PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION INTERNS ON THE MANAGEMENT OF CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS

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ABSTRACT

Teacher quality is one of the most important indicators of students' academic achievement. Lack of preparation is cited as one of the reasons why teachers leave their teaching profession.According to literature, teachers believe that students with disabilities in inclusive settings may detract from the instructional time as such students might be slow learners and have behavior problems and will require educators with specialized teaching skills. The participants of the study included students from an education faculty during their final semesters.Quantitative research methods were employed to examine interns' readiness and knowledge of evidence-based practices to manage classroom behaviors for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. The findings suggested that there was evidence that some teaching interns felt uncertain of their ability to manage classroom behaviors.Many participants expressed that they were uncertain about how they may cope with the pressures of classroom behavior management.

Key words: Teacher preparation, behavior management, teacher internship, inclusive education

Introduction

Several laws about students in special education have been mandated to provide effective and appropriate education. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was enacted in 1975 to stress the importance of mainstreamed educational settings. One of the important purposes of the act was to provide least restrictive environment for students in special education programs. Such laws has dramatically increased the demands that all teachers encounter in the educational settings. According to EHA, schools needed to establish a continuum of placement options (Kavale and Forness, 2000). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted as it required classroom teachers to teach more complex curriculum to the growing number of public school students who are economically disadvantaged and have difficulty in reaching educational resources at home (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Inclusive education is a philosophy and educational approach, which provides learning opportunities for both students with disabilities and those without disabilities (Idol, 2006). Inclusive environments allows educators to incorporate students with disabilities into the regular learning settings rather than exclude them from these environments (Norwich, 1999). According to research, the centerpiece of inclusive education is the academic success of all students (Dukes and Lamar-Dukes, 2006). Teacher interns have developed an opinion that having students with special needs in the classrooms will be very challenging for new teachers (Polloway, Patton, and Dowdy, 2001). They believe that students with special needs would detract from the instructional time as theymight be slow learners and have behavior problems and will need educators with specialized teaching skills. However, research suggests that students in inclusive classrooms would consistently benefit from such settings compared to those receiving special education services in segregated settings (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan, andShaw, 2000; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, andKaplan, 2005). Studies have indicated that teachers teaching in inclusive settings should not be concerned about having students with special needs as students with disabilities in such settings perform closer to students without disabilities on classroom tasks and achievement tests (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, andLevine, 2003).

Some of current research shows that teacher interns have the feelings of incapability about adequacy and preparedness in the classrooms (Katz, 1972). In addition, they have established substantial concerns about their inadequacy in classroom management (Burden, 1979; Fuller, 1969; Fuller and Brown, 1975; Katz, 1972). These concerns have been the focus of some of the educational institutions to not only examine the outcomes of their teacher programs, but assess the strategies that lead to such

outcomes (Slavin, 2007). These measures are crucial with respect to teachers' teaching and classroom management readiness (Cooper, Kurtts, Baber, and Vallecorsa, 2008).According Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), teacher education programs have focused on improving teacher effectiveness, providing information to educators and families to improve students' learning, implementing college standards for better educational practices, and providing support for student achievement in the nation (ESEA, 1965). Along with EHA and NCLB acts, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 also stress the importance of developing content knowledge that helps regular education teachers and special education teachers improve their teaching strategies for diverse learners such as students receiving special education services (Boe, Shin, and Cook, 2007).

Having negative feelings towards teaching profession may affect teacher retention. Teachers leave their professions due to having difficulty in managing student behaviors and increasing students' academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010).They also indicate that inadequate preparation for their classes may be a strong indicator for their leave as well (McKinney, Haberman, Stafford Johnson, and Robinson, 2008). Research suggests that teachers, who are successful in behavior and classroom management may establish an effective learning environment and remain in teaching profession for many years (Reschly and Holdheide, 2008).

Some research put emphasis on importance of evidence-based practices such as strategies to respond to discipline problems, reward appropriate student behaviors, observe students' academic success, maximize teaching content, and monitor expectations (Simonsen, Fairbank, Briesch, Myers, and Sugai, 2008). School districts in the US have been implementing evidence-based practices to support teachers in their classroom management strategies (Sugai and Horner, 2006). Although teachers in the field somewhat feel that they are ready to successfully address inappropriate student behaviors, it is difficult to indicate the same for teacher interns (Cooper et al.,2008). Teacher interns especially feel inadequate about students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Billingsley, Israel, and Smith, 2011; Regan and Michaud, 2011). They believe that having students with special needs in inclusive settings would require extra effort, time, and specialized teaching skills in various learning tasks. Therefore, some teacher preparation programs in the colleges create very dynamic curriculum for teacher interns so that they would not feel inadequate once they are in the field.

Purpose of the study
It is evident that teacher preparation programs focus on providing foundational strategies, which will serve as a capstone experience for teacher interns (Backhus and Thompson, 2006; Fernandez and Erbilgin, 2009; Kenny, 1998). Teacher interns obtain a teacher experience in the form of a semester-long internship. The internship usually take place in the final semester of teacher interns' baccalaureate study. By having the internship, teacher interns obtain an opportunity to refine their knowledge and successfully implement it in real-world situations. The aim of this study was to examine undergraduate teacher interns' preparedness when implementing classroom management strategies in inclusive classrooms. The study includes the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of readiness among teacher interns for managing the behaviors of students in inclusive classrooms?

2. How does the readiness of teacherinterns from different majors for managing the behaviors of students in inclusive classrooms differ from one another?

Table 1: Percentages of teacher interns participating in the study

Group	N	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Early Childhood Education	32	14.9	14.9
Elementary Education	42	19.5	34.4
English L.A. Education	44	20.5	54.9
Mathematics Education	34	15.8	70.7
Science Education	30	14.0	84.7
Social Sciences Education	33	15.3	100.0
Total	215	100.0	

Methodology

Setting

The survey was conducted at a large research university in the Midwestern United States, having an enrollment of 30,786 students. When the study took place, the college of education had an enrollment of 790 students. The number of faculty members were about 75. The college had the degree programs of Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Language Arts/English Education, Mathematics Education, Science Education, Social Sciences Education, Special Education, and World Language Education. Students from most of those programs participated in the study (Table 1).

Table 2: Percentages of genders participating in the study

Group	N	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	116	54.0	54.0
Male	99	46.0	100.0
Total	215	100.0	

Sample

A non-random sample was obtained in collaboration with the head of the Science Education Department. All students in the sample enrolled in a teaching internship program (N = 215).The sample included 116 female and 99 male participants (Table 2). A survey consisted of 15 questions was distributed to the participants. The participant were given enough time to answer all questions on the survey.

The Instrument

The surveyused in the study is called*thePre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Readiness for Behavior Management*(PSTPRBM). The instrument included 15 items and was developed by Garland, Garland, and Vazquez (2013). They validated the survey items through factor analysis. Results indicated that the instrument had three factors: Factor 1 = Preparedness (items = 5, 6, 9, 1, and 10), Factor 2 = Accommodations (items = 8, 4, 2, 7, 13, and 14), and Factor 3 = Communication (items = 11, 3, 12, and 15).The rating scale of the instrument had five possible answers (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree).Before this study was conducted, the instrument was pilot tested for its reliability, and coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was found as .81.

Data Analysis

The study took place in a research university. The participants answered 15 questions on the survey. After the data were collected, they were imported into SPSS 20.0 for further analysis.The data were analyzed based on means, standard deviation, and ANOVA tests. The mean scores of each question

and subscales were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Perceptions of education interns from different majors were analyzed by ANOVA test.

Results

The findings of the study are presented according to the mean scores of education interns on each item of the PSTPRBM survey. In addition, the scores of teacher candidates from each teaching major are compared on the basis of preparedness, accommodation, and communication.

Table 3: Summary of ranges, means, and standard deviations on items of PSTPRBM survey

Group	N	Min-Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q5	215	1-5	3.13	1.29
Q6	215	1-5	3.00	1.27
Q9	215	1-5	3.34	1.13
Q1	215	4-5	4.72	.44
Q10	215	3-5	4.26	.77
Q8	215	1-5	2.73	.89
Q4	215	2-5	3.39	1.03
Q2	215	2-5	4.13	.80
Q7	215	1-5	2.57	.98
Q13	215	1-5	3.87	.95
Q14	215	2-5	3.13	.83
Q11	215	1-5	3.97	.95
Q3	215	1-5	3.66	1.01
Q12	215	2-5	4.11	.83
Q15	215	1-5	3.36	1.11

Note.PSTPRBM = Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Readiness for Behavior Management.

The mean values on each items showed that education interns scored the highest on item 1 (M =4.72, SD = .44) and lowest on item 6(M = 2.57, SD = .98) of the survey (see Table 3). Education interns had high scores on item 10 (M =4.26, SD = .77), item 2 (M =4.13, SD = .80), and item 12 (M =4.11, SD = .83), and low scores on item 8 (M =2.73, SD = .89).

Table 4: Summary of ranges, means, and standard deviations on subscales of PSTPRBM survey.

Group	N	Min-Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Preparedness	215	2.40-5.00	3.69	.49
Accommodations	215	2.17-4.33	3.30	.38
Communications	215	2.25-5.00	3.78	.51

Note.PSTPRBM = Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Readiness forBehavior Management.

Education interns had different scores on the subscales-preparedness, accommodations, and communications- of PSTPRBM (see Table 4).They had highest mean score on communications (M = 3.78, SD = .51) and lowest mean score on accommodations (M = 3.30, SD = .38). Education interns also scored considerably high on preparedness (M = 3.69, SD = .49).

Table 5: One Way Anova test results between groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Preparedness	10.58	5	2.11	10.58	.000
Accommodations	6.92	5	1.38	11.97	.000
Communications	16.74	5	3.34	17.13	.000

Data analysis from Anova tests showed that there were significant differences on mean scores between education interns on preparedness with conditions $F(5, 209) = 10.58$, $p = .00$, $\eta2 = 10.58$, on accommodations with conditions $F(5, 209) = 11.97$, $p = .00$, $\eta2 = 6.92$, and on communications with conditions $F(5, 209) = 17.13$, $p = .00$, $\eta2 = 16.74$ (see Table 5).

Table 6: Multiple comparison between groups on Preparedness

Teacher		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Early Childhood Education	Elementary Education	.39*	.104	.003
	Mathematics Education	.58*	.110	.000
	Social Sciences Education	.71*	.110	.000
Elementary Education	Early Childhood Education	-.39*	.104	.003
	Social Sciences Education	.31*	.104	.028
English L.A. Education	Mathematics Education	.29*	.102	.043
	Social Sciences Education	.43*	.102	.001
Mathematics Education	Early Childhood Education	-.58*	.110	.000
	English L.A. Education	-.29*	.102	.043
Science Education	Social Sciences Education	.44*	.112	.001
Social Sciences Education	Early Childhood Education	-.71*	.110	.000
	Elementary Education	-.31*	.104	.028
	English L.A. Education	-.43*	.102	.001
	Science Education	-.44*	.112	.001

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Study findings showed that there were significant differences on mean scores of preparedness among education interns. Teacher candidates in Early Childhood Education obtained the highest mean scores (see Table 6). The difference on mean scores between Early Childhood Education teachers and Social Sciences Education teachers was the highest ($p = .00$). On the other hand, the difference on mean scores between English L.A. Education teachers and Mathematics Education teachers was the lowest ($p = .043$).

Table 7: Multiple comparison between groups on Accommodations

Teacher		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Early Childhood Education	Elementary Education	.23*	.079	.042
	English L.A. Education	.41*	.079	.000
	Mathematics Education	.59*	.083	.000
	Science Education	.36*	.086	.001
	Social Sciences Education	.43*	.084	.000
Elementary Education	Early Childhood Education	-.23*	.079	.042
	Mathematics Education	.35*	.078	.000
English L.A. Education	Early Childhood Education	-.41*	.079	.000
Mathematics Education	Early Childhood Education	-.59*	.083	.000
	Elementary Education	-.35*	.078	.000
Science Education	Early Childhood Education	-.36*	.086	.001
Social Sciences Education	Early Childhood Education	-.43*	.084	.000

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

After analyzing the multiple comparison results between each major, the results indicated that there were significant differences on mean scores of accommodations among education interns. Education interns in Early Childhood Education had the highest mean scores (see Table 7). The difference on mean scores between Early Childhood Education teachers and Mathematics Education teachers was the highest (p = .00). However, the difference on mean scores between Early Childhood Education teachers and Elementary Education was the lowest (p = .042).

Table 8: Multiple comparison between groups on Communications

Teacher		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Early Childhood Education	Mathematics Education	.35*	.108	.014
	Social Sciences Education	.93*	.109	.000
Elementary Education	Social Sciences Education	.68*	.102	.000
English L.A. Education	Social Sciences Education	.74*	.101	.000
Mathematics Education	Early Childhood Education	-.35*	.108	.014
	Social Sciences Education	.57*	.108	.000
Science Education	Social Sciences Education	.65*	.111	.000
Social Sciences Education	Early Childhood Education	-.93*	.109	.000
	Elementary Education	-.68*	.102	.000

English L.A. Education	-.74[*]	.101	.000
Mathematics Education	-.57[*]	.108	.000
Science Education	-.65[*]	.111	.000

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The multiple comparison results between each major showed that there were significant differences on mean scores of communications among education interns. Education interns in Early Childhood Education had the highest mean scores (see Table 8). The difference on mean scores between Early Childhood Education teachers and Social Sciences Education was the highest (p = .00). However, the difference on mean scores between Early Childhood Education teachers and Mathematics Education teachers was the lowest (p = .014).

Discussion

This study sought insight into teacher interns' perceptions of readiness for managing the behaviors of students in inclusive classrooms. Upon the analysis of the findings, some of the pre-service teachers had mixed feelings about their ability to manage classroom behaviors. Many of the participants stated that they were aware of the fact that students receiving special education services have legal rights. In addition, they suggested that they needed to be aware of students, who were on medication. Federal acts such as EHA require schools and teachers to understand the conditions of their students and establish a continuum of placement options (Kavale and Forness, 2000). On the other hand, many respondents expressed their mixed feelings about how they should provide opportunities for individual and group work on assignments. Teacher interns also indicated that they might have difficulty to understand whether seating arrangements of students may promote positive behaviors or negative behaviors in inclusive classrooms. In parallel findings, Katz (1972) found that teacher interns have the feelings of incapability about adequacy and preparedness. In addition, they have negative opinions about how inclusive settings may be challenging teaching environments as such places may require extra effort and specialized teaching skills from new teachers (Polloway et al., 2001).

Although the perceptions of readiness of teacher interns from different majors for managing the behaviors of students in inclusive classrooms differed from one another, many respondents suggested that having a more initial exposure could solidify foundational pedagogies of best practices in behavior management in inclusive classrooms. In addition, they expressed that they were uncertain about how they may cope with the pressures of classroom behavior management and whether they were confident enough to have ability to manage student behaviors. These findings mirror previous study findings which report the importance of evidence-based practices that include strategies to monitor student behaviors and to respond to discipline problems (Simonsen et al., 2008; Sugai and Horner, 2006). Such practices would help teacher interns to be successful in managing student behaviors and increase teacher retention (McKinney et al., 2008; Reschly and Holdheide, 2008).

In looking toward future studies on perceived readiness of teacher interns and given the state of available teacher programs, institutes of higher education may seek to develop and evaluate teacher preparation curricula that help teacher interns gain confidence in order to cope with managing student behaviors in inclusive classrooms. By utilizing effective teacher preparation curricula that allow teacher candidates to have immediate feedbacks about their behavior management skills, teacher interns may obtain a strong sense of belief to overcome discipline problems (Rock, Gregg, Gable, and Zigmond, 2009; Scheeler, McKinnon, and Stout, 2012). Possibilities may include having larger sample sizes from different colleges in order to be able to generalize study findings.

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