

Implementation of Individual Education Program (IEP) in Curriculum of Students with Learning Disabilities

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Abstract: An individual education plan (IEP) is a written document prepared to ensure that the individual learning needs of students with special needs are met. This study aims to examine IEP implementation in curriculum achievement with students with learning disabilities from the teachers' perceptions. This study is based on Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory. It is quantitative study which uses the survey method to collect data. The study involved 52 Special Education Integration Program (PPKI) teachers from eight schools in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. The instrument used in the questionnaire was adapted from the Curriculum Indicators Survey (CIS) by Salle (2013) and was tested using Alpha Cronbach. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, percentages, frequency and mean to obtain the information needed to answer the research questions. The findings show that there is a higher implementation of IEP in the curriculum ($M = 3.96$, $SP = 0.80$). This study shows that teachers perceive that the implementation of IEP affects the development and ability of students with special learning needs. In conclusion, teachers play an important role to plan and implement IEP according to the each student's abilities, strengths and weaknesses.

Keywords: Individual Education Plan (IEP), curriculum, student with learning disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the Integrated Special Education Program (PPKI) for students with special learning needs (MBK) involve students with varying spectrum of disabilities and special needs. This reflects the need for appropriate lesson planning to the best of their ability. According to Mohd Hanafi et al. (2010), stated that students with learning difficulties face variety problems due to their learning disabilities. Student with learning disabilities refer to students who have a variety of learning problems especially in terms of reading, writing, counting, learning difficulties, following instructions and weak focus (Zalizan 2009).

The different levels of learning difficulties exhibited by special needs students require teachers to design a specific learning plan based on the student's disabilities. Students with special needs requires a series of individualised teaching programme, supportive special education services and relevant assessment tools to help them learn specific skills and to develop their individual potential (Sahin 2012). Culatta and Tompkins (1999) state that special students need individualized teaching and are designed to meet their educational needs and related to students with disabilities. In this light, PPKI provides learning opportunities that might not be offered by the regular curriculum. This means that each student with learning difficulties requires a specially designed individual lesson plan.

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a document written to meet a student's individual learning needs. The IEP is a written record that provides an individualized plan for learning based on strengths and weaknesses of students with special needs (MBK Education Code of Practice, 2015). IEP serves as a document to determine the cooperation and collaboration between schools, parents, students and, if necessary, district

education officers, and individuals from other agencies or support services. Special education teachers are required to prepare IEP for each special needs student (Special Education Regulations 2013).

The IEP describes how students with special needs learn, how they exemplify what they have learned and what teachers and service providers do to help these children learn more effectively (Adibah 2014). IEP is also used as a modification of learning programs and services provided to students (Department of Special Education, 2005). The IEP implementation guidelines are contained in the IEP Handbook of the Special Education Department, Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Zainal Abidin (2010) in his study found that teachers' use of IEP for special needs students makes the teaching and learning process more organized, systematic and helps teachers to keep up with the development of special needs students. The use of IEP helps teachers to plan daily lessons in the classroom (Sahin 2012). The implementation of the IEP as a whole, helps special needs students to grow to their potential (Ismail 2008; Sahin 2012 & Timothy & Agbenyega 2018) and assist the MOE to facilitate the enrolment of special needs students to the Inclusive Education Program (Siti Nor Maisarah & Mohd Hanafi 2016).

Therefore, the implementation of IEP is an important part of learning. In this regard, this study was conducted to examine teachers' perception on the impact of IEP implementation in improving the achievement of the students with learning disabilities curriculum in schools. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the importance of implementing IEP to teach students with learning disabilities.

METHOD

This study is a quantitative study and used the survey method to collect data. The study's population is 60 primary PPKI teachers from eight schools in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. The survey involved 52 teachers as respondents and the sample size was determined according to Krejcie & Morgan's (1970) sample size table. The instrument was conducted using the questionnaire and the instrument was adapted from the Curriculum Indicators Survey (CIS) by Salle (2013). The validity of the instrument was evaluated by two specialists in the field of Special Education. A pilot study was conducted on 30 primary school PPKI teachers to measure the level of reliability of the instrument used prior to the actual study. The pilot study scored the Cronbach's Alpha of 0.944 which indicates high reliability. Google Form was used to collect data virtually and the link was provided to respondents online using WhatsApp application. The data collection process took three weeks.

The items in the questionnaire are anchored by a Five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- Not sure, 4-Agree, and 5-Strongly Agree. There are two sections in the questionnaire, part A probes the respondents' demographics and part B focuses on the impact of IEP implementation on curriculum achievement. Respondents were required to indicate their degree of agreement by selecting the number of choice based on the instructions and descriptions of the scale. The results were analyzed from the frequency, percent and mean using the Software Statistical Package for the Social Science Module version 20.0 (SPSS).

This study is grounded on the Vygotsky socio-cultural theory. This theory illustrates that the zone of proximal development (ZPD) helps children to acquire skills that are difficult for children to achieve based on the guidance of more experienced and skilled adults or peers (Berk 2009). This theory emphasizes the provision of learning and education based on students' ability to promote and optimize individual learning by catering to different individual levels and needs. The concept of scaffolding and zone of proximal development in the context of education is evident when teachers provide assistance to allow students to complete tasks without any guidance. This theory states that the ZPD is used in the context of IEP implementation, where the learning is planned based on students' achievement level.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study involved 52 respondents from eight primary schools in Negeri Sembilan. Based on the findings, 10 (19.2%) were male and 42 (80.8%) were female. For the analysis of age, 5 (9.6%) respondents aged 20 to 30 years, 32 (61.5%) respondents aged 31 to 40 years, 14 (26.9%) respondents aged 41 to 50 years and 1 (1.9%) respondents were 51 to 60 years old. Based on academic approval, 2 (3.8%) respondents were diploma graduates, 44 (84.6%) respondents had undergraduate academic approval, 5 (9.6%) respondents had undergraduate and 1 (1.9%) respondents had PhD. Furthermore, based on teaching experience, 6 (11.5%) respondents had teaching experience less than 5 years, 25 (48.1%) respondents had teaching experience 6 to 10 years and 14 (26.9%) respondents had teaching experience 11 to 15 years, 5 (9.6%) respondents had teaching experience 16 to 20 years and 2 (3.8%) respondents had teaching experience over 21 years. A summary of the demographic distribution of respondents is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Respondents

| Demographic Aspects | Frequency | Percentage % |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Male | 10 | 19.2 |
| Female | 42 | 80.8 |
| <i>Age</i> | | |
| 20 – 30 years | 5 | 9.6 |
| 31 – 40 years | 32 | 61.5 |
| 41 – 50 years | 14 | 26.9 |
| 51 – 60 years | 1 | 1.9 |
| <i>Academic approval</i> | | |
| Diploma | 2 | 3.8 |
| Degree | 44 | 84.6 |
| Master | 5 | 9.6 |
| PhD | 1 | 1.9 |
| <i>Teaching experience</i> | | |
| Less than 5 years | 6 | 11.5 |
| 6 – 10 years | 25 | 48.1 |
| 11 – 15 years | 14 | 26.9 |
| 16 – 20 years | 5 | 9.6 |
| 21 years and above | 2 | 3.8 |

Table 2 shows the scores for each item and the results show the highest mean for each item. Results from the analysis shows that the highest items were students' gross motor skills improved from IEP implementation ($M = 4.08$, $S = 0.76$), improved motor skills ($M = 4.06$, $S = 0.78$), improved student performance in the classroom ($M = 4.02$, $S = 0.75$), overall student development potential ($M = 3.98$, $S = 0.81$), 3M mastery ($M = 3.92$, $S = 0.81$), student curriculum goals achieved ($M = 3.85$, $S = 0.85$) and the lowest item finding was the objective of the students' curriculum achieved ($M = 3.81$, $S = 0.82$). The results of the overall study found that the impact of the implementation of IEP on the achievement of the students with learning disabilities curriculum was higher overall ($M = 3.96$, $S = 0.80$).

| Item | Mean | SD | Level |
|---|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| | n | | |
| The student's gross motor skills can be improved through the implementation of IEP. | 4.08 | 0.76 | High |
| The student's fine motor skills can be improved through the implementation of | 4.06 | 0.78 | High |

| Item | | Mean | SD | Level |
|--|---|------|------|-------|
| | | n | | |
| IEP. | | | | |
| Implementing IEP to improve student performance in the classroom. | IEP student in the classroom. | 4.02 | 0.75 | High |
| Implementing IEP can enhance the potential of the student based on the level of student ability. | IEP can enhance the potential of the student based on the level of student ability. | 3.98 | 0.80 | High |
| Implementing IEP can enhance students' 3M skills (reading, writing and counting) | IEP can enhance students' 3M skills (reading, writing and counting) | 3.92 | 0.81 | High |
| Students can achieve long term goals through the implementation of IEP. | Students can achieve long term goals through the implementation of IEP. | 3.85 | 0.85 | High |
| The objectives of the student curriculum can be achieved through the implementation of IEP. | The objectives of the student curriculum can be achieved through the implementation of IEP. | 3.81 | 0.82 | High |
| Grand total | | 3.96 | 0.80 | High |

Table 2. Impact of IEP Implementation on Student with Learning Disabilities Curriculum

(Level: Low = 1.00 – 2.33, Moderate = 2.34 – 3.66, High = 3.67 – 5.00)

Discussion

Based on the findings of the research, this study found that teachers perceive that the implementation of RPI has enhanced the development of the special education curriculum and helps optimize learning for students with learning disabilities. The findings also showed that each question scored a high agreement and this demonstrates the importance of IEP to students as it helps enhance their development. IDEA (2004) also stated that IEP can help address issues of their involvement and progress in the general curriculum of the education system. Eldood Yousif (2015) in his study also found that the implementation of IEP has a positive impact on the development and learning of students with learning disability. In this regard, optimum planning and implementation of IEP will ensure special need students receives quality education (Dempsey 2012). Studies from Zainal Abidin (2010), also shows that IEP helps teachers improve student's performance compared to without using IEP.

IEP is a teaching map for every student with special needs that forms the basis for teachers to plan student's learning and needs (Sahin 2012). Timothy & Agbenyega's (2018) study found that the use of IEP is the best practice in planning lessons and curriculum. It also serves a teacher's reference in teaching students with special needs and to ensure they could achieve their individual learning objectives. A comprehensive and integrated implementation of IEP could help special needs students achieve meaningful learning outcomes and fulfill their needs (Yell et.al 2016). According to Sitti Hasnah Bandu & Zalizan (2012), teachers' understanding

of IEP implementation helps to identify the development and detects the weaknesses of the students thus helps to improve student's performance.

Improvements in the student learning can be seen through the implementation of IEP as IEP allows teachers to facilitate individual centered learning to special needs students according to their needs and levels of ability. This study is in line with Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory which explains the level of scaffolding provided to the students based on their level of proximal development. IEP also allows teachers to make adjustments and adaptations to the original curriculum based on what students need to learn, and use the appropriate teaching strategies, techniques and assessment of achievement.

The success of IEP implementation depends on teachers' systematic planning and implementation (Ismail 2008 & Sahin 2012). Yell et. al (2006) mentioned that the assessment of special needs students is important for teachers to adapt teaching and skill training strategies to fit their students' development. Nadiah & Mohd Mokhtar (2018) stated that the use of appropriate assessments strategies based on the capabilities of the special needs students is important to provide equal opportunities for them to succeed in mainstream education.

The implementation of effective IEP comes from competent teachers. Therefore, to fulfill the needs for competent teachers, teacher training institutes have to prepare trainee teachers with the adequate knowledge pertaining to the design, development and implementation of IEP. Adequate knowledge, skills, and competency on IEP development among teachers will help to improve their teaching practice. In-house workshops and courses should also be conducted to equip special education teachers with the knowledge to improve their skills related to IEP development.

CONCLUSION

The diversity of special needs students enrolled in the Integrated Special Education Program (PPKI) requires that each individual receives a learning plan that is designed to meet their educational needs. The implementation of IEP in schools needs to adhere with the established guidelines and teachers need to adapt the curriculum to suit the students' capabilities. It is clear that the implementation of IEP has a positive impact on the special needs students learning process as IEP has become an instrument for planning, assessing and monitoring student's education development. The use of IEP with proper planning and implementation can help students with special needs to achieve optimum development at their level and provide them with the same educational opportunity as typical students in mainstream classrooms.

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