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Teacher Leadership and Classroom Management Practice on Special Education with Learning Disability

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between teacher leadership and classroom management practice on special education with learning disability. There are six dimensions under teacher leadership practice namely creating energy in the classroom, building capacity, securing environment, extending the vision, meeting and minimizing crisis, and seeking and charting improvement. This study utilized quantitative method survey design by using questionnaire as research instrument to obtain data. This sample comprised of a total of 179 special education teachers including elementary and secondary schools in Penang state of Malaysia. The results showed that teacher leadership (mean score = 4.08, SD = 0.50) and classroom management practice (mean score = 4.22, SD = 0.44) were practised very frequently. Furthermore, Pearson correlation analysis indicated that all the six dimensions of teacher leadership, namely meeting and minimizing crisis dimension ($r = 0.731$, $p < .01$), seeking and charting improvement dimension ($r = 0.726$, $p < .01$), extending the vision dimension ($r = 0.697$, $p < .01$), securing environment dimension ($r = 0.647$, $p < .01$), building capacity dimension ($r = 0.535$, $p < .01$) and creating energy in the classroom dimension ($r = 0.531$, $p < .01$) are significantly and positively associated with classroom management practice. Findings also revealed that meeting and minimizing crisis dimension, seeking and charting improvement dimension, creating energy in the classroom dimension, and extending the vision dimension are significant predictors which contributing 53.2 percent, 8.6 percent, 3.9 percent and 3.2 percent of variance on classroom management practice respectively. In conclusion, teacher leadership practice must be adapted to special education teachers in order to create quality and effective classroom management practice.

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1. Introduction

Teacher leadership played a key role in leading the progress of not only to the class but also to the school, therefore it contributed directly to improve students' achievement (Tang & See, 2009). Based on the literature review, teacher leadership could bring a positive impact on classroom management. Previous studies like Hickey and Harris (2005), Khalid (2007), Siti Aida (2011), and Tan (2011) have indicated that the practice of teacher leadership would enable to improve classroom management skills of teachers. According to Zharulnizam Shah (2010), special education is an area that is very challenging. Owing to the challenges in the field of special education, teachers are very much needed to practice teacher leadership in order to determine the success in classroom management. According to Zalizan (2012), special education teachers must have the special knowledge and skills to implement their teaching and learning process thus increase the effectiveness of their students' learning in the classroom.

2. Statement of the problem

Challenges and high expectations to improve the quality of special education in Malaysia are depending on the responsibilities of teachers on how to educate the students with special needs (Yahya Don, 2007). This is because teachers who have the skills and abilities are able to influence their students (Syed Ismail & Ahmad, 2010). Teachers who have leadership qualities are able to perform their roles as advisor, mentor, facilitator, trainer, and curriculum specialist in order to promote class and school improvements (Abdullah Sani, Abdul Rashid & Abdul Ghani, 2007). However, past studies revealed that special education teachers are two and a half times more to quit from their teaching profession service compared to the mainstream teachers (Webster, 2010). Hence, special education teachers have to deal with problems of classroom management such as the congested classroom, too much paper work and assignments and so on (Tang & See, 2009).

In addition, previous studies (Ho, 2005; Hasnah, Mohd Hanafi, Mohd Mokhtar & Norani, 2010; Mohd Rizal & Muallimah, 2010) showed that special education teachers are lacking of knowledge and skills to deal with students with learning disabilities. Special education teachers must be sensitive in managing those students with special needs particularly with learning disabilities due to they often behave in unpredictable emotional experience (Mohd Zuri & Aznan, 2011). Therefore, a special education teacher leader should be sensitive to the feelings of empathy and capabilities to deal with their students (Ainon, 2011). This relationship between teacher and students is the key factor in effective classroom management (Burke, 2008; Haliza & Samuel, 2009).

3. Objectives of the study

Based on the above problem statements, this study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- a. To identify teacher leadership and its dimensions, namely creating energy in the classroom, building capacity, securing environment, extending the vision, meeting and minimizing crisis, and seeking and charting improvement practiced by special education teachers.
- b. To identify special education teachers' perceptions on classroom management practice.
- c. To examine the relationship between the teacher leadership and its dimensions namely creating energy in the classroom, building capacity, securing environment, extending the vision, meeting and minimizing crisis, and seeking and charting improvement practiced by special education teachers toward their perceptions on classroom management practice.
- d. To examine the significant predictors of special education teachers' perceptions on classroom management practice.

4. Methodology of the study

This study employed a survey questionnaire as a method to collect quantitative data. The questionnaires were distributed to 179 special education teachers who are teaching in elementary and secondary integration program with learning disabilities in Penang state, Malaysia. This method benefits this study in terms of obtaining data more efficiently as time, energy and costs could be minimized (Sekaran, 2006). The questionnaire was in Malay language.

There were 90 items including demographics items and consisted of three sections in this instrument. Section A of the questionnaire was intended to gather information regarding demographic factors of the respondents which included information pertaining to their personal background such as age, gender, teaching experience and school level that is elementary or secondary school. Section B was adopted and adapted from teacher leadership questionnaire designed by Tang and See (2009). Section C of the instrument was specifically designed by researchers based on the several concepts related to classroom management, derived from those experts such as Skinner, Canter, Dreikurs, Kounin, Glasser, and Dunn and Dunn. Section B comprised of 38 items and it used to measure teacher leadership practices of special education teachers whereas Section C consisted of 48 items and it used to measure special education teachers' perceptions on classroom management practice. There are six dimensions in Section B, namely creating energy in the classroom, building capacity, securing environment, extending the vision, meeting and minimizing crisis, and seeking and charting improvement. Section B and C were scored using a five-point Likert scale.

Pilot testing of the instrument was carried out to about 10 percent (30) of the total number (364) of teachers in the 47 public schools who have a similar background to the respondents in the survey. Those teachers involved in the pilot study were excluded in the actual study. Revisions were made based on the suggestions and feedback given by these teachers. It could be concluded from the pilot-study results that the instrument had high internal consistency as the Cronbach alpha value ranged from 0.915 to 0.942.

5. Findings

5.1. Descriptive statistical analysis

Table 1 shows the mean score, standard deviation, frequency and percentage of the level of teacher leadership and its dimensions practiced by the special education teachers as well as their perceptions on classroom management practice. The mean scores and standard deviations of the teacher leadership and its dimensions practiced by special education teachers ranged from 3.92 to 4.19 and 0.43 to 0.56 respectively which was considered as highly practiced by special education teachers. It can be concluded that special education teachers practiced all the six dimensions of teacher leadership as well as overall teacher leadership. In addition, their perceptions on classroom management practice were found to be at high level with mean score 4.22 and standard deviation 0.44.

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