

CO-CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES AS A SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of social inclusion is an alternative to social learning for special needs students. This effort is aimed at giving special needs students the opportunity to learn social skills before joining the community at large. The purpose of this study is to obtain information on social inclusion in the context of special needs students' involvement in co-curriculum activities. This quantitative study was conducted in two schools involving a sample of 48 teachers using a set of questionnaires. From the descriptive statistical and Structural Equation Modelling using Partial Least Squares analyses, it was found that teachers' involvement required comprehensive and structured strategies in the form of active collaboration. In addition, the teachers agreed that special needs students should be given the option of engaging in activities which helped them to show their talents rather than just follow their teachers' consistent and permissive instructions. The implication of this study is that the implementation of co-curricular activities as an alternative to special needs students' social learning needs to be evaluated.

Keywords: special needs students, co-curriculum, social inclusion, social learning, active collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Special needs students or SEN require inclusive teaching and learning processes within and outside the classroom. The development of inclusive education has expanded globally, including in Malaysia. The Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013 provide for the academic progress of SEN. However, the regulations focus on inclusion within a class, while inclusive developments need to begin in social form (Coates, 2011). Ferguson (2008) stated that the latest data showed positive development of inclusive education, which benefited many parents who placed their special needs children in inclusive classes.

This study focuses on structured strategies used by teachers in planning uniformed units, clubs, associations and annual school activities which need to involve SEN. Involvement in these groups and activities is expected to enable SEN to join mainstream students in co-curricular activities. According to Koster, Pijl, Nakken, and Houten (2010), involvement in co-curricular activities in a planned manner requires a structured approach. Teachers need to focus on maximising the number of SEN who take part in the school-led activities. This study will examine the involvement of SEN in these organised activities.

The study will look at social inclusion of the students and the comprehensive strategies needed to provide space for the structuring of co-curricular activities in schools. It will also give special attention to active collaborative efforts to provide a more inclusive environment for SEN so that they will have more opportunities to take part in school activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of the term “social inclusion” needs to be translated into a larger perspective. The discussions mentioned by Koster et al. (2010) indicated that social inclusion could enable SEN to enter the mainstream group of students. Various efforts should be made to develop social inclusion so that it is implemented not only in the classroom (Adams, 2017). Among the aspects which could be used as back-up is the field of co-curriculum. Co-curriculum activities could help all students to interact in an unrestricted environment (Brooks & Bianca, 2013). These also provide the opportunity for SEN to be in situations where they could interact better than in a classroom. Rani and Keshwal (2016) emphasised that co-curriculum activities could help make the school environment a learning platform for teachers to learn about SEN.

Character creation can be formed depending on the students' talents and interests. This statement is the basis for the creation of the items used in this study. The assertion expressed by Koster, Timmerman, Nakken, Pijl, and Van (2009) revealed that the concern about collaborative efforts. This study gives priority to the efforts and planning made by teachers in evaluating the active involvement of SEN with mainstream students. The assessments carried out by the researchers found that teachers were the catalyst for active collaboration between the mainstream and SEN teams; therefore, various efforts and cooperation were needed to clarify this situation in its implementation in Malaysia.

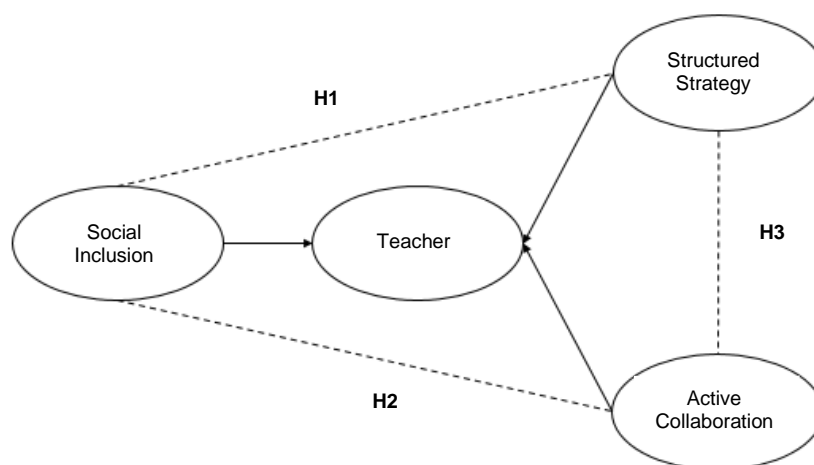


Figure 1: Research Framework and Hypotheses

Hypotheses

- H1: There is a positive relationship between social inclusion and structured strategy.
H2: There is a positive relationship between social inclusion and active collaboration.
H3: There is a positive relationship between structured strategy and active collaboration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study used data obtained from questionnaires that were distributed to respondents from two different schools who were selected through purposive sampling. The respondents answered 24 questions and the data was processed in the form of relationship constructs that are shown in Figure 1. The use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in this study helped to assess the relationship among social inclusive constructs, structured strategy constructs, and active collaboration constructs. Three hypotheses were used to test this model to explain the relationship between the three constructs which influenced the insertion of social inclusiveness in co-curricular activities.

Instrument

The research methodology of this study involved three settings: the development of research instruments, the setting of the respondents, and data analysis. This study used purposive sampling which involved two groups of teachers: mainstream and special education.

The instrument was developed by the researchers using a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was distributed to the respondents in two schools and subjected to exploratory factor analysis and the validation process comprising the three stages of test, retest, and pilot test.

From the pilot test, Cronbach's alpha for the whole instrument was 0.926, while for the construct of Social inclusion was 0.947, structured strategy 0.907, and active collaboration 0.923. The survey items were constructed from Koster et al. (2010), Chamberlain, Kasari, and Rotheram-Fuller (2007), Rani and Keshwal (2016), and Brooks and Bianca (2013).

The instrument was divided into two parts –Section A, which consisted of three demographic questions on gender, type of teacher, and academic, and Section B which comprised 24 questions representing the three constructs.

Data Analysis

In this study, different tools were used to analyse the data and obtain an overview of the three constructs. The first data analysis employed IBM SPSS 21.0 to process the descriptive analysis and reliability of the data collected as well as access the demographic profile of the sample and internal consistency of the constructs.

The second measurement, which was the partial least squares (PLS) based structural equation modelling (SEM), was used to analyse the constructs answered. As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), this study assessed the properties of measurement scales for the convergent and discriminant validities and then the constructed composite reliability by using the confirmatory factor analysis followed by the SEM analysis to test the hypotheses. Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006) suggested SEM using PLS which is a popular statistical technique for multivariate data analysis in social and behavioural sciences and education. This is due to its ability to model latent constructs under the conditions of non-normality and small-medium sample sizes (Ali, Ryu, & Hussain, 2015).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The 40 respondents comprised 22 men and 18 women. Based on ethnicity, the respondents could be divided into 26 Malays, eight Indians and six Chinese. They also consisted of 23 special education teachers and 17 mainstream teachers. As for their academic background, 28 have a bachelor's degree while 13 have a master's degree.

The findings of this study were divided into two analyses, namely, the measurement model and the structural model.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated by examining the outer loadings, cross-loading (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), convergent validity (CV), and discriminant validity (DV). The structural model was evaluated by SEM-PLS 2.0.

Firstly, the measurement model was tested for CV. This was assessed through factor loadings, CR, and AVE (Hair et al., 2006). According to Chin (1998), loading items must be more than 0.6 to be considered as the recommended value. The results of this study showed that all constructs were accepted because the AVE value range was between 0.695 to 0.705 as listed in Table 1. The recommended value for CR exceeded 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006), as it was in the range of 0.929 to 0.945.

Table 1: Validity and Reliability of Constructs

	Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Inclusion		0.705	0.945	0.947
S1- Terms of Social Inclusion	0.917			
S2- Implementation of Inclusion	0.945			
S3- Implementation of Co-curriculum	0.788			
S4- Involvement of SEN in school activity	0.826			
S5-Teacher's Responsibility	0.949			
S6- Special Training for Teacher	0.878			
S7- Readiness to Implementation	0.767			
Structured Strategy		0.652	0.929	0.907
S8- Introduction of Social Inclusion	0.915			
S9- Acceptances among Students	0.827			
S10- SEN Interaction	0.755			
S11- Friendship Program	0.641			
S12- Understanding Co-Curriculum	0.901			
S13- Interaction	0.748			
S14- Student's social self-perception	0.835			
Active Collaboration		0.695	0.932	0.923
S15 Sharing Uniform unit	0.675			
S16- Sharing Club	0.942			
S17- Sharing Sport Interest	0.760			
S18- Re-organization	0.945			
S19- Teacher's Involvement	0.771			
S20- Student's Buddy System	0.743			
S21- Mentoring	0.942			

Table 2 shows the discriminant validity for the three constructs, which were accepted because AVE achieved the minimum value. Meanwhile, AVE, which reflects the overall

amount of variance in the indicators, was accounted for by the latent construct and its recommended value exceeded 0.5 (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	SS	ST	AC
Social Inclusion	0.809		
Structured Strategy	0.966	0.833	
Active collaboration	0.835	0.761	0.840

Table 3 shows the cross-loading. For this study, the square root of the AVE (diagonal values) of each construct was larger than the corresponding correlation coefficients, indicating adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As discussed by Ramayah, Yeap, and Ignatius (2013), the low correlation between the measure of interest and other constructs indicate good discriminant validity. A comparison of the loadings across the columns in Table 3 also indicates that each indicator's loading on its own construct was, in all cases, higher than all cross-loadings with other constructs. Thus, the results indicated discriminant validity between all constructs based on the cross-loadings criterion. Table 3 shows that the weight of the first-order constructs on the designated second-order construct indicated social inclusion, structured activity, and active collaboration.

Table 3: Cross-Loadings

	SS	ST	AC
S1- Terms of Social Inclusion	0.917	0.676	0.554
S2- Implementation of Inclusion	0.945	0.435	0.532
S3- Implementation of Co-curriculum	0.788	0.499	0.676
S4- Involvement of SEN in school activity	0.826	0.433	0.573
S5-Teacher's Responsibility	0.949	0.554	0.676
S6- Special Training for Teacher	0.878	0.532	0.435
S7- Readiness to Implementation	0.767	0.676	0.499
S8- Introduction of Social Inclusion	0.564	0.915	0.433
S9- Acceptances among Students	0.453	0.827	0.554
S10- SEN Interaction	0.573	0.755	0.532
S11- Friendship Program	0.676	0.641	0.674
S12- Understanding Co-Curriculum	0.435	0.901	0.554
S13- Interaction	0.499	0.748	0.532
S14- Student's social self-perception	0.433	0.835	0.676
S15- Sharing Uniform unit	0.554	0.433	0.675
S16- Sharing Club	0.532	0.554	0.942
S17- Sharing Sport Interest	0.674	0.532	0.760
S18- Re-organization	0.567	0.674	0.945
S19- Teacher's Involvement	0.563	0.567	0.771
S20- Student's Buddy System	0.455	0.563	0.743
S21- Mentoring	0.756	0.433	0.942

Structured Model

The structured model and hypotheses in this study were tested by Smart PLS 2.0 as recognised by Ringle, Wende, and Will (2005). A bootstrapping procedure with 500 interactions was performed to examine the statistical significance of the weights of sub-constructs. According to Chin, Peterson, and Brown (2008), researchers should run the bootstrapping procedure. Figure 1 shows the results of the bootstrapping analysis. The results of t-values showed positive relationship between social inclusion and structured strategy, social inclusion and active collaboration, and structured strategy and active collaboration.

Table 4 presents the complete results of the structured model and hypotheses testing. All three hypotheses were strongly supported in relation to the three constructs.

Table 4: Weight of the first-order constructs (Hypotheses Testing)

Hypotheses		S-Beta	S-Error	t-Value	Decision
H1	Social Inclusion to Structured Strategy	0.988	0.025	42.482**	Supported
H2	Social Inclusion to Active Collaboration	0.867	0.021	42.194**	Supported
H3	Structured Strategy to Active Collaboration	0.760	0.025	39.767**	Supported

DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis showed that social inclusive development should be introduced early during the implementation of co-curricular activities. The data obtained showed no significant differences between the three constructs used in this study. From the empirical data obtained, the use of buddy systems in the execution of an activity of a dedicated unit, club, and association showed good acceptance by SEN. Similarly among teachers, acceptance in the context of structured strategy in implementing co-curricular activities revealed better acceptance of the assumption that groups of teachers could perform active collaboration activities. According to Goodwin and Watkinson (2000), the use of intermediaries i.e. peers could help SEN to engage more actively in co-curricular activities. The strategies described in the study supported the estimation that acceptance by SEN could be enhanced with the implementation of activities together. The implementation of active collaboration between teachers is also considered similar. From the hypotheses, it could be concluded that there is a positive relationship between social inclusion and strategy of implementation and between social inclusion and active collaboration. These two hypotheses clearly showed that the teachers were well prepared for inclusion.

The implementation of inclusion using co-curriculum activity is suggested in this paper. The involvement of pupils in sports can provide a clear difference in scores, especially in terms of more comprehensive involvement of students (Lopes, 2015). Third hypotheses also showed a very good relationship between structured activity and active collaboration. It means special education teachers need to enhance motivation and support the planning of the mainstream teachers. From active collaboration, acceptance among students will be better.

The co-curriculum implementation scenario in Malaysia at present shows a separation made against SEN during sports activities at school (Adams, 2017). Therefore, there needs to be coordination so that highly functioning SEN could take part together and social inclusiveness could be translated more clearly. Coates (2011) explained that in terms of communication, consistent planning can provide an opportunity for SEN to practise communication skills. The opportunity to communicate could be implemented well in the context of co-curriculum. This statement is parallel to the explanation by Solish, Perry, and Minnes (2010) who emphasised social inclusion.

Implementation of social inclusion in the perspective of co-curricular activities is necessary to explain the involvement of teachers as discussed by Bailey (2008). Teachers need to be involved in planning so that SEN can participate in the activities being implemented. According to Hwang and Evan (2011), through the co-curriculum implementation, acceptance of the SEN will occur naturally despite obvious differences in achievement and physical aspects.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the data analysis, the insertion of social inclusiveness through co-curriculum activities in schools can build a generation that can accept SEN. For implementation in Malaysia, adjustments should be made in the context of management to plan strategies and collaborations among school communities. This study also highlighted the idea of creating a buddy system among students so that planning could be made to improve the existing system. Teachers need to plan the activities of associations, clubs and uniform units regardless of student groups. SEN must be involved in the planned activities so that the inclusive implementation described in Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013 could be extended to various fractions and not just focus on implementation in the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions/support of all members and schools involved in this research.

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