

Understanding Special Education Teachers' Perspectives on Professionalism in Educating Autistic Students

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ABSTRACT--- *Autism is a distinction that belongs to a child causing them to exhibit a different behaviour than normal children. Children who are diagnosed with autism are limited in communication and social development. Special Education Teachers are among the 'supporters' and 'complementary' assistance to the child's autism education and help achieve their ambitions. This study aims to identify the level of professionalism among special education teachers in order to educate students with autism. This study employed quantitative method where by the special education teachers were selected through a purposive sampling. This study was taken place in schools located in Kuala Terengganu. Therefore, the results obtained showed that the level of professionalism special education teachers was high.*

Index Terms — *Autistic students, professionalism, special education teachers.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Autism is a developmental disorder that impacts the sufferer's ability to communicate and interact. The word autism comes from the Greek word 'auto' which means 'self' or yourself. In the early stages of the emergence of autism, this word refers to individuals who do not have relationships with other people and the outside world. The word autism was introduced by Eugene Bleuler. Today, the term autism refers to a developmental disorder that affects the whole development of the sufferers. According to the medical dictionary, autism is an obsession to fantasy as an escape from reality. This definition refers to the behaviour exhibited by children with autism.

According to [1], autism is a disability that is quite serious regarding the development of a child. This inability was very obvious in the first three years of child development. According to previous studies on autism, an odd ratio of children between men and girls susceptible to autism is 4: 1, which is more likely to occur in boys.

Among the inabilities of autistic children are the inability of social interaction, communication and disability in their behaviour patterns. This will cause the child difficult to accept and understand the discipline of other parties such as parents and teachers. However, there are also children with autism who have a high IQ. These children are known as Asperger's. Asperger's group is a

group that can be deemed as data collectors. This group has an advantage in memorizing cases such as the date of birth or age. In fact, these people does not exhibit trouble in speaking. However, this group will possess high social disorder although being classified to have a high IQ.

Children with autism are often left out of academical endeavours due to their inability. However, they deserve the right to be educated as a normal child. The Philosophy of Education has outlined that all children have the right to get a proper education according to their respective capabilities. Therefore, various parties, including parents and teachers should discuss and develop the effort to find solutions and appropriate learning techniques to ensure the future of these children with autism.

Child autism is very difficult to diagnose. In terms of physical appearance, children with autism are not much different compared with normal children. However, with serious observation, there is a significant difference. However, identifying them requires ample knowledge about autism. Inadequate knowledge would complicate diagnosing a child with autism. This knowledge is only possessed by those who study and learn about the autism such as special education teachers, researchers, experts on children, doctors, and so on. With the knowledge, special education teachers must be fully prepared to design the right teaching techniques and allow children with autism to have better learning experience.

However, in a matter of educating children with autism, the need for an appropriate approach and professional attitude in doing the job is imperative. This is because children are difficult to understand and be educated. In addition, it will smooth the process of teaching and learning and a positive impact on children with autism.

In this study, several questions were stated to achieve the objectives of keeping with the title of this study. Several questions were identified, namely:

To what extent the level of knowledge of special education teachers have about autism? To what extent the level of professionalism of teachers in special education in teaching students diagnosed with autism? To what extent that the knowledge can affect the professionalism of teachers special education in educating children with autism?

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II. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Research Hypothesis: There is a relationship between the level of knowledge and professionalism of the special education teachers to educate students with autism.

Null hypothesis: There is no relationship between the level of knowledge and professionalism of the special education teachers to educate students with autism.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

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A. Autism

According to the study of National Autism Society of Malaysia (NASOM) [2] explained the purpose of autism is that the existence of diagnose show its effect within 30 months of birth. NASOM also characterised children with autism and that they have limited, stunted communication. In addition, children with autism also have problems in their behaviour.

However, there are also advantages possessed by the child's autism. They often point to the advantages in the field of mathematical and mechanical skill, or in music, 'rote memory' and others [3]. According to [4], autism occurs due to genetic defects and inflammation of the brain and this will cause an interruption in the development of a person.

B. Special Education Teachers

The difference between teaching children with special needs and regular students are the methodology. The mission of teaching ordinary students may be more to follow the prescribed syllabus. This is in contrast to the instruction for special education students. Teaching special education students are not by learning through content, but rather to study the pattern of teaching and guiding. This is because, each special education student has a problem different learning abilities. Thus, the ability to know in advance, and adapt new teaching content can be adjusted according to the level of the student [5].

According to [6], Special Education means education for students with special needs in a special school or in a school which implements Special Education Integration Program (PKI) or Program for Inclusive Education (IEP) at preschool, primary education, secondary education or tertiary education. The Special Education system in Malaysia is a major contributor of the student's enrolment PKI Special Needs (MBK) and is implemented throughout the country.

The Ministry of Education has outlined nine categories of children with special needs:

1. Hearing problem
2. Sight problem
3. Mentally retarded
4. Autism Spectrum Disorders
5. Emotional and Behavioral Disorders
6. In Learning Disabilities
7. Physical Disability and Health Problems

8. Gifted and Talented

9. Language and Speech

C. Professionalism

The term comes from the professionalism aspect of any profession. In the English-Malay Dictionary, profession means jobs. According to Professor HM Arifin in his *Capita Selecta Education (Islam and General)* professions contain the same meaning of the word 'occupation' or the selected work based education and specialised training. Whereas, according to [7], professionalism has meant to people who have a job based on skills, ability, techniques and procedures based on individual intellectual property.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Instrument

To identify the level of professionalism of the special education teachers in educating students with Autism, a questionnaire was adapted and translated from an article by [8]. The questionnaire consists of four parts, A: Demographics of respondents, Part B: special education teachers' knowledge about Autism, Part C: the professionalism of special education teachers in educating students and Autism Part D: To what extent knowledge affects special education teachers' professionalism. A five-point Likert scale was used in this questionnaire according to a scale of 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=not sure, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree.

B. Research Procedure

This study is a survey research using questionnaires as the instrument. The sample was selected using purposive sampling method. The sample for this study was special education teachers in Special Education School in the district. A total of 20 special education teachers have been in the study. Researchers have distributed a total of 20 questionnaires to teachers in the area of Special Education School, Kuala Terengganu.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 20 special education teachers have been selected to participate in this study consisting of 5 patients (25%) men and 15 (75%) women. As for age, there were 9 respondents aged between 31 and 40 years with 45% of the number, 7 respondents in the age group 41 to 50 years with the percentage of 35%, while 4 respondents' aged between 50 and 60 years with a percentage of 20%. While in terms of race, 19 respondents i.e. 95% are Malays while one respondent answered "other" which is 5% from 100%.

For information about the positions held by the 20 respondents in this study, 16 people were a special education teacher while 4 others were served as a special education teacher assistant. The percentage of this information is respectively 80% and 20%. A total of 9 respondents i.e. 45% of 20 respondents according to the

course or class on autism and the rest are null. The course or class on autism have been followed and specified in the questionnaire that was circulated through the *Quranic Playground* Assessment Program, Organized by its advocate Faqih and Students Autism Observation Programmers.

For experience as Professor of Special Education, there were seven respondents that had experience as a teacher typically between 1 to 5 years with a percentage of 35%, 9 respondents in the group had an experience of 6 to 10

years with the percentage of 45% and 1 respondents have experience in the range of 50 to 60 years at 5%. The rest are 3 respondents who have experience as a special education teacher for 16 years and upwards with a percentage of 15%. For information on the number of students diagnosed with autism and the number of students with autism, all 20 respondents of this study was to provide information regarding their experience. Meanwhile, all 20 respondents have an interest to educate students with autism.

Table 1: Knowledge level of the information about autism in special education teachers

Question	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Certainly	Totally Agree	Agree	Mean
Levels in the level of autism are mild, moderate and severe.	-	-	2 (10%)	14 (70%)	4 (20)	4:10
The probability for boys and girls to have autism is 4:1.	-	1 (5%)	14 (70%)	5 (25%)	-	3:20
Difficult to communicate between the problems faced by children with autism.	-	-	-	13 (65%)	7(35%)	4:35
Children with autism are more individualistic	-	-	-	9 (45%)	11 (55)	4:55
Children diagnosed with autism have problems with social interaction.	-	-	-	13 (65%)	7(35%)	4:35
Children with autism demonstrate behaviours and interests to things repeatedly	1 (5%)	-	4 (20%)	7 (35%)	8(40%)	4:05
Emotions in children with autism are variable and difficult to predict.	2 (10%)	-	3 (15%)	11 (55%)	4(20%)	3.85
Children with autism can accept changes.	5 (25%)	6 (30%)	3 (15%)	6 (30%)	-	2:50

Based on the analysis in the Table 1, the response obtained for the first question namely stages in autism are ranked mild, moderate and severe, found that the mean average respondent is 4.10 where as many as 2 respondents answered "not sure", 14 respondents answered "agree" and 4 respondents answered "strongly agree". Meanwhile for the second question, which relates to 'the probability for boys and girls to have autism is 4:1, 1 respondents answered "do not agree", 14 replied "definitely not," and the remaining 5 respondents answered "agree". The mean average of respondents for this second question is 3.20. For the third question, the difficulty of communication between the problems faced by children with autism, the mean average of respondent is 4:35. Respondents on average answered "agree" and "strongly agree" with this statement, which each amounted to 13 people and 7 people.

The fourth question relates to children with autism are more individualistic and a total of 9 respondents answered "agree" and 11 respondents answered "strongly agree". The Mean average of respondents for this question is 4.55. For the fifth question: children diagnosed with autism have problems with social interaction, the mean average of respondents was 4:35. Respondents on average answered "agree" and "strongly agree" with this statement, which each amounted to 13 people and 7 people.

As for the sixth question, namely with regards to 'Children with autism demonstrate behaviours and interests repeatedly, 1 respondents answered 'Strongly disagree', 4 person answered "certainly", 7 respondents answered "agree" and the remaining 8 respondents answered "Strongly agree". The Mean average of respondents for this second question is 4:05. The seventh question which explains "the emotional aspect of a child with autism that is variable and difficult to predict", as many as 2 respondents answered "strongly disagree", 3 respondents answered "not sure", 11 respondents answered "agree" and 4 people answered "strongly agree". The Mean average of the respondent is 3.85. For the eighth question: "Children with autism can accept changes", a total of 5 respondents answered "strongly disagree", 6 respondents answered "do not agree", 3 respondents answered "not sure" and 6 answered "agree". The mean average of the respondent is 2.50.

A. Level of Professionalism of Special Education Teachers

Responses were obtained from the statement, in this section the mean average response was 4:50 when asked about the help and guidance of a professional

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expert or autism specialist to develop appropriate programmes for children with autism. When asked about additional training courses on autism can be of benefit to the teachers, the mean average of the respondent is 4.70. Based on the response on 'event specialist autism in my area, I will use the individual as the source of reference' the mean average is 4:40. These findings demonstrate that the level of professionalism in special education teachers in order to increase their knowledge and effort to educate autistic students more effectively is high. When asked about 'I will never get bored of treating the autistic

children's illness', the mean average of their responses is high at 4.15. Respondents also gave a high mean average when asked about the deficiency in children with autism themselves as a burden to the teacher with a percentage of 4.25. They are also deciding to become an expert in autism and even need to add more knowledge by taking courses and additional training when the mean average of their responses is 3.75. The table 2 below shows the information about the professionalism of the special education teachers in educating students with autism.

Table 2: The information about the professionalism of the special education teachers in educating students with autism

Question	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Certainly	Agree	Totally Agree	Mean
I love when getting help and guidance from professionals or autism specialist to develop appropriate programs for children with autism.	-	-	-	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	4:50
I think the courses and additional training in the field of autism can be beneficial to me.	-	-	-	6 (30%)	14 (70%)	4.70
If there is an autism specialist in my area, I will use the individual as a source of reference.	-	-	-	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	4:40
I will never tire to treat the ills of children with autism.	-	-	2 (10%)	13 (65%)	5 (25%)	4:15
I never considered the deficiency in children with autism as a burden to me.	-	1 (5%)	-	12 (60%)	7 (35%)	4:25
I am interested to become an expert in autism, I even need to add more knowledge by taking courses and additional training.	-	-	8 (40%)	9 (45%)	3 (15%)	3.75

B. Level of Knowledge of Special Education Teachers with Their Professionalism

The researcher has chosen inter-correlation test to achieve the fourth objectives namely to assess the

extent of the relationship between knowledge and professionalism of special education teachers in educating students with autism (Table 3).

Table 3: Results of inter-correlation test

Correlations			
		Knowledge	Professionalism
Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	1	.121
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.611
	N	20	20
Professionalism	Pearson Correlation	.121	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.611	
	N	20	20

The inter-correlation analysis results show the correlation between the level of knowledge and professionalism ($r=.121$). These results indicate the level of knowledge affecting professionalism. This means, knowledge level influences the professionalism of special education teachers.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of studies that have been analysed by the researchers which are based on the

data from questionnaires obtained from the respondents, the study found out that special education teachers have a high level of knowledge about autism and the characteristics possessed by students with autism.

The study also assessed the level of professionalism of the special education teachers in educating students with autism. The results showed that the teachers are very interested in educating students with autism and the level of professionalism of teachers is also high.

The findings of a recent study, namely to assess the level of knowledge affecting the professionalism of special education teachers in educating students with autism have a positive relationship with the level of professionalism.

The findings were that the level of knowledge of special education teachers about autism affects the level of professionalism of the special education teachers in educating students with autism. This shows that the research hypothesis is accepted in that there is a relationship between the level of knowledge and professionalism of the special education teachers to educate students with autism. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the research hypothesis is accepted.

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