

## TEACHER TRAINING TO INCREASE TEACHER'S COMPETENCY IN TEACHING AUTISM CHILD

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**Abstract:** Autism teacher that is competence is able to educate autism child that are increasing throughout the year. The aim of this study is to identify the competency of special education teacher in teaching autistic child and curriculum in teacher training. This study used quantitative approaches and questionnaire is built to collect the data. A total of 107 primary teachers in Jasin Melaka have been selected by purposive sampling for this survey. The study found that special education teachers are less competency in using evidence based teaching for autism. Data shows that most of the teachers have not received any training in how to teach autistic child during teaching training in university or teacher training center. This study is important to modify the current teacher training course related to autism to increase the quality of teachers.

**Keywords:** competency, autism, evidence based learning

Autism is known to have repetitive behaviour and communication problem. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Autism student is increasing greatly that it has been reported that there is 1 autism child in every 68 child birth. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

In Malaysia, autism student is categorized as 'student with learning difficulties' and studies at local primary school integrated with special education. It means that autism children will be studying together with other students with learning difficulties like Down syndrome, slow learner, global delay and hyperactive. However, if autism student is being included, they will be studying together with mainstream students.

Symptoms and characteristics of autism are varies. Therefore they need teacher that is skilful and knowledgeable to fulfill their need in learning process. (Simpson, 2005). Without proper guideline, autism children might have long-life predicament whereas, under proper guidance, autism children can continue living without facing much troubles. (Gulec Aslan, Kircaali Iftar & Uzuner, 2009).

It is challenging for schools to be able to provide autism teachers that are competence. A competence autism teacher should be skilful, knowledgeable, and is positive towards autism children. However, many researchers have been reporting the lack of teacher qualities due to the teacher training provided. Therefore the question remaining in whether teachers are capable in handling autism students that are unique and been increasing year to year.

An autism teacher should be able to a) plan and prepare individualized education program (IEP) for every autism student based on their requirement. (Sari & Ilik, 2014; Avcioglu, 2005), b) communicate and recognise students' need, c) encourage student participation (Aksu, 2000), d) Focus in problem solving and learning objectives and e) Knowledgeable and able to tolerate with students (Yok, 1998 & MEB, 2008).

In order to be a qualified special education teacher, they must process knowledge in knowing how to select suitable teaching strategies for each student. In America, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) has obligated every teacher to use evidence based practise to teach autism student. However, there is no such rule in Malaysia to help implementating these vital strategies in teaching. Instead, it is a question to ask whether all of the special education teachers know the existence and functionality of these evidence based practise strategies.

Past research reported that teachers rarely implement evidence based practise. (Hess, Morrier, Heflin & Ivey, 2008). This is due to the lack of training in teacher training as a result of not knowing the most effective way to teach autism child. As a result, teacher institution could not decide to focus on which evidence based practise to be delivered to every teacher.

Eric Shyman (2012) stated that teacher training prefer an overall certification for special education

teacher compare to a certification specific to autism. In this case, even though teachers with the certificate can be accepted to teach, but it doesn't mean that the teacher has the qualification to handle autism student with the lack of emphasises during teacher training program.

Toran, Westover, Sazlina, Suziyani & Mohd Hanafi (2016) have done a research about teacher competency, knowledge level and readiness in teaching autism student. Result shown that teacher has moderate level competency in knowing how to choose appropriate intervention for students.

Previous research is being done generally without specify on every evidence based teaching. In this research, it will focus on every evidence based teaching that has been proved empirically to know that whether they were being applied by special education teachers in school. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to define the following: (a) To identify special education teacher level of competency in using teaching strategies. (b) To identify whether teacher training offer autism related courses for teacher.

## METHOD

This is a quantitative survey research. This research is being done by purposive sampling which focus on special education teachers in Jasin Melaka. A total of 28 primary school integrated with special education are involved in this study. 107 teachers have given response to the questionnaire delivered to each school.

The questionnaire is divided into 3 sections which is A, B and C. Section A focus on demography which comprises of 6 items. Questions asked is gender, age, teaching experience, teaching experience in special education, number of autism students that has been taught and lastly number of autism student in current school. Section B focus on level of education which comprises of 7 items. Questions from Section B was adapted from Schwart & Darger (2008) in their research to identify level of knowledge in autism among pathologies. Section C focus on teacher's competency in using evidence based practises strategies. A total of 30 strategies which refer from Simpson et al., (2005) have been selected. The strategies are grouped into 5 categories which is interpersonal, cognitive, neurology & biology, skill and others. Section C was adapted from Autism Treatment Survey (ATS) by Morrier, Hess & Heflin (2011) to investigate characteristics of autism teacher that used evidence based teaching strategies on autism student. In each strategy, sample is required to choose and circle one answer which is in 5 likert form, ranging from very disagree to very agree. Lastly, sample is given a chance to list out

strategies that is not listed in the question.

Analyse is done by using SPSS Version 22. Calculation of percentage, mean, and frequency will be done and displayed in table or chart.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Among the 107 samples that are included in this research, 29% are man and 77% are woman. Most of them are age 30 to 40 years old. A total of 59.8% of teachers have 10 years experience teaching in special education and most of them reported to have around 1 to 5 autism students in their current school.

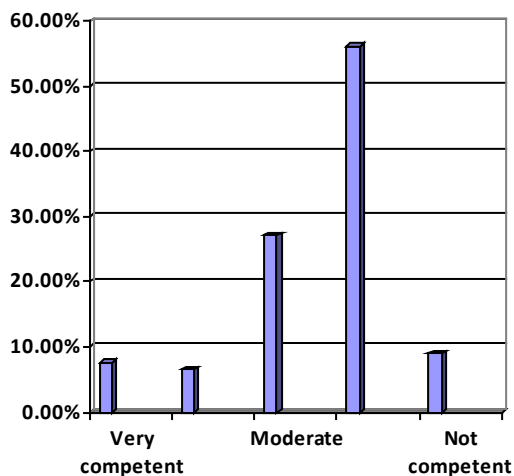
**Table 1: Demography**

	Category	Finding	
		Fre- quency	Percent- age
<b>Gender</b>	Female	77	72
	Male	29	27.1
<b>Age</b>	20-30	12	11.2
	30-40	54	50.5
	40-50	37	34.6
	50-60	4	3.7
<b>Experience teaching as a special education teacher</b>	0-5	23	21.5
	5-10	64	59.8
	10-15	16	15.0
	15-20	4	3.7
<b>Number of autism in current school</b>	0-5	92	86.8
	5-10	11	10.4
	10-15	2	1.9
	15-20	1	0.9

### *Evidence based teaching strategies*

Among the 30 teaching strategies, only 7.5% of sample reported that they are skillful and knowledgeable in using the strategies. Another 6.5% of sample stated that they are competent, 27.1% in moderate level of competency, 56.1% less competent and lastly 9% are not competent in using the teaching strategies. From those 30 teaching strategies, the strategies that have the highest reported usage is in category neurology & biology, following by others, interpersonal, skill, and cognitive.

**Chart 1: Competency level in Teaching strategy**



*Teacher training program*

Result shows that there is 87.9% of sample own a degree level of education and only 7.5% own a diploma and 4.7% own master level. Among them, only 72.9% have certificate in special education whereas the left do not.

A total of 49.5% of sample reported that they have never attend any courses fully about autism whereas 28% said that they attended 1 course, 7.5% attended 2 courses and 10.4% attended more that 3 courses during teacher training.

A total of 40.2% sample reported that they have never attend course partly about autism whereas 31.8% said that they have attended 1 related course, 11.2 % attended 2 courses, and 11.2% attended 3 or more courses.

Courses that have been attended are mostly about modification behavior following by intervention, therapy and language. Besides, samples also reported that most of the training given are being held by Seamoe Sen, Permata Kurnia or Teaching training centre.

**Table 2: Teacher training**

	Category	Finding	
		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Level of Education</b>	Diploma	8	7.5
	Degree	94	87.9
	Muda		
	Master	5	4.7
<b>Certification</b>	Yes	78	72.9
	No	29	27.1

<b>Courses fully about autism</b>	0 course	53	49.5
	1 course	30	28.0
	2 course	8	7.5
	3+ course	11	10.3
<b>Courses partly about autism</b>	0 course	43	40.2
	1 course	34	31.8
	2 course	12	11.2
	3+ course	12	11.2

**Discussion**

The result shows that most of the special education teacher in Jasin Melaka are less competence in using teaching strategy to teach autism student. The introduction of theory and practices of strategies were not delivered to teacher during teacher training. It caused teacher not know how to handle autism student that is so unique emotionally, socially, psychomotor and behaviour. This finding is supported by Toran et al., (2016) who stated that special education teacher has moderate level of competency in deciding proper intervention for autism student. Knowledge and skill in using appropriate intervention that has been proved empirically is essential to educate autism student that is increasing in number. It is supported by Morrier et al., (2011), Scheuermann et al., (2003) & Simpson (2004) who said that teacher training has to focus in teaching strategy.

According to the result yielded, teaching strategy that has been greatly used is under category neurology and biology which refer to sensory integration in this research. It is surprise to know that teachers know better sensory integration compared to other teaching strategies that are well known. It is reported that teachers might gain knowledge in using sensory integration via reading from book, conferences or sharing between teachers (Leong et al., 2013). Even though sensory integration is costly but it has been proven that this intervention manage to modify and overcome student behaviour.

The second highest competency reported by teachers fall in others category which refer to music therapy, art and integrated movement therapy. Music, art and physical education are included in special education curriculum. Even though without specific training in each subject, but it has been reported that teachers have general knowledge and skill in all those therapies due to their experiences in teaching and also chances to practise it in classes.

The lowest teaching strategies used fall in cognitive category. Even though strategies like social stories and social decision making strategies are widely used in other country, but result showed that it is less applicable in Malaysia. It might be caused by less

training provided in Malaysia. Unlike in other country, teaching strategies in cognitive category is trained via workshop or being included in teaching training (Morrier, 2011).

Other than these 30 teaching strategies picked from past research, teachers suggested that they have been using Al-Quran reading as intervention for autism child. According to past research, by reading Al-Quran, it helps to lessen stress and has calming effect (Siti, 2013). This finding is supported by Noor Ashikin (2013) that reported that al-Quran manage to bring peace to person who recite it. Meanwhile, no report has mentioned that reciting Al-Quran manages to help autism child emotionally and verbally.

### *Teacher training*

Result show that most of the teacher does not receive training about autism fully or partly. Those attended reported that the courses being held are mostly short courses without involving all teachers. Therefore, only parts of the teachers that have the opportunities to attend the courses gain knowledge about autism. On the other hand, there are also no practical chances in using teaching strategies which cause teacher to have no idea in how to implement these teaching strategies correctly. This finding is supported by Holdheide & Reschly (2008) who stated that teacher training need to focus on the need of autism student specifically from academic, social, language, teaching strategies aspects.

The lack of training might be caused by setting of the classroom itself in which autism student is studying together with other student with learning difficulties. Therefore, teacher training mostly focus on general

teaching strategy so that teacher can handle all students at one time. This is supported by Eric Shyman (2012) who stated that teacher training is focus on overall certification without emphasising on autism student. Even though teacher might be well trained in handling the whole class with different types of students, but autism student might be neglected as their need required special attention and treatment, different from other students.

This problem should be fixed in order to produce a quality autism teacher. Courses related to autism have to be introduced in teacher training as the first step to help autism students. This is supported by Toran et al., (2016) who stated that currect teacher training program has to be modified to increase teacher's competency in using teaching strategy correctly:

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Teaching strategy are essential to student development. This study can be taken as ministry reference in order to plan and modify current teacher training program so that teachers produced will be equipped with knowledge in this field.

The lack of training might be caused by setting of the classroom itself in which autism student is studying together with other student with learning difficulties. Therefore, teacher training mostly focus on general teaching strategy so that teacher can handle all students at one time. This problem should be fixed in order to produce a quality autism teacher. Courses related to autism have to be introduced in teacher training as the first step to help autism students.

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