

GSAPS THE SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM: COUNTRY CASE STUDIES ANALYSIS ON MAINSTREAM TEACHERS' TEACHING-EFFICACY AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN JAPAN AND SINGAPORE

4014S316-1

Adrian Yap Yei Mian

Chief Advisor: Prof. KURODA Kazuo

Keywords: Teaching-efficacy, attitudes, special education, inclusive education, disabilities

"Creating an inclusive classroom" is no easy feat for education policy-makers and school educators to include students with special educational needs in the regular school settings. How we want to idealise our schools to become an inclusive educational institution depends on how the school leaders, educators and policy-makers put in their measures to realise inclusivity in the classrooms. For the past few decades, inclusive education is often pushed to the forefront of educational agenda and it becomes a frequently talked-about topic at educational conferences. Past research has indicated that teachers' teaching-efficacy and attitudes created significant impacts on their teaching competence and students' achievements (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Soodak & Podell, 1994; Wilczenski, 1992).

This dissertation focusses on two country case studies conducted in Japan and Singapore. It investigates how mainstream in-service teachers' teaching-efficacy and attitudes affect the inclusion outcome for the students with special needs in the regular classrooms. The study was executed in the sequential phases: Phase 1, a questionnaire-type research and Phase 2, a semi-structured interview research. This research project aims to identify what the important child-related, teacher-related and environment-related variables affect their teaching-efficacy and attitudes towards their students and why these particular factors produced the outcomes. This also sought to explore the relationship between teachers' teaching-efficacy and attitudes and to identify what kind of teaching-efficacy could best result in their positive attitudes towards students with special needs.

In Phase 1, a three-part questionnaire instrument was rolled out to 189 Japanese and 183 Singaporean mainstream teachers and this included three sections: demographic profiles of teachers, the Sentiments, Attitudes, Concerns regarding Inclusive Education (SACIE-R) scale to measure the level of attitudes and the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (TEIP) scale that measured their teaching-efficacy of mainstream teachers. Empirical findings suggested that Japanese teachers had slightly above-average teaching-efficacy and showed relatively neutral towards students with special needs. Based on the statistical analysis, it was found that teachers' prior experiences with students with special needs, presence of disabled family members, geographical locations in Japan, knowledge about policy and legislation related to inclusive education and confidence level to teach students with special needs had significant influence on their teaching-efficacy and attitudes. In the case of Singapore, teachers had quite high sense of teaching-efficacy but their attitudes were relatively neutral. Gender, educational levels, knowledge about local policy and legislation and training had significant impact on their teaching-efficacy and attitudes. In addition, Singaporean and Japanese in-service teachers' teaching-efficacy were found to be positively correlated with their attitudes towards inclusive education.

In the succeeding phase, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 38 Japanese and 15 Singaporean teachers who also participated in the earlier questionnaire researches. The objective of this narrative research was to follow up on the quantitative findings and to further explore their self-beliefs and perspectives about inclusion of students with special needs. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed different sets of findings for

two countries. In Japan, experienced teachers with prior experiences in teaching students with special needs were better advantaged due to their accumulation of mastery and vicarious experiences. Teachers with disabled family members had more positive attitudes towards students with special needs due to their constant interaction with their family kin. In Singapore, male teachers were found to have higher teaching-efficacy than female due to the local contextual factors and their stronger physical traits to handle children with behavioural problems. Another finding showed that secondary school teachers and teachers who attended in-service special needs education trainings were more positive than primary school teachers and teachers who did not attend any in-service training. Lastly, Japanese and Singaporean teachers shared their thoughts about different problems and how they identified their strategies to address these challenges to better include their students. Their concerns cited ranged from concerns about academic performances, school bullying, lack of teacher training, large class size to lack of specialized manpower and support for their students. They also shared that their strategies included modification of teacher pedagogies to match their learning needs and better collaborations with teachers and parents.

These frontier findings provide invaluable insights into Japanese and Singaporean mainstream teachers' attitudes and teaching-efficacy for inclusive class practices. Implications for policy and practice are also discussed; recommendations for better need to balance evidence-based trainings and practical trainings, affirmation of stronger collaboration between general and special needs teachers to better share resources and expertise and strong legal protection for students with special needs to safeguard their rights to inclusive education. These findings are salient as they could provide useful insights for the Ministry of Education in two countries, school leaders, and other stakeholders to better support the inclusion of students with special needs in the mainstream schools at both on-the-ground and policy levels.

References

- Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burden, R. (2000a). A Survey into Mainstream Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs in the Ordinary School in one Local Education Authority. *Educational Psychology*, 20(2), 191–211.
- Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, M. A. (1996). Teacher perceptions of mainstreaming/inclusion, 1958-1995: A research synthesis. *Exceptional Children*, 63, 59–74.
- Soodak, L. C., & Podell, D. M. (1994). Teachers' Thinking About Difficult-to-Teach Students. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 88(1), 44–51.
- Wilczenski, F. L. (1992). Measuring attitudes toward inclusive education. *Psychology in the Schools*, 29(4), 306–312.