LEADING SPECIAL EDUCATION IS NOT AN EASY JOB: EXPRESSIONS OF HEADMASTERS AND PRINCIPALS

Mohd Norazmi bin Nordin¹, Izzat Fadhli Bin Hamdan², Ekmil Krisnawati Erlen Jont³, Nor Zanira binti Abd Manan⁴, Nor Adila binti Mohd Noor⁵

¹Cluster of Education and Social Sciences, Open University Malaysia
²English Language Teaching Centre, Malaysia
³Faculty of Law, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
⁴Law Department, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka, Malaysia
⁵Contemporary Islamic Studies Academy, Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

School is a place where learning takes place formally. That is where the implementation of formal education programs lies. Through schools as well, the education system can be evaluated for effectiveness in terms of policy and implementation. Due to the diverse needs in determining the potential of students, there are various types of schools and programs created. One of the most important programs in the education system in Malaysia is the special education program. The program places students with special needs in one community in selected schools. This special education program also involves various categories of students such as visually impaired, hearing impaired and learning impaired. Even in the category of learning problems itself there are various types of student disabilities. In leading special education programs in a better direction, then school leadership needs to play a big role. Due to this diversity, there are various challenges in implementing leadership in special education. This brief study was conducted to explore the opinions of school principals on the challenges of leading special education. The study was conducted qualitatively by interviewing 11 headmasters in a special education program in Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia. The findings of this study are expected to provide a basic overview of the challenges of special education leadership.

Keywords: Special Education Unique Leadership Theory, educational leadership, special education

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a reflection of the success of an organization that is led. Effective or not a leadership can be seen through the success possessed by the organization (Abdul Jalil et al., 2021; Mohd Noh et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2021; Roszi et al., 2021; Tumisah et al., 2021). In the school environment, leadership can determine the success of a school. If leaders are able to exercise their leadership effectively and appropriately, then we will be able to see the success enjoyed by the school (Irma et al., 2021; Suzana et al., 2021; Rohanida et al., 2021; Nazrah et al., 2021; Shahrulliza et al., 2021). However, leadership is not something that is easy to implement in an organization, including in schools. The situation becomes more difficult when it involves students with various special needs (MBK) and complex staff problems. Special education desperately needs unique and effective leadership in serving its needs. The theory below may be used as a reference in conducting leadership in special education.

Norazmi Special Education Unique Leadership Theory

In maintaining the success of the special education program, the welfare of teachers and SNS needs to be taken into account (Norazmi, 2020). Therefore, the basis for this theory of leadership is based on leadership those focuses on:

i. The Welfare of Special Education Teachers
ii. Achievement of Special Education Students

To achieve this, leadership needs to control the task load of teachers and inculcate teachers’ job satisfaction, so that SNS achievement can be enhanced. As a result, school administrators need to have five uniqueness in their leadership:

i. First Unique: Unique Leadership Style

In leading a school organization or program involving special education, a school leader must have uniqueness in their leadership. This means that the style of leadership practiced should be consistent with the guidelines for the implementation of the work and scope of the special education teacher’s duties. In addition, their leadership must also be special in considering the needs of the SNS. In other words, the practice of leadership needs to be consistent with the acceptance of special education teachers and students. In order to make the leadership relevant, it is sometimes necessary to emphasize things that involve teacher work performance and student achievement. This unique leadership style is at the center of the autocratic and democratic leadership styles.

ii. Second Unique: Unique Knowledge

Knowledge of leadership is very important in managing special education. The uniqueness of this knowledge is that their knowledge must be meticulously as bottom up process. School leaders need to have knowledge of basic education fundamentals such as policies, scope rules and so on. Then, knowledge also needs to be satisfied regarding each of the features of SNS and their capabilities. This knowledge of SNS is important to prevent school leaders from setting goals beyond their SNS capabilities. After that, the knowledge of special education teachers should be taken into consideration. Their basic background, their service, their way of working, their commitment to the school and so on. On the top level, knowledge about leadership is needed in deciding what kind of leadership needs to be implemented.

iii. Third Unique: Unique Attitude

In addition to leadership styles and knowledge, school leaders also needs to have a unique attitude toward leading special education. Attitudes are concerned, empathy, love and more are at the discretion of deciding something for teachers and SNS.

iv. Fourth Unique: Unique Experience

The experience of managing special education is a unique and meaningful journey. In order to succeed in effective leadership, a leader leading a special education program needs to have direct experience with special education. This means that the leader must be in the special education program, in the special education teacher condition and in the SNS abilities. Keep in touch with them, hear them, experience the learning process with special education teachers and SNS. Gain experience by engaging in activities with a special education community at school or outside of school.

v. Fifth Unique: Unique Qualification

In order to become a leader who is qualified to lead a special education program, one must place themselves at the ready with the hustle and bustle of special education. Not only academic requirements, but management qualifications, community engagement, always wanting to find special education related knowledge, ready to serve special education and always bear the responsibility of special education.

The theory introduced is in support of existing leadership theories and adapted to the situation in special education. In line with the findings of this study and previous studies, this theory is an attempt to make special education more consistently through competitive and responsible leadership. It is hoped that this theory will help the school leadership to implement leadership focused on special education

II. BACKGROUND STUDY

Many among head teachers are exhausted in implementing leadership in special education because of the various forms of challenges faced (Mohd Arafat et al., 2021; Sumaiyah et al., 2021; Hifzan et al., 2021; Shahrul et al.,
2021; Helme et al., 2021). Nevertheless, they remain enthusiastic in carrying out their duties as leaders. Basically, special education is a unique place with a wide range of diversity as well as needs, not only of students, but also of teachers. In informal conversations as well as through the medium of social media, it can be observed that, head teachers in special education are very great with challenges. The challenge that comes may be because they are not from special education backgrounds, so, when they are assigned to a school that has a special education program, then a bit of constraint will occur. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the perceptions of principals regarding the challenges they face in leading special education.

III. METHODOLOGY

This brief needs study uses a qualitative approach in collecting and analyzing data. Interviews were conducted with 11 special education headmasters in Batu Pahat district. The interview sessions lasted for 15 to 30 minutes with discussions focused on the challenges faced in leading schools that have special education programs. The sessions were recorded and then transcribed for data analysis purposes. Thematic analysis was conducted on the resulting transcripts. The themes derived from the analysis became the findings of this study. These themes are also indicators of the results of this study.

FINDINGS

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Based on Table 1, there are five challenges faced by head teachers in leading special education. The intended challenges are diversity of categories of students with special needs, diverse teacher and staff problems, parents expectations, facilities and amenities, limited financial resources. All of these challenges were stated in the transcripts of the interviews that were analyzed. The main challenge stated by all 11 respondents was limited financial constraints. Followed by the challenge of lack of facilities and amenities to carry out activities for MBK. Next is the challenge in addressing parents’ high expectations in MBK achievement. Through the opinions of six out of 11 respondents, the challenge is also present through the diversity of categories of students with special needs and diverse teacher and staff problems.
IV. DISCUSSION

If examined to the findings of this study, it can be stated that, the biggest challenge faced by head teachers in special education is the problem of lack of financial funds in implementing the necessary activities in special education (Farah et al., 2021; Syahrul et al., 2021; Quah et al., 2021; Ahmad Syarifuddin et al., 2021; Jumiah et al., 2021). This challenge is always present because some activities involving special education require large funds. Unlike in the mainstream, special education-appropriate activities may require certain places and tools that can only be found at expensive prices (Mohd Ali et al., 2021; Parimala et al., 2021; Siti Jamilah et al., 2021; Nor Fauziyana et al., 2021; Noel et al., 2021). With regard to finance as well, then complete infrastructure is also a constraint as there are also schools that do not have disability-friendly facilities (OKU) (Ahmad Shafarin et al., 2021; Junaidah et al., 2021; Farah Adibah et al., 2021; Ahmad Shakani et al., 2021; Muhammad Amin et al., 2021). The challenge is further compounded by the constraints to obtain some special tools for the use of MBK in learning.

Challenges are also present from the parents. Some of them place high expectations on the school in making their children successful like mainstream students (Santibuana et al., 2021; Nor Diana et al., 2021; Zarina et al., 2021; Khairul et al., 2021; al., 2021; Rohani et al., 2021). The great desire of parents such as wanting MBK to succeed in public examinations and certain competitions makes the school pay more attention. In addition, the challenge is also present internally through the teachers and also the MBK itself. The diversity of MBK categories presents a formidable challenge to school leadership to provide good services. As is well known, each MBK has different abilities that require different focus and equipment. Similarly, the problems and backgrounds of teachers and staff are different and require different approaches by the school administration to address them (Badaruddin et al., 2021; Abdul Rasid et al., 2021).

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that each responsibility is accompanied by certain challenges. As leaders, of course they have anticipated this challenge. In addition, they are also prepared to face various challenges in leading special education. Personally, the researcher believes that all the head teachers involved in leading special education are those who are great and strong in overcoming any challenge, in order to provide the best service to MBK.

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