

# The Rural Teacher's Ability, Knowledge and Skill in Early Identification of Children with Special Needs

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**Abstract:** Early intervention will help special educational needs (SEN) children to get early enforcement in learning. Therefore, this study aims is to identify teacher's ability, knowledge and skill in identifying children with special needs. The method used in this study is mix method. The data is analysed in qualitative and quantitative. The sample in qualitative method involved 16 respondents while 219 respondents in quantitative method. The research findings was 50.2 % respondents achieve mastery level while 49.8 % was below mastery level. The research also found that respondent able to identify children with SEN based on their appearance and behavior. Therefore, the qualitative found that majority of respondents able to identify children with disabilities through children's behavior and characteristic while some of respondents identify pupils based on academic performance including children's abilities to read and write.

**Keywords:** early identification; early intervention; children with special needs

## INTRODUCTION

Special Education in Malaysia begin with the establishment of the St. Nicholas Primary School in Melaka in 1929 by Anglican Church and the revolution in Special Education become more rapidly by establishment of Special Teachers Training College in 1964 which produced special education teachers. After the restructuring of the Ministry of Education, the Special Education Unit in the school section was upgraded to a Department of Special Education in Ministry of Education Malaysia by October 1995.

The government plays a vital roles towards the development of special education as well in Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM 2013-2025) that emphasize equality in education in order to make sure that every Malaysian citizen has the equal right in educational opportunities. The Ministry of Education in Malaysia defines special needs pupils as those who have visual disability, hearing disability, speech disability, physical disability, learning difficulties and multiple disabilities.

Education for children with special needs is very important in continuing their lives involving reading, writing and speaking skills. It also includes job opportunities and engages in decision makers (Nadhir and Alfa, 2016). However, the biggest challenges for national education system is to respond to the needs of every learner at all level.

Some may confuse as the term children with special needs represent a big category of pupils who face up with various learning difficulties and requires a variety of treatment methods (Tomlinson, 2000), Vassiliki, Marita and Eleni (2011). Therefore, early intervention is really needed to improve the development and children learning potential (Safani, Aisyah, Nur Aini and Hanafi, 2016). However, the failure to early intervention was linked to teacher knowledge and skill in teaching SEN (Aisyah and Safani, 2014).

Malaysia faces a problem with conceptualization between term of disability and lack of motivation. Most of educator believe that pupils with low achievement in academic performance were SEN but sometimes this situation due to lack of motivation. Nadhir and Alfa (2016) states that opportunity involved in activities because of stigma and stereotyping. Therefore early intervention was needed in order to make sure the human right will be applied and Malaysia achieve a greatly one, academic achievement as well as human development.

### *Aim of Study*

The aim of this study was to identify teacher's ability, knowledge and skill in identifying children with special needs in classroom.

### *Literature Review*

The level of achievement of a low school is also influenced by the low teacher competence (Losius, Khairuddin and Rosy, 2016). Although the

teacher was able to carry out the teaching and learning process among disabled children, suggestions were given to train teachers and stakeholders to assist teaching and learning process as teachers are still faced with problems related to theory and practice as well as skills in teaching some subject (Salend, 2005), Yusof and Aminah (2008). Even according to Hasnalee and Zulkiple (2000), not all demographic factors affect pupils' skills in the lesson but more on teacher expertise determine pupil readiness and the teaching style in the classroom.

In fact, the Report of the Inspectorate and Quality Assurance of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia (2013) showed that only 12% of the teachers were in good and excellent levels, 31% were at a satisfactory level while 5% were weak.

In the study, Liyana, Fatihah and Khuziton (2013) on special education teachers in Jeli, Kelantan only one (1) respondent who had taught dyslexia children to have special training for dyslexia children while the majority of respondents (80%) did not specify the method used to teach dyslexic children because they have never attended a course on effective teaching methods to help these people.

In line with the Education for All, the challenge of Education is to improve the quality and equality of education with the mission no children leave behind. So, it regardless whether it normal or special needs students (Zalizan and Noraini, 2000). This is in line with the Education Act (1998) Regulations (Special Education) Volume 41, No. 26 Legislation effective January 1, 1998 in part 2 states that in implementing the Special Education Curriculum, teachers can modify teaching and learning techniques, for activities and the atmosphere for subjects and teaching aids to achieve the goals of Special Education.

However, in the classroom the teacher often does not diversify teaching and learning activities according to individual ability but teach in class as a whole (Norliah and Hanafi, 2016), Lynch and Adams (2008). Whereas the students need to be divided into groups and assessments in the classroom need to be modified to two or three levels (Tomlinson, 1999), Brown (2004) and Salend (2005). Therefore, students in the classroom need to be taught inclusively by giving special guidance and attention. In addition, teachers need to reduce the traditional form of teaching method by incorporate more into interactive learning style to gain students interest in order to achieve teaching objectives of the day. However, teacher need to play vital roles by diversify the content of student-assigned task (Salend, 2005), Brown (2004) and Tomlinson (1999).

## METHOD

Research conducted in mix method study whereby the qualitative data will support the finding in quantitative data. The sample for answering questionnaire is 219 and in depth interview conducted with a group of 16 respondent from four (4) different school. The quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS version 22, and the data was presented in descriptive format, while the interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. Researcher help the interviewees for missing link by given a probing to keep the conversation on a good track.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Teachers Abilities

Based on finding in Table 1.1 show that 94.1% teacher were never attended any courses regarding special education whereby only 5.9 % respondent are exposure to this matter. This small portion was indicates that the teachers in this study areas have not in the good exposure on special education and special education cultures was still relatively very low. It also indicated that teachers faced the difficulties in their ability to identify student with SEN as the SEN consists of various types of disabilities. Lacking of course or training in special education among mainstream teacher could be cause by locality, fund and lack of expertise in special education in study areas and it shown that teachers are not yet fully prepared for inclusive

**Table 1.1 Attended Course/Training Regarding Special Education**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	13	5.9	5.9	5.9
	No	206	94.1	94.1	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Lacking of exposure towards special education was given an affect toward the result on practitioners of inclusive education. The evident of findings shows in Table 1.2 whereby only 8 respondents with 3.7 % were have an experience in teaching inclusive education. It shows that, inclusive education was less popular in this study area and it could be happen due to the dissemination of special education is not yet comprehensive and the exposure to the course especially involving Level 1 teachers has not reached a good level. Therefore, this situation indicates that, the readiness and ability among Level 1 teachers in this study were very low because they were not yet fully prepared for inclusive education.

**Table 1.2 Experience in Teaching Inclusive Education**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	8	3.7	3.7	3.7
	No	211	96.3	96.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

### Teacher Knowledge

The respondent was tested by answering 10 items based on their general knowledge towards characteristic of Special Need Children, with Cronbach's Alpha 0.700. The result in Table 1.3 show only 11% of respondent able to answer all correct whereby majority or 22.4 of respondent was answer 9 item correct and the second score was 7 item correct with percentage 20.1%.

**Table 1.3 Item with Correct Answer**

Item	Score	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
2	2.00	5	2.3	2.3	2.3
3	3.00	3	1.4	1.4	3.7
4	4.00	7	3.2	3.2	6.8
5	5.00	14	6.4	6.4	13.2
6	6.00	36	16.4	16.4	29.7
7	7.00	44	20.1	20.1	49.8
8	8.00	37	16.9	16.9	66.7
9	9.00	49	22.4	22.4	89.0
10	10.00	24	11.0	11.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The researcher summarize the score with indicated the mastery level are those answer 8 item correctly. Therefore, based on Table 1.4 below, indicate that only 110 or 50.2 % respondent are achieve mastery level whereas, 109 or 49.8 % non-mastery level. Even though the mastery level score was higher, but the percentage of non – mastery level was consider still very high. It may gapping between collaboration between resource and mainstream teacher in teaching special education and also linking on exposure towards SEN in mainstream teacher.

**Table 1.4 Summarize of Mastery Level**

Answer	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	109	49.8	49.8	49.8
Yes	110	50.2	50.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Therefore, based on answering pattern, respondent were having a tendency to get correct answer based on question that more towards physically appearance compare to analytical analysis on every categorize of SEN. This finding was supported by qualitative study.

### Teachers Skills in Teaching

#### Identifying through observation

Interview conducted with the level one teachers reveals that all the respondent has an experience

teaching the children with disabilities in their classroom. Generally, majority of them said they are able to identify children with learning difficulties based on their observation towards children character

*"... I notice student with disabilities are less attention in the classroom... never ask me permission to go to the toilet like others do..." (R7)*

*"...I think my student is hyperactive because he always distributing others and run in class even sometimes he walked alone in the school compound during lesson..." (R4)*

*"... I recognize my student with disabilities due to their eye contact and they only respond according to their mood..." (R5)*

#### Identifying through academic performance

The findings show some of respondents stated that they are able to notice children with special needs in classroom through their observation on academic performance. The fact of teacher interviews said:

*"...generally, I notice student with disabilities on their writing skills. Most of the time, she keeps repeating the doing the same mistakes.."(R1)*

*"... we have a diagnostic test to examine the student performance basically in two skills, reading and writing..." (R2)*

## CONCLUSION

Early intervention are effectiveness in improving teaching techniques with SEN but the implementation of early intervention practices are still less widely conducted (Aisyah and Safani, 2014).

The Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM 2013-2025) arises special education issue as a focus on the right of education and the principle of inclusive education was to provide for all children an equity in education regardless on any perceived different, disability even cultural and linguistic difference.

However, the result in this paper indicated that teacher ability, knowledge and skills in conducting inclusive education in normal classroom is slightly need a room for improvement. It is because their exposure to special education, hence attended any courses regarding special education. Therefore, various efforts have been undertaken to uplift special education in accordance with the educational call for

all. However, there is still room to refine, especially involving disclosure and training to the primary teachers on special education. This is because there is still a large space associated with the knowledge and understanding of primary teachers on special education.

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