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Teacher's perspective on infrastructure of special education's classroom in Malaysia

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Abstract

To provide children with special needs with comfortable, safe, and controlled learning, it is important to create continuity in the environment so that they would have equal access to education like typical students. Therefore, the specific infrastructure, such as barrier-free facilities, wheelchair access, a comfortable classroom, and safety aspects, should be taken into account for purposes of teaching and learning. Studies conducted in the form combine qualitative and quantitative aspects and involve observation, interviews, and questionnaires, with teachers and school administrators as respondents. The findings showed that 37.7 percent of the respondents are not sure about the classroom space needed by each special education student. Approximately 30 percent of the respondents also are uncertain, given the financial allocation for special education integration program. In addition, the majority of respondents (53.6%) are satisfied with the location of the special education program at their school, located on the ground floor of each building. Approximately 55.8 percent of the respondents agreed that the special education classroom in their schools have adequate lighting, and 52 percent agreed that there is good air circulation. However, 41.9 percent of the respondents did not agree with the space available for learning process because it does not match the capacity of students and teachers at a time. Some respondents indicated that insufficient infrastructure, especially for basic amenities, such as chairs, tables, fans, teaching aids (BBM), LCD facilities, computers, and others. In conclusion, the integration of special education programs needs much improvement especially in the accessibility of special needs students so that their right to have an education does not remain neglected. Therefore, the development of infrastructure and special education classroom modifications should be done using a certified standard.

Keywords: special education; classroom, infrastructure

1. Introduction

Preparation of educational inputs and the provision of a conducive learning environment are essential to ensure the comfort of learning at school. According to Goldsmith & Goldsmith (1998), to provide children with special needs with comfortable, safe, and controlled learning, it is important to create continuity in the environment so that they would have equal access to education like other normal students. With awareness of the importance of integration, separating students with special needs for learning from those with normal education is considered inappropriate. Currently, the educational need of students with special needs leads to a real community-oriented setting (Najib Ghafar & Sanisah, 2006). Deterrent factors should be evaluated and taken into consideration so that students with special needs are not marginalized and ranked within education field and job opportunities in

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the future. According to Gargiulo (2006), the place where a student receives the education problem will actualy affect the attitudes, achievement, and social development. Thus, basic needs, such as barrier-free facilities, comfortable classroom, and safety aspects, should be taken into account for purposes of teaching and learning. The study by Crozier & Sileo (2005) states that to increase success for students with disabilities in the regular curriculum, teachers of students with special learning needs and those with normal education must work together. Therefore, the specific infrastructure, such as barrier-free facilities, wheelchair access, comfortable classroom, and safety aspects, should be taken into account for purposes of teaching and learning. With the help of teachers, school administrators, and peers, complemented by a conducive environment and proper equipment, students with special needs are able to carry out the process of learning with ease. Students with disabilities also are able to acquire education to a higher level if given the proper space and facilities (Lane et al., 1993). This study was conducted to investigate the management, location, and facilities provided for these programs and also explore the perception of respondents on special education classroom.

2. Study Design

This survey study has combined quantitative and qualitative aims to explore the infrastructure available in the School of Special Education and Special Education Integration Program. Data for this study are derived from the interviews, observation, document analysis, and questionnaires.

3. Sample of the Study

The sample in this study consisted of administrators and teachers who teach in special education schools and special education integration program for children with visual impairment, hearing problems, and learning disabilities. Respondents were selected in each state for schools with integrated special education program in Malaysia. A total of 554 respondents were selected to answer the questionnaire, whereas eight teachers and school administrators in the district of Sabah were the respondents to an interview.

4. Data Analysis

Data obtained through the questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.0, whereas data from the interviews were analyzed using manual methods.

5. Results

Table 5.1 Integrated Program Management for Special Education

Item	Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Knowing the space required	Strongly disagree	20	3.6
	Disagree	54	9.7
	Not sure	209	37.7
	Agree	234	42.2
	Strongly agree	37	6.7
Knowing circulars related to infrastructure modifications	Strongly disagree	34	6.1
	Disagree	69	12.5
	Not sure	252	45.5
	Agree	165	29.8
	Strongly agree	34	6.1

Data show that 42.2 percent of the respondents agree and know the space required by each special education student. However, 209 or 37.7 percent of the respondents were not sure about the space. In addition, in terms of circulars related to physical infrastructure renovation programs, a total of 252 subjects (45.5%) stated that they were unsure of the circular.

Table 5.2 Related Information on Locations of Special Education Programs

Item	Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Located on the ground floor	Strongly disagree	29	5.2
	Disagree	85	15.3

Item	Scale	Frequency	Percentage
	Not sure	19	3.4
	Agree	255	46
	Strongly agree	166	30
Situated in its own building	Strongly disagree	85	15.3
	Disagree	114	20.6
	Not sure	19	3.4
	Agree	183	33
	Strongly agree	153	27.6
Away from the road	Strongly disagree	57	10.3
	Disagree	103	18.6
	Not sure	38	6.9
	Agree	231	41.7
	Strongly agree	125	22.6

As seen on Table 5.2, a total of 255 respondents agreed to the location of their special education being located at the ground floor, and a total of 54.7 per cent of the respondents do not agree to the location of their special education program being located at the top floor. The majority of the respondents also agreed to special education programs being located in their own building. In addition, a total of 231 respondents (41.7%) agreed to the location of their special education programs being located far from the road so as to avoid outside noise interfering with the process of teaching and learning.

Table 5.3 Related Information Facility of Special Education Program

Item	Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Adequate learning space	Strongly disagree	58	10.5
	Disagree	232	41.9
	Not sure	46	8.3
	Agree	187	33.8
	Strongly agree	31	5.6
Have a good circulation	Strongly disagree	25	4.5
	Disagree	101	18.2
	Not sure	49	8.8
	Agree	288	52
	Strongly agree	91	16.4
Have adequate lighting	Strongly disagree	15	2.7
	Disagree	84	15.2
	Not sure	39	7
	Agree	309	55.8
	Strongly agree	107	19.3

For the learning space provided for special education programs, 41.9 percent of the respondents did not agree with the space available because it does not match the capacity of students and teachers at a time. Other than that, for the aspects of lighting and air circulation in the classroom, both physical conditions are found to show high results for the respondents who agreed that a special education classroom in their schools have adequate lighting (55.8 percent) and good air circulation (52 percent).

6. Results from the Interview

Interview retrieval showed that respondents from administrators at the schools in Sabah are less aware of relevant information on special education programs in their school. Most of the courses that were related to special education students and attended by the respondents are short-term courses, and the respondents also stated that they had attended the same modules every year. On information relating to the management of special education programs, majority of the respondents did not know about the space required by each special education student in the classroom and was not informed in detail about the funds provided. Facilities for both teaching and learning processes are still not enough, and some are not even available. In this study, respondents also were asked to give

opinions regarding other facilities that should be available in a special education class, and the respondents suggested the following: LCD, self-management rooms, computers, audio-visual equipment, and life skills room. The last item is associated with location information, a special education classroom. The majority of the respondents indicated that the location of the special education classroom for their students with special needs has adequate lighting and is appropriate.

7. Conclusion

To nurture interest and student motivation to continue learning, the school must provide adequate and accessible facilities for the needs of all the students. In addition to increasing infrastructure facilities, research should be done prior to making infrastructure improvements and facilities for special education students to increase comfort and enhance the quality of teaching and learning methods. Therefore, efforts to improve the quality of classroom infrastructure and other facilities in the school integration of special education program requires continuous effort and commitment from all parties. Teachers need to improve the skills and knowledge in planning, supervising, and managing the classroom as well as infrastructure facilities for students with special needs.

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