

The Level of Knowledge and Skills of Special Education Teachers in Teaching with the use of Learning Through Play Method

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Abstract: Children construct knowledge through a meaningful play. Playing is a norm for each child; hence they are more inclined to learn through play. Children's playing activities have to be significantly planned by teachers to obtain a quality product. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify the level of knowledge and skills in teaching with the use of learning through play method. The research samples consisted of 44 teachers from 9 schools with the Integrated Special Education Programme in the district of Kinta Selatan, Perak, Malaysia. This quantitative research used survey through a questionnaire that was adapted from Norhaya Isa. The questionnaire had 3 sections which were teachers' demography, the level of knowledge in teaching using the learning through play method, and the level of skills in teaching using the learning through play method. The research findings were analysed descriptively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22.0. A pilot study was conducted and the coefficient value Alpha Cronbach was high which was 0.937. A descriptive analysis of the mean scores showed that the teachers' levels of knowledge and skills were high. In conclusion, the research findings showed that teachers' level of knowledge and skills in implementing teaching and learning through the learning through play method is vital in producing successful special needs pupils. Therefore, teachers need to improve their knowledge as well as to vary their skills in using the various methods of teaching and learning.

Keywords: knowledge, skill, learn through play, special education

INTRODUCTION

Playing is a norm for each child in this world. They are more prone to learn through play. Children's playing activities have to be significantly planned by teachers to obtain a quality product. A teacher who knows to choose a teaching method that is suitable with the students' ability would help to make the teaching process run smoothly (Bakar, 2011). One of the ways to ensure students' success is that teachers need to be wise in using various learning aids, and arrange the activities based on the existing teaching and learning methods.

The use of the learning through play method in teaching and learning would aid in improving students' understanding through a fun teaching method. Teachers determine if the implementation of the curriculum in the education system is successful. Past researches stated that the failure was caused by the teachers who were deficient in the aspects of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the process of teaching and learning. Thus, the significance of this research is to be used by the responsible parties like the Ministry of Education, the State Education Department and the District Education Department to find out the current information about the Special Education teachers in going through the education transformational current through the learning through play method. Apart from that, internal courses

on the usage of the learning through play method could be planned and conducted by the schools for all teachers to share

The learning through play method has been proven effective towards the cognitive, language, physical, emotional and social developments of the pupils. According to Jalongo and Isenberg (2003), the learning through play method is effective in the teaching process when the teachers communicate well. This is also proven by Ali and Zamri (2014) who opined that playing is the best method to aid pupils to master a language concept. The teaching and learning process will be more effective when the learning through play is applied to the special needs pupils. Findings by Norbaya and Annamalai (2012) also supported the same argument. The learning through play method has brought positive impacts from the aspects of motivation, comprehension, performance and cooperation among pupils. Thus, it is recommended that the learning through play method is vastly utilised in the teaching and learning process. This method makes students to be comfortable to learn, and is very suitable for the special needs pupils who need more attention from teachers.

Teachers are the implementing agents in every shift in the curriculum. Hence, they need to know the effective teaching methods, so that they can disseminate knowledge better. The number of

researches on teachers' knowledge and skills towards the use of learning through play method are minimal especially related to the special education teachers. Thus, this research is conducted and it seems to be a need in the Special Education field. This study has two main goals. The first one is to identify teachers' level of knowledge in implementing the learning through play method in their teaching process, and the second one is to find out the level of skills in implementing the learning through play method in their teaching process. All these aspects are seen as the effectiveness factors of the learning through play method.

Stated that a play can instigate a happy feeling for pupils, hence encourage positive interactions. The exploration made by children when they are playing could be seen through their social interactions with the environment in the context of understanding the ways the children learn. Children always socially interact with their environments, and are very active individuals whereby they always involve all their body parts in their movements. Apart from that, Piaget also came up with a theory based on his research about how children understand their surroundings. The findings of his research showed that through social interaction, children would go through the adoption, adaption and accommodation processes (Saracho, 2012). While playing, children would go all these processes, and would comprehend new things by using prior knowledge. Play activities that are stressed in the concept of education encompass activities that can naturally generate experience, learning and skills. This is significant, for the memory of learning and experiencing through play would then be connected to the prior knowledge to construct new knowledge. This situation fits with (Saracho, 2012) whereby the assimilation process adapts new knowledge to the prior knowledge and skills. Thus, children could also relate the cause and effects of a particular matter.

Activities that are well planned and student-centred that can provide learners' autonomy are one of the concepts of learning through play (Noriati et al., 2012). Playing activities exist by the student's choice and without force. Therefore, they will learn to be responsible of their own choices. Nevertheless, planning and teacher's initiatives are essential in framing the agenda to improve the effectiveness of the activities of learning through play, so that it would leave a meaningful impact towards children. Preparing a safe and secured environment would also give a comfortable and fun effect while children play with their friends, as well as would encourage them to stay active in the play conducted. According to Fatimah et al. (2008), play activities could stimulate students' developments in terms of physical, cognitive, social and emotional. This is supported by Puteh and Ali (2016) who concluded that the teaching and learning process would be more effective if teachers use the play approach, because through this approach, children

would learn and understand things in a fun and meaningful context. Furthermore, the effectiveness of teaching and learning depends on the implementation by teachers who really understand their roles and responsibilities (Saleha and Surayah, 2010).

The findings from a study conducted by Ainalita (2011) found that the level of teachers' knowledge and skills in conducting the learning through play activities are at a positive level, but in terms of the adequacy and suitability of resources as well as the involvement of the school administration are at a moderate level. This shows that teachers are capable to conduct play activities, but the insufficiency of resources and tools to conduct play activities affect the effectiveness of the activities apart from caused by the lack of involvement of the school administration in providing support and awareness on the importance of play activities to parents. This matter would eventually make teachers to conduct a more conventional and academic learning activities. Based on these findings, the researcher could assume that teachers' knowledge is vital in encouraging the effectiveness of play activities implementation. Therefore, pedagogical knowledge of a teacher is very imperative if we want to use the learning through play method. According to Jasmi et al. (2011), teachers need to equip themselves by mastering the advantages of using any particular teaching method. They need to know about the definition, theories, characteristics and other things in the learning through play method.

Aminah (2003) stated that teacher could choose and use various techniques and strategies that are suitable with the topic of the lesson, types of learning and learning objectives to be achieved if they want to master this pedagogical knowledge. The effect is that teacher could provide meaningful and useful information to pupils (Ali, Najeemah and Yusof, 2012). According to Faridah (2001), there are many teachers who face problems in a few important aspects related to teaching and learning process such as the teaching methods, learning activities, teaching aids and content evaluation. The problem occurs due to insufficient teachers' knowledge in using a certain teaching method in their teaching. Based on the discussions in past studies, it could be seen that researches on the implementation of learning through play activities were more focusing on managing the play activities that were conducted, but not specifically towards the process of how the learning through play activities are conducted in terms of the lesson preparation, set induction, development as well as closure stages. Other than that, the researches were also mainly focussing on the constraints of conducting learning through play activities. Stated that the teaching and learning process would face problems when teachers have no knowledge in using teaching methods, and at once would affect students' academic performance, create an uncontrolled classroom environment, and would cause students to lose their focus in learning. In

this context, the researcher assumes that this study is necessary to find out teachers' readiness in the aspect of their knowledge and skills in conducting the learning through play activities.

METHOD

This study was a survey using quantitative methods. Research samples consisted of 44 teachers of the Integrated Special Education Programme from nine primary schools in Kinta Selatan, Perak, Malaysia. Samples selection was made through a table. The instrument that was adapted from the questionnaire by (Saracho, 2012). The questionnaire consisted of three sections namely Section A: Respondents' Demography, Section B: Teachers' Knowledge in Teaching Using the Learning through Play Method, and Section C: Teachers' Skills in Teaching Using the Learning through Play Method. Section A had six items that asked about respondents' demographical information, whereas Section B and C had 10 items respectively. The choices of responses used 5-point Likert's scale in Section B and C. A pilot study was also conducted prior to this research to ensure that each item in the questionnaire constructed had validity and reliability. The Alpha Cronbach reliability coefficient value was high which was 0.937. The gathered data was analysed using the SPSS Version 22.0. The descriptive statistical analysis in this research involves the analysis of the frequency, mean and percentage scores.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1 shows the mean scores of teachers' perceptions towards their knowledge in conducting lessons using the learning through play method. From Table 1, we can see that the highest mean score for teachers' knowledge is on the item "The concept of the Learning through Play Method is fun and meaningful education." with a mean score of 4.59 and standard deviation of 0.497 is at a high level. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score is on the item "Collaborative learning (cooperation among the groups)." with a mean score of 3.50 and standard deviation of 1.455. In general, the items of teachers' knowledge in teaching using the learning through play method is at a high level with the total mean score of 4.098 and standard deviation of 0.829.

Table 2 shows the mean scores of teachers' skills in conducting lessons using the learning through play method. Based on Table 2, the highest mean score on teachers' skills is on the item "Prepare lesson plans according to level of pupils and suitability." with a mean score of 4.48 and standard deviation of 0.505.

The lowest score is on the item "Ensure the teaching and learning process is conducted based on the planned lesson plan." with a mean score of 3.41 and standard deviation of 1.403 at a moderate level of skills. Based on the findings, teachers' skills in teaching using the learning through play method is at a high level with a total mean score of 4.06 and standard deviation of 0.806.

Discussion

Level of Teachers' Knowledge in Conducting Lessons Using the Learning through Play Method

This study shows that the level of knowledge of the special education teachers in conducting lessons using the learning through play method is at a high level. The total mean score is 4.09. Thus, research findings show that the level of teachers' knowledge in teaching using the learning through play method is high. These findings give the assumption that the special education teachers have gained a lot of good information regarding the learning through play method encompassing various aspects. Research findings of Schön et al, (2008) found that the inculcation of the fun approach in teaching and learning does help a lot, and has advantages in enhancing pupils understanding towards the lesson taught. Apart from that, Nor Azlinah (2010); Mohd Izuddin (2011; Maimon (2011); Siti Faizzatul et al. (2011) stated that the learning through play method has positive impacts towards students. Thus, teachers' in-depth knowledge about this method would be a fundamental foundation to aid teachers to be more prepared to effectively implement this method in lessons. Other than that, the concept of learning through play stresses on how teachers should use a method that is more student-centred in the teaching and learning process. Research findings show that the teachers' knowledge on the concept of the learning through play method is fun and meaningful education is at a high level. Therefore this statement is in line with opinions by Ahmad Subki and Syed Ismail (2013) and Sharifah and Aliza (2013) who stated that play activities are something that should provide fun to children.

Level of Teachers' Skills in Conducting Lessons Using the Learning through Play Method

This study shows that the level of special education teachers' skills in teaching using the learning through play method is high with a mean score of 4.06 and standard deviation of 0.806. Research findings show that teachers need to prepare lesson plans according to the level and suitability of pupils.

Table 1. Teachers' Level of Knowledge in Teaching Using the Learning through Play Method

No	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Knowledge
1	The definition of the Learning through Play Method.	4.07	0.501	high
2	The goals of the Learning through Play Method to encourage life-long learning.	4.14	0.632	high
3	The Learning through Play Method enables special needs pupils to gain basic knowledge in learning.	3.59	1.455	moderate
4	The concept of the Learning through Play Method is fun and meaningful education.	4.59	0.497	high
5	Collaborative learning (cooperation among the groups).	3.50	1.455	moderate
6	The objective of activity is inclined towards various ways of problem solving.	4.41	0.583	high
7	Pupils are free to talk, but are controlled.	4.39	0.579	high
8	The role of teachers in the Learning through Play Method.	4.36	0.650	high
9	The advantage of using the Learning through Play Method.	4.36	0.574	high
10	The suitability of using the Learning through Play Method based on the topics in subjects.	3.57	1.371	moderate
Total		4.09	0.829	high

Table 2. Level of Teachers' Skill in Teaching Using the Learning through Play Method

No	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Skills
1	Refer to the Dokumen Standard Kurikulum (syllabus) to achieve teaching and learning goals.	4.30	0.594	high
2	Set the teaching and learning goals with great effort.	3.66	1.200	moderate
3	Choose topics that are difficult to be comprehended by pupils.	3.64	1.036	moderate
4	Prepare lesson plans according to level of pupils and suitability.	4.48	0.505	high
5	Plan the teaching and learning steps to produce effective lesson plans.	4.30	0.509	high
6	Conduct teaching and learning process using the learning through play method.	4.41	0.542	high
7	Solve identified pupils' learning problems through test.	3.59	1.187	moderate
8	Always stress on the moral values in lessons.	4.48	0.549	high
9	Ensure the teaching and learning process is conducted based on the planned lesson plan.	3.41	1.403	moderate
10	Make evaluation on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning conducted.	4.39	0.538	high
Total		4.06	0.806	high

This is in line with an opinion by Sharifah and Aliza (2013) who opined that the preparation of the teaching and learning using the learning through play method must be made before the lesson takes place. Research findings also portray the level of teachers' skills in planning thoroughly to conduct lessons using the learning through play method. Teachers should also be capable of planning the activities to be conducted, and prioritising the suitable teaching aids to be used in teaching and learning process. That being said, these

findings are in line with the views by Sharifah and Aliza (2013). Who stated that teachers' skills in planning and adjust teaching strategies that use the learning through play method would help improve pupils' understanding and performance. Teachers should be skilled in ensuring the planned teaching and learning process is conducted smoothly and perfectly, teachers are the implementers of the curriculum practices.

CONCLUSSION

Based on the research analysis provided, the findings showed that teachers had a high level of knowledge and skills in using the learning through play method in teaching and learning. Nonetheless, special education teachers are still not ready to conduct lessons by inculcating the learning through play method to special needs pupils because there were a number of items in the questionnaire to identify teachers' level of knowledge and skills were at moderate. This shows that the teachers' knowledge and skills still need to be improved and must be given important attention to avoid ineffective learning in classrooms. Therefore, training programmes or courses need to be provided to teachers sufficiently, so that teachers could be more ready to conduct teaching and learning by inculcating the learning through play method in their classrooms. This is supported by Nasrudin and Othman (2014) who stated that workshops and trainings could improve teachers' knowledge and skills in certain areas. In-service training could also be conducted to enhance the quality of teachers in implementing lessons in classrooms.

The variety of methods and techniques in teaching should be mastered by special education teachers, so that they could trigger pupils' interest and attention in learning (Nasrudin and Othman, 2014). That being said, a teacher should have high knowledge and skills in planning teaching and learning process with a high quality. Gustafsson-Pesonen and Remes (2012) stated that teachers need to be highly knowledgeable to apply various methods in teaching and learning. Apart from that the pedagogical training that is given to teachers could shift their way of thinking towards a more positive direction (Gustafsson-Pesonen and Remes, 2012). Furthermore, it is suggested that the research samples and locations should be expanded, so that we could find out the level of teachers' knowledge and skills in applying the learning through play method in teaching and learning process from other demography. Other than that, it is also suggested for further research to find out the barriers that may be present for teachers to effectively implement this method in classroom. Other than that, teachers need to play a significant role to master the content of learning subjects to produce a quality special needs pupils.

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