest to be taught to PST as a preparation to teach in an inclusive program. Table 4 shows the importance of this course in the inclusion of inclusive education policy.

Table 4.

Inclusive education policy in IES

No	Code	Inclusive education policies	Score		
			Yes	Unsure	No
1	CIE	Concept and definition of Inclusive Education	27	3	0
2	NIE	Needs to Inclusive Education	25	5	0
3	IEM	Inclusive education model in typical education	27	3	0
4	TIE	Types of Inclusive Education	27	3	0
5	FIE	Fully Inclusive Education	30	0	0
6	SIE	Partially Inclusive Education	30	0	0
7	IEM	Inclusive Education Management at Schools	22	6	2
8	IES	Inclusive education settings	25	4	1
9	WNP	Welfare and needs of inclusive pupils	26	2	2
		Total	249	26	5
		Percentage %	88.92	9.29	1.79

Table 4 shows the importance of teaching education policies. Overall, 88.93% of participants agreed that the course was important for them to master the knowledge on inclusive education policies. 9.29% of participants are not sure whether this course is important to them while 1.79% of participants think this course does not importance to them. The findings show that aspects of fully inclusive education (FIE) and partially inclusive education (PIE) achieve the highest score while the inclusive education management at school (IEM) achieves the lowest score. From the course, respondents understand better in inclusive education policies in Malaysia as a preparation to teach student with special needs in school.

Discussion

The importance of the Inclusive Education course in this study found that the four importance of learning this course is about the characteristics of special needs students, special needs teaching techniques, attitudes toward special needs students, and inclusive education policies. Although teachers have no qualification in Special Education, they can learn about Special Education based on the module so they can teach more effectively in inclusive classes (Boyle et al, 2013; In Gennaro et al., 2014). The inclusive education policy should be consistent with the practice of teachers in order to teach effectively. The importance of implementing inclusive education effectively should be made at the level of teacher training by developing courses that can provide guidance and examples of how teachers can enhance more inclusive practices and inculcate inclusive attitudes (Boyle et al, 2013; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Philpot , Furey & Penney, 2010). Walton, Nel, Muller and Lebeloane (2014) also emphasize the need for professional learning to be nurtured in professional life and teacher work to achieve meaningful teaching goals (Philpot, Furey and Penney (2010).

Knowledge of students' special needs is one of the important aspects in cultivating the willingness of teachers to teach in an inclusive class. Professional development should provide teachers with the skills to identify and define special needs problems, recognize their students and understand the importance of learning the culture of students, and knowledge about

disability needs (Florian, 2012; Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Philpot, Furey & Penney, 2010). In order to improve the pre-service teacher's attitude towards inclusive, they should be given the opportunity together with special needs students (Chambers & Lavery, 2012) so that they can understand and understand the characteristics of the students in depth.

This study proves that the teaching of the topic of inclusive education is crucial for preparing pre-service teacher teaching special needs. The course provides a solid foundation of inclusive knowledge to be practiced in future teaching. In the case of inclusive education policy, pre-service teachers study various aspects of inclusive education, the concept and definition of inclusive education, the need for inclusive education, the inclusive education model in special education, the types of inclusive education, the full-time inclusive education, the part-time inclusive education, inclusive education management in schools, an inclusive classroom layout (setting), and the welfare and needs of inclusive students. Teacher education courses focusing on inclusive issues have transformed perceptions and self-efficacy also provided basic knowledge to students towards inclusive education (Killoran, Woronko, & Zaretsky, 2014, Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013). Teacher preparation programs provided by teacher training institutions should provide a full range of knowledge on inclusive education laws and policies (Philpot, Furey & Penney, 2010). experience interacting with people with disabilities, the level of confidence in teaching disabled, and previous teaching and training experiences with disabilities (Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013).

The importance of KPK 3012 courses is also seen in the teaching of teaching techniques. Through this course pre-service teachers study various topics related to teaching techniques for students with special needs. Pre-service teachers introduced a variety of teaching media for special needs students such as optical and non-optical devices, Braille, various software, and ICT for students with special needs. As a prospective teacher who will teach students with special needs, it is important that pre-service teachers are prepared with knowledge regarding teaching techniques. Education officials and decision-makers should think whether teachers need to know how to improve teaching and learning, or innovate in teaching and should be exposed to various teaching strategies, including developing a record of assessment and using cognitive strategies to improve learning (Florian, 2012; Lancaster & Bain, 2010; Philpot, Furey & Penney, 2010). Group-based teaching strategies such as cooperative learning and peer-tutoring, support or multidisciplinary groups to facilitate student learning (Garrote, Sermier, & Moser, 2017). Such activities will encourage critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, communication skills, and collaborative learning skills of students with special needs with other students. Teacher education courses should align teaching methods equally with inclusive values and support the way teachers deal with complex features in the context of the 21st century education (Di Gennaro et al., 2014). So this study is very much in keeping with the purpose of providing a pre-service teacher with special needs teaching with the right teaching techniques in an inclusive class.

Conclusion

The teaching of inclusive education courses is crucial in preparing pre-service teachers to teach inclusive classes. Knowledge and skills on the characteristics of students with special needs, inclusive education policies, teaching techniques, and attitudes should be given priority in providing pre-service teachers with special needs. It is recommended that this inclusive education course be offered to pre-service teachers at universities offering educational programs so that they are also willing to teach inclusive programs.

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