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Full Inclusion: How its Implementation Could Affect the Academic Performance and Social Well-Being of Students as Perceived by Educators of Northeast Arkansas

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the relative level of acceptance held by various professional educator constituencies for full inclusion respective of its effect on the academic performance and social confidence of students. The sample consisted of 1,247 professional educators, which included general education classroom teachers, special educators, school counselors, and school administrators sampled via a Likert-scaled survey. They were asked to rate their level of belief for the consequence described by each statement. Educators were split on their opinions regarding the benefits of full inclusion for student performance and self-esteem. It was determined general education teachers were less likely to endorse full inclusion as an effective or desirable means to improve or develop students' academic performance, self-esteem, and sense of community than other educators included in the sample. It was also the belief of a relatively large proportion of general education classroom teachers they did not have the instructional skills and appropriate educational background to teach students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom.

Considering previous research outcomes respective of educators' attitudes and beliefs regarding full inclusion, it seemed beneficial to measure and report the level of acceptance and the beliefs that educators of Northeast Arkansas held for the effect of full inclusion respective of student academic performance and their social well-being. Although various designations of PK - 12 professional educators would have a role in the implementation of inclusive practices, classroom teachers have been considered the most critical link to its success. Further, because it has been determined that, the beliefs and enthusiasm (or lack thereof) by classroom teachers would very likely determine the success of such an endeavor, this study reports on findings

relative to their level of acceptance of full inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Silverman, 2007).

The analysis and discussion presented here were based on results from the responses of Northeast Arkansas educators to a survey developed and administered in the study, "A Comparison of the Acceptance Levels for Full Inclusion by Various PK - 12 Education Practitioner Groups of Northeast Arkansas (Hessling-Hux, 2017a)." Although there were ten belief statements addressed on the survey, the presentation reported here is restricted to the results for the following four belief statements:

> Belief Statement 2: General education teachers have the instructional skills and appropriate educational background to teach students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom.
>
> Belief Statement 4: The full inclusion of students with exceptionalities within the general education classroom will negatively affect the performance of general education students.
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> Belief Statement 5: The full inclusion of students with exceptionalities would adversely affect their performance, due to a higher level of instruction in the general education classroom.
>
> Belief Statement 7: Both students with exceptionalities and general education students will experience an increase in self-esteem and the sense of community in a fully inclusionary classroom.

The Problem and Purpose

The problem addressed in this investigation was to relate the level of desirability PK-12 Northeast Arkansas educators held for educating all children in fully inclusionary classrooms to their beliefs about how such placements would affect the performance, self-esteem, and sense of community of all students. The problem was further complicated by an intervening variable; teacher preparedness. In other words, for any ambivalence toward full inclusion discovered in this study, was it predicated on educators' perceptions of the anticipated effect of full inclusion on the students' academic performance and social well-being or was it possibly related to their confidence level in their preparedness to teach special education students in an inclusive classroom?

The problem addressed in this study emanated from the results of the original study: "A Comparison of the Acceptance Levels for Full Inclusion by Various PK – 12 Education Practitioner Groups of Northeast Arkansas" by Hessling-Hux (2017a). In the original study, it was determined that 36% of a sample of 1,247 Northeast Arkansas education practitioners disagreed with the practice of full inclusion. However, and possibly most importantly, it was determined that 45% of general education classroom teachers disagreed with the practice of full inclusion.When these same educators were asked specifically if the educational needs of students with exceptionalities would have been best met in a fully inclusionary classroom, 55% of the sample disagreed, and approximately 60% of classroom teachers disagreed (Hessling-Hux, 2017b). With such a dichotomy of opinions that had practically as many educators opposed to the placement as agreeing with the value of placement of students into fully inclusionary

classrooms, it seemed appropriate to investigate and discuss some of the particulars that could have been responsible for these beliefs and opinions. Therefore, it was the purpose of this study to determine the relative level of acceptance held by various Northeast Arkansas professional educator constituencies for educating all students in fully inclusionary classrooms, respective of the possible effects on the students' academic performance, self-esteem, and sense of community. Additionally, it was the purpose to determine the level of belief held by general education teachers as to their own preparedness to teach exceptional students in the general education classroom.

The response items of the survey are referred to as "Belief Statements." This moniker provides an appropriate nexus for the study because of the relationship between our beliefs and our behaviors.The beliefs of individuals tend to not only affect their own behaviors but the behaviors of others as well.This effect for "behavior" would be a relatively important concern to the implementation of new ideas or programs such as full inclusion.Those surveyed for this study were asked to provide their level of "belief" for each of the (belief) statements on the survey. As it turns out, our beliefs play a part in determining outcomes for others. Our beliefs influence what we do, how we do it, and how others seem to be affected by our actions. Our beliefs drive our underlying motives, which influence our purpose and affect the degree of value we associate with different task outcomes (Hoffman, 2015).

It had been reported in the literature that the successful implementation of new or different education methodologies, practices, and procedures in schools was directly related to what educators, especially classroom teachers, believed about its worthiness based on their personal beliefs and desirability for a new or changed methodology (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Sokal & Sharma, 2014; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Sideridis & Chandler, 1996; Stewart, 1983; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2001; Whiting & Young, 1995). Therefore, investigating the beliefs Northeast Arkansas educators had for educating all students in fully inclusionary classrooms for what they believed would have been the possible effects on the students' academic performance and social well-being. Also the degree of preparedness held by general education teachers to teach exceptional students in the general education classroom seemed an appropriate way to adequately address the problem of this study.

Background and Literature Review

In this section, an attempt is made to provide the reader with sufficient background information to develop an awareness of the matters of concern relative to this study. Information is presented that should provide the reader with recognition and understanding of the need for pursuing a study of why educators' beliefs about full inclusion respective of its effect on student performance and their social confidence are important.

The attitudes and beliefs of school professionals, especially general education classroom teachers, about inclusive practices were considered to have been highly significant since they would have been expected to play a vital role in the implementation of the inclusion process as their perceptions may influence their behavior toward and acceptance of exceptional students in their classrooms (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Sideridis & Chandler, 1996). According to Sokal and Sharma (2014), teachers' attitudes were a significant determinant of success in inclusive classrooms. Teachers' attitudes [beliefs] also affect their behaviors which in turn influence the

classroom climate and students' opportunities for success. Negative attitudes toward inclusion held by teachers, parents, and administrators were considered the most significant barriers to successful inclusion implementation (Sokal & Sharma, 2014).

According to Ruijs and Peetsma (2009), "In order to draw conclusions about the desirability of inclusive education, it was important to know the effects on the academic achievement of children with special educational needs" (p. 69). In their literature review, they focused on the academic and socio-emotional effects of inclusive education on both general education students and students with special educational needs. Their findings are summarized as the following:

> (1) the results indicated neutral to positive effects of inclusive education, (2) the academic achievement of students with and without special educational needs seemed to be comparable to non-inclusive classes or even better in inclusive classes, (3) indicated that students with special educational needs achieved better in inclusive settings than in non-inclusive settings, (4) students with special educational needs had a less positive social position than their peers without special educational needs, and (5) findings suggested that there was a differential effect for high-achieving and low-achieving students without special educational needs. (p. 67)

According to Horne (1983) and Van Reusen et al. (2001), the success of an inclusionary program may have been at risk if general classroom teachers held negative perceptions toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. Teachers were considered to have been (unequivocally) essential to the implementation of inclusive education (Haskell, 2000). Research indicated teachers were considered the key to the success of inclusionary programs (Cant as cited in Subban & Sharma, 2005). General education teachers were viewed as the "linchpins" in the process of including students with disabilities into general education classes (Stewart, 1983; Whiting & Young, 1995). Other studies have also acknowledged that inclusive education could only be successful if teachers were a significant and respected part of the team driving the process (Horne, 1983; Malone, Gallagher, & Long, 2001). Therefore, as schools begin to employ more inclusionary processes and implement inclusionary classrooms in their schools, it will be important that professional educators involved in the process, especially classroom teachers, are convinced of its value and benefit for all students (Sokal & Sharma, 2014).

However, not everyone was excited about bringing students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom on a fully inclusionary basis for several reasons, to include its possible effect on student performance and self-esteem (At-Turki, Ali ALdmour, Al Maitah, & ALsarayreh, 2012; Daniel & King, 1997; Koster, Nakken, Pijl, & van Houten, 2009; Tkachyk, 2013; Zigmond, 2003). There were arguments both for and against the practice.

A review of the literature and results of previous studies indicated that educational professionals in schools were not consistent in their beliefs for the value and effectiveness of inclusion, especially for all students. There seemed to have been a dichotomy of beliefs for the various constituencies of the professional education community on this matter (Hessling-Hux, 2017a). According to Ruijs and Peetsma (2009), there could be both positive and negative effects resulting from inclusion. They pointed out that children with special educational needs might achieve better results because they can learn from more able students and they could become more motivated to achieve because there might be more focus on academic achievement and academic progress in general education classes. They alternatively pointed out, children with

special educational needs might become less motivated and self-confident when they compare themselves to their peers because they were likely to achieve less well than their peers without special educational needs and this might adversely affect their motivation and self-confidence. Furthermore, there might be less knowledge about teaching children with special educational needs in general education classrooms, which also might have a negative effect on the quality of their education and their achievement (Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009).

Arguments supporting inclusion centered on the benefits derived both academically and socially for children with disabilities. Advocates contended academic achievement was enhanced when children with disabilities were expected to follow the higher standards that usually exist in the general classroom setting. In contrast, the critics of inclusion argued that many students with disabilities would have been better served in non-inclusive settings. In Zigmond's study (2003) as well as a study by At-Turki et al. (2012), it was reported that resource rooms were determined to have been more effective than general education classrooms in improving the academic achievement of students with learning disabilities.

The positive benefits of inclusion have been as much of a social matter (self-esteem and sense of community) as academic (performance), and maybe more-so. According to Koster et al. (2009) and Tkachyk (2013), a common argument for inclusion has been the enhanced opportunity for social interaction provided to special needs students and the establishment of relationships with others. For example, students with problem behavior or social issues could benefit from being fully included in the general education classroom environment because they could observe and learn more socially acceptable behaviors from other students. However, those that opposed full inclusion, accused full inclusionists of being concerned primarily with the socialization of disabled students, thereby placing academic achievement as a secondary consideration (Daniel & King, 1997).

Concern had been reported in the literature, for the effect that full inclusion and even regular inclusion would have on student academic performance, self-esteem, and their sense of community, not only for special needs students but general education students as well. In an article published by Salend & Duhaney (1999) that reviewed the literature on inclusion programs and students with and without disabilities, the studies reviewed indicated the placement of students without disabilities in inclusionary classrooms did not appear to interfere with their academic performance and had several social benefits for these students. Studies had also reported that placement in inclusion programs had resulted in improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities, while other studies had indicated that students with disabilities educated in inclusive settings did not receive specially designed instruction to meet their educational needs (Salend & Duhaney, 1999).

Although Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) concluded from their comprehensive study and review of the literature for the effects of inclusion of students with and without special educational needs, there seemed to be sufficient support for inclusive education for children with mild to moderate special educational needs. There were opposing views held for full inclusion on more or less a continuous spectrum as to degree. The proponents of full inclusion believed if students with disabilities were fully included in the general education classroom, they would have been more accepted by their peers, experienced more balanced friendships, and gained more academic knowledge (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994). However, some groups like the Learning Disabilities Association of America (2012) did not support full inclusion or any policies that mandated the same placement, instruction, or treatment for ALL

disabled students. Therefore, it would have been important to know the beliefs of Northeast Arkansas educators about how they felt the performance and socialization of students could have been affected not only for special needs students but general education students as well.

Method

Participants

A sample of 1,247 Northeast Arkansas public school practitioners during the spring of the 2015 school term was used for this study. For analytical purposes of this study, these practitioners were divided into four major constituency groups consisting of PK - 12: [1]General Education Teachers, [2]Special Education Teachers, [3]School Counselors, and [4]School Administrators. The school administrator subgroup was composed of special education directors, principals, and superintendents. Comparisons of their survey responses for four specific belief statements regarding student performance, self-esteem, sense of community, and teacher preparedness were made. A categorization of the subgroups and their numbers of respondents may be found in Table 1. Of the 1,247 respondents, there were 967 valid responses (77.5%) available for consideration in the analysis. To avoid redundancy, the words "significant," "significance" or "significantly" will refer to a statistical definition of chance error where $p < .05$. Moreover, the word "sample" will be used in reference to the number of valid responses garnered from the original 1,247 respondents originally sampled. The term "subgroup" will refer to a particular category of respondents within the sample.

Table 1

Numbers of Respondents per Subgroup

	N	*N* %	*n*	*n* as %
General Education Teachers (PK-12)	808	64.8%	602	62.2%
Special Education Teachers (PK-12)	227	18.2%	197	20.4%
School Counselors (PK-12)	71	5.7%	53	5.5%
School Administrators (SPED Administrators, Principals (PK-12) and Superintendents)	141	11.3%	115	11.9%
The Sample - All Subgroups	1247	100.0%	967	100.0%

N = Number of total responses within the category
n = number of valid responses within the category

Research Design

A quantitative descriptive survey research design was employed. A Likert-scaled survey based on ten belief statements addressed a range of issues related to full inclusion; only four of

which were the subject of this study. The results were interpreted on a relative scale via descriptive and inferential statistical analyses; averages, relative proportions, rankings, t-tests, and ANOVAs. The participants of the study were provided four choices of response from which to choose. Each response had a numerical value assigned for quantitative analysis purposes (see Table 2). Neutral was not a choice for respondents, but it was used in the results for averages that fall within a "neutral" range (see Table 2). The survey was administered via SurveyMonkey (Hessling-Hux, 2015).

This was a forced-choice survey; the "Neutral" category was not included on the survey response form for the raters to choose. Respondents were required to make a choice, either agreeing or disagreeing, on the issue described in each belief statement. For purposes of interpretation and discussion, in addition to the Likert scale ratings, each of the levels of the scale was assigned a particular descriptor level (see Table 2).

Table 2

Response and Interpretation Levels for Likert Scale; 5-Point and Percent Scaling

Response Level	Scale Value	Description Levels	Scale Score Range
Strongly Agree (SA)	5	Substantial Level of Acceptance	4.20 – 5.00
Agree (A)	4	Meaningful Level of Acceptance	3.40 – 4.19
*Neutral (N)	3	Uncertain or Non-Discernable Level of Acceptance	2.60 – 3.39
Disagree (D)	2	Non-acceptance	1.80 – 2.59
Strongly Disagree (SD)	1	Substantial Level of Non-Acceptance	1.00 – 1.79

* "Neutral" was not a choice for respondents.

Research Questions

The following four research questions were composed to address the relative level of acceptance held by various professional educator constituencies in Northeast Arkansas for full inclusion respective of its effect on the academic performance and social confidence of students. Additionally, it was important to consider any possible relationship between the preparedness of general education teachers to teach special needs students in the general education classroom as it might be related to the outcomes their acceptance of full inclusion.

> Research Question 1: What were the comparative levels of belief held by Northeast Arkansas educators regarding the effect of full inclusion of students with exceptionalities within the general education classroom on the academic performance of general education students?

Research Question 2: What were the comparative levels of belief held by Northeast Arkansas educators regarding the effect of full inclusion for the academic performance of students with exceptionalities placed in general education classrooms?

Research Question 3: What were the comparative levels of belief held by Northeast Arkansas educators regarding the effect of full inclusion of students with exceptionalities within the general education classroom on the self-esteem and sense of community for general and special education students?

Research Question 4: What was the level of belief held by Northeast Arkansas general education teachers regarding possessing the instructional skills and appropriate educational background to teach students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom?

The following questions were created as a guide for the collection and specificity of data needed to provide information necessary to adequately respond to the research questions and purpose of this study:

1. What were the mean Likert response scores, the proportions of the samples that agreed with each belief statement, and their Likert descriptor ratings?

2. Which of the four constituent subgroups most agreed and least agreed with each belief statement, what proportions of these two subgroups were in agreement, and were their levels of agreement significantly different from one another?

3. Which constituent subgroups may have scored belief statements statistically significantly different ($p < .05$) from the mean score of the sample or one another?

4. How did general education classroom teachers compare with other constituent subgroups of professional educators as to their acceptance of the premise for each belief statement?

5. How did the general education classroom teachers' mean score compare on the acceptance of the premise for each belief statement with the combined mean score for a constituent subgroup that included special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators?

6. What was the importance of the outcome of each belief statement?

Findings and Results

Findings

Table 3 provides the results for different combinatorial arrangements of the four major subgroups of Northeast Arkansas educational professionals as to their level of belief of how full inclusion would affect students' academic performance, self-esteem, sense of community, and preparedness of general education teachers. The different constituency subgroups, identified in Table 3, rated their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale for each of the four belief statements, rating their perceived effectiveness of full inclusion on students' performance, self-esteem, and sense of community as well as the preparedness of general education teachers to teach in a fully inclusionary classroom. Table 3 provides both the average level of agreement for each group as well as the proportion of the group (as a percent) that agreed with the belief statement.

Table 3

Likert Scale Score and Proportion of Respondents in Agreement with Each Belief Statement Disaggregated by Constituent Subgroups

	Belief Statement 2: *General education teachers have the instructional skills and appropriate educational background to teach students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom.*		***Belief Statement 4:*** *The full inclusion of students with exceptionalities within the general education classroom will negatively affect the performance of general education students.*		***Belief Statement 5:*** *The full inclusion of students with exceptionalities would adversely affect their performance, due to a higher level of instruction in the general education classroom.*		***Belief Statement 7:*** *Both students with exceptionalities and ge neral education students will experience an increase in self-esteem and the sense of community in a fully inclusionary classroom.*	
Subgroups	Survey Score 5-point Likert Scale	Proportion of Sub-group that Agreed	Survey Score 5-point Likert Scale	Proportion of Sub-group that Agreed	Survey Score 5-point Likert Scale	Proportion of Sub-group that Agreed	Survey Score 5-point Likert Scale	Proportion of Sub-group that Agreed
General Education Teachers	2.74 *n* = 622	31.4%	3.08[H] *n* = 602	50.0 %	3.41[H] *n* = 602	64.8 %	3.04[L] *n* = 585	50.9 %
Special Education Teachers	2.44[L] *n* = 200	31.0%	2.45 *n* = 197	30.0 %	3.12 *n* = 197	55.3 %	3.47 *n* = 196	66.8 %
School Counselors	2.60 *n* = 53	34.0%	2.66 *n* = 53	34.0 %	3.09 *n* = 53	52.8 %	3.12 *n* = 52	53.9 %
School Administrators	2.89[H] *n* = 122	46.7%	2.37[L] *n* = 114	28.1 %	2.82[L] *n* = 114	43.9 %	3.58[H] *n* = 111	72.1 %
Sample Mean - All Respondents Combined	*2.51 n = 997*	*33.3%*	*2.84 n = 966*	*42.4 %*	*3.26 n = 966*	*59.7 %*	*3.20* *n* = 944	*56.9 %*
All Respondents minus Reg. Ed. Teachers	*2.61 n = 375*	*36.5%*	*2.46 n = 364*	*30.0 %*	*3.02 n = 364*	*51.4 %*	*3.45* *n* = 359	*66.6 %*

[H] = Highest. [L] = Lowest.

Note: Belief statements 4 and 5 were negative statements and the higher the approval score for these statements the less the rater accepted the value of full inclusion as a benefit for students.

From Table 3, it is apparent school administrators scored Belief Statement 2 highest, and special education teachers scored it lowest. It is also evident that general education teachers scored Belief Statements 4 and 5 highest among the subgroups in agreement with the premise of each belief statement. It is also apparent that general education teachers scored Belief Statement 7 at the lowest level on both the Likert-level score and the percentage of respondents agreeing with the premise, indicating their relative disagreement with Belief Statement 7.

Results and Response for Each Belief Statement

Research question 1: What were the comparative levels of belief held by various constituencies of Northeast Arkansas educators for Belief Statement 4, *"The full inclusion of students with exceptionalities within the general education classroom will negatively affect the performance of general education students?"*

Results for Belief Statement 4 are:

(1) The mean Likert-score for the sample was 2.84/5.00, a neutral response with 42.4% of the respondents agreeing with the belief statement and 57.6% of the respondents disagreeing with the belief statement. The result was that a 5.2% greater proportion of respondents were in disagreement than agreement with the belief statement.

(2) General education teachers most agreed with the premise of Belief Statement 4, scoring 3.08/5.00, a neutral response, with 50.0% of their group in agreement. School administrators least agreed with the belief statement scoring 2.37/5.00, at the disagree level indicating a substantial level of non-agreement with only 28.1% of their group in agreement, meaning that 71.9% of administrators did not agree with the premise of Belief Statement 4. A t-test of means indicated these two subgroup scores, general education teachers and school administrators, were statistically significantly different from one another ($p < .05$).

(3) ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) among the constituent subgroup scores and the mean score. Tukey post hoc tests determined there were significant differences between the sample mean (2.84/5.00) and each of three subgroups; general education teachers (3.08/5.00), special education teachers (2.45/5.00), and school administrators (2.37/5.00), for Belief Statement 4. General education teachers scored significantly above the mean, and both special education teachers and administrators scored significantly below the mean.

(4) ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) for general education teachers (3.08/5.00) scoring significantly greater than the three other constituent subgroups of the sample; special education teachers (2.45/5.00), counselors (2.66/5.00), and school administrators (2.37/5.00). General education teachers scored Belief Statement 4 significantly higher than special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators.

(5) A t-test of means determined a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the scores of general education teachers and a constituent subgroup of the sample that did not include general education teachers. General education teachers' mean score (3.08/5.00) was found to have been significantly higher than the combined mean score of special education teachers, counselors and school administrators (2.46/5.00).

(6) The importance of the outcome for Belief Statement 4 was that general education classroom teachers believed to a statistically significant degree, more so than special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators, "The full inclusion of students with exceptionalities within the general education classroom would negatively affect the performance of general education students." The proportion of respondents, 30%, for the combined group of special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators that agreed with the premise of Belief Statement 4 was significantly different from the proportion of general education teachers, 50%, that agreed with Belief Statement 4. Seventy percent of the sample that excluded general education teachers did not agree with the premise of Belief Statement 4.

Research question 2: What were the comparative levels of belief held by various constituencies of Northeast Arkansas educators for Belief Statement 5, *"The full inclusion of students with exceptionalities would adversely affect their performance, due to a higher level of instruction in the general education classroom?"*

Results for Belief Statement 5 are:

(1) The mean Likert score for the sample was 3.26/5.00, a neutral response with 59.7% of the respondents agreeing with the belief statement and 40.3% of the respondents disagreeing with the belief statement. The result was that a 19.4% greater proportion of respondents were in agreement than disagreement with this belief statement.

(2) General education teachers most agreed with the premise of Belief Statement 5, scoring 3.41/5.00, an agree-level response, with 64.8% of their group in agreement. School administrators least agreed with the belief statement scoring 2.82/5.00, at the neutral level indicating a non-discernable level of acceptance with 43.9% of their group in agreement, meaning that 56.1% of administrators disagreed with the premise of Belief Statement 5. A t-test of means indicated for these two subgroups, general education teachers, and school administrators, their scores were significantly different ($p < .05$) from one another.

(3) ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) among the constituent subgroup scores and the mean score. Tukey post hoc tests determined there were significant differences between the sample mean, (3.26/5.00) and administrators (2.82/5.00) and general education teachers (3.41/5.00) for Belief Statement 5. The school administrator subgroup scored significantly below the mean, and general education teachers scored significantly above the mean.

(4) ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) for general education teachers (3.41/5.00) scoring significantly greater than two other constituent

subgroups of the sample; special education teachers (3.12/5.00) and school administrators, (2.82/5.00). General education teachers scored Belief Statement 5 significantly higher than special education teachers and school administrators.

(5) A t-test of means determined a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the scores of general education teachers and a constituent subgroup of the sample that did not include general education teachers. General education teachers' mean score (3.41/5.00) was found to have been significantly higher than the combined mean score of special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators (3.02/5.00).

(6) The importance of the outcome for Belief Statement 5 was that general education classroom teachers believed to a statistically significant degree more-so than special education teachers and school administrators that, "The full inclusion of students with exceptionalities would adversely affect their performance, due to a higher level of instruction in the general education classroom." The proportion of respondents, 51.4%, for the combined group of special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators that agreed with the premise of Belief Statement 5 was significantly lower than the proportion of general education teachers, 64.8%, that agreed with Belief Statement 5.

Research question 3: What were the comparative levels of belief held by various constituencies of Northeast Arkansas educators for the Belief Statement 7, *"Both students with exceptionalities and general education students will experience an increase in self-esteem and the sense of community in a fully inclusionary classroom?"*

Results for Belief Statement 7 are:

(1) The mean Likert score for the sample was 3.20/5.00, a neutral response with 50.9% of the respondents agreeing with the belief statement and 49.1% of the respondents disagreeing with the belief statement. The result being there was a minimal 1.8% greater proportion of respondents were in agreement than disagreement with the belief statement.

(2) Administrators most agreed with the premise of Belief Statement 5, scoring 3.58/5.00, an agree-level response, with 72.1% of their group in agreement. General education teachers least agreed with the belief statement scoring 3.04/5.00, at the neutral level indicating a non-discernable level of acceptance with 50.9% of their group in agreement, meaning that 49.1% disagreed with the premise of Belief Statement 7. A t-test of means indicated these two subgroup scores, general education teachers, and school administrators, were statistically significantly ($p < .05$) different from one another.

(3) ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) among the constituent subgroup scores and the mean score. Tukey post hoc tests determined there was a significant difference between the sample mean (3.20/5.00) and administrators (3.58/5.00), special education teachers (3.47/5.00), and general education teachers (3.04/5.00), for Belief Statement 7. The school administrator and special education teacher subgroups scored significantly above the mean, and general education teachers scored significantly below the mean.

(4) ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) for general education teachers (3.04/5.00) scoring significantly less than two other constituent subgroups of the sample: special education teachers (3.47/5.00) and school administrators (3.58/5.00). General education teachers scored Belief Statement 7 significantly lower than special education teachers and school administrators.

(5) A t-test of means determined a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the scores of general education teachers and a constituent subgroup of the sample that did not include general education teachers. General education teachers' mean score (3.04/5.00) was found to have been significantly lower than the combined mean score of special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators (3.45/5.00).

(6) The importance of the outcome for Belief Statement 7 was that general education classroom teachers held the lowest level of belief among the subgroups that, "Both students with exceptionalities and general education students would have experienced an increase in self-esteem and the sense of community in a fully inclusionary classroom." The proportion of respondents, 66.6%, for the combined group of special education teachers, counselors, and school administrators that agreed with the premise of Belief Statement 7 was significantly higher than the proportion of general education teachers, 50.9%, that agreed with Belief Statement 7.

Research question 4: What was the level of belief held by various constituencies of Northeast Arkansas educators for Belief Statement 2, *"General education teachers have the instructional skills and appropriate educational background to teach students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom?"*

Results for Belief Statement 2 are:

(1) The mean Likert score, for the sample, was 2.51/5.00, a disagree level response with 33.3% of the respondents agreeing with the belief statement and 66.7% of the respondents disagreeing with the belief statement. The result was there was a relatively large 33.4% greater proportion of respondents were in disagreement than agreement with the belief statement.

(2) School administrators mostly agreed with the premise of Belief Statement 2 scoring 2.89/5.00, an agree-level response, with 46.7% of their group in agreement. Special education teachers least agreed with the belief statement scoring 2.44/5.00 at the disagree-level indicating a level of non-acceptance with 31.0% of their group in agreement, meaning that 69.0% of special education teachers disagreed with the premise of Belief Statement 7. A t-test of means indicated these two subgroup scores, special education teachers and school administrators, were statistically significantly different from one another ($p < .05$).

(3) ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) among the constituent subgroup scores and the mean score. Tukey post hoc tests determined there was a significant difference between the sample mean (3.20/5.00) and administrators (3.58/5.00), special education teachers (3.47/5.00), and general education teachers (3.04/5.00) for Belief Statement 7. The school administrator and special education teacher subgroups scored

significantly above the mean, and general education teachers scored significantly below the mean.

(4) ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) for special education teachers (2.44/5.00), scoring this belief statement significantly lower than both general education teachers (2.74/5.00) and school administrators (2.89/5.00).

(5) A t-test of means determined no significant difference ($p > .05$) between the scores of general education teachers and a constituent subgroup of the sample that did not include general education teachers. Both subgroups, general education teachers and the remainder of the sample, scored in the neutral range (2.60 to 3.39). General education teachers scored themselves at 2.74/5.00, and the remainder of the sample scored general education teachers at 2.61/5.00. The difference in the Likert-scale score (0.13) was not determined to be significant. Also, the proportion of general education teachers (68.6%) and the remainder of the sample (63.5%) disagreeing with the premise of Belief Statement 2 were not significantly different (5.1%).

(6) Although the Likert scale score was in the neutral range, both the general education teachers and the remainder of the sample scored Belief Statement 2 in the lower region of the range. However, the importance of the result for Belief Statement 2, was that a significantly large proportion of the general education teachers (68.6%), as well as the remainder of the sample (63.5%), disagreed that general education teachers had the instructional skills and appropriate educational background to teach students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom.

Summary

The result for Belief Statement 2, was that a significantly large proportion of the general education teachers (68.6%), as well as the remainder of the sample (63.5%), disagreed that general education teachers had the instructional skills and appropriate educational background to teach students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom. For the three belief statements concerning student academic performance, self-esteem and sense of community, the sample responded in the neutral range with between 40% and 60% of respondents agreeing with the belief statements. The sample's response to Belief Statement 4, directed at the effect of full inclusion on the performance of general education students, resulted in an average score of 2.84/5.00, a neutral response, with 42% of the sample agreeing there would have been a negative effect. Belief Statement 5, directed at the effect of full inclusion on the performance of students with exceptionalities resulted in an average score of 3.26/5.00, a neutral response, with 60% of the sample agreeing there would have been a negative effect. Belief Statement 7, directed at the effect of full inclusion nurturing an increase in self-esteem and sense of community, resulted in an average score of 3.20/5.00, a neutral response, with 57% of the sample agreeing that self-esteem and sense of community would increase for all students.

When the responses of the sample were disaggregated among the four constituency subgroups and considered separately, patterns began to emerge, and the application of inferential statistics revealed significant differences in the results among these subgroups. Special education teachers and school administrators disagreed that inclusion would have a negative effect on general education students. General education teachers agreed that placement of exceptional

students in general education classrooms would have a negative effect on students with exceptionalities. Moreover, school administrators and special education teachers agreed that all students would experience an increase in self-esteem and sense of community in fully inclusionary classrooms. General education teachers ranked at the top, most agreeing with the negative premises of Belief Statements 4 and 5, that both exceptional and general education students' performance would have been negatively affected by fully inclusionary classrooms. School administrators ranked the lowest, believing the opposite, basically disagreeing with the premise of Belief Statements 4 and 5. On Belief Statement 7, school administrators ranked the highest believing that self-esteem and development of a sense of community would have been enhanced, while general education teachers ranked it the lowest. General education teachers were the least favorable to inclusions' effect on student performance and any increase in self-esteem and sense of community, while administrators were the most favorable of these aspects. School counselors and special education teachers scored the three belief statements neutral at a level between general education teachers and administrators.

The inferential statistical analyses via t-tests and ANOVA revealed significant differences among and between the constituency subgroups of educators within the sample. For Belief Statements 4 and 5, we see general education teachers were ranked the highest for agreement, and school administrators were ranked the lowest. For Belief Statement 7, just the opposite occurred; school administrators were ranked the highest and general education teachers were ranked the lowest. School counselors and special education teachers scored intermediately between the two extremes.

Conclusions

Educators were split on their opinion regarding the benefits of full inclusion for student performance and self-esteem. The comparative level of belief that general education teachers held for the value of full inclusion was significantly lower than that of school administrators, special education teachers, and counselors. General education teachers were less likely to endorse full inclusion as an effective or desirable means to improve or develop students' academic performance, self-esteem, and sense of community than special educators, counselors, and school administrators. Moreover, school administrators composed of district superintendents, building principals, and special education administrators, valued the effects of full inclusion to a greater degree than the other constituency subgroups of educational professionals in improving and developing the academic performance, self-esteem, and sense of community of students. Although the ambivalence general education teachers expressed in their response to belief statements regarding its effect on students' self-esteem, sense of community, and academic performance, they had also expressed a significant concern for their own preparedness to teach students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom. This issue of preparedness seems to lead to more of a question about their expressed concern regarding their preparedness to teach in a fully inclusionary classroom, and its possible effect on their response or do they genuinely believe that no matter the preparedness of the teachers, full inclusion would not be a positive impetus for students' self-esteem and social aptitude?

If fully inclusionary classrooms are to be successfully implemented and yield beneficial results for all students, it would be necessary for the educational professionals implementing such programs to have the knowledge and skills necessary. Classroom teachers will need the

opportunity for training and skill development to develop their preparedness for teaching in the fully inclusionay classroom and all others supporting such an effort will need to develop an enhanced level of knowledge regarding implementation.For those involved in the implementation of full inclusion, having and visibly displaying a highly supportive and enthusiastic attitude in the process will be important because the beliefs that education professionals possess can significantly influence success in implementation.

With such dichotomous opinions that have practically as many educators opposed to the placement as agreeing with the value of placement of students into fully inclusionary classrooms, more research is needed for ways to change the attitudes of educators, especially general education teachers. School leaders would need to demonstrate a commitment and involvement regarding inclusion and provide for in-service activities that would adequately inform educators on the merits of inclusive practices and the values inclusive classrooms could provide for all students. It was quite clear that pre- and in-service training to enhance general educators' knowledge and skills in teaching students with disabilities and learning difficulties is a must. The beliefs that teachers have about the merits of inclusive practices can affect their attitude and success when working in inclusionary programs.

Recommendations

From the literature and the results of this study, it was evident that classroom teachers were the key to success in the implementation of inclusionary classrooms. Appropriate training and providing motivation of classroom teachers for the value of full inclusion and causing them to have a positive attitude and a desire for accomplishment will be the key to success for schools that choose to implement full inclusion in their schools. More research is needed as to the effect of teacher preparedness and its effect on their beliefs about the value of implementing changed or new school practices; in this case full inclusion.

According to the study by Ruijs and Peetsma (2009), it can be concluded that the degree and type of handicapping condition effects the execution of inclusion on students with and without special educational needs. Therefore, it is suggested it would be important to investigate further the effects of specific inclusion policies because there may be differential effects for different groups of children and differential effects of different inclusion practices.

Due to the ambivalence general education teachers expressed regarding the effect of inclusion on students for reasons of self-esteem and social well-being contrasted with their concern for their preparedness to teach in fully inclusionary classrooms, further research is needed in this area. Research should be undertaken to determine if teachers genuinely believe that no matter their level of preparedness, full inclusion would or would not likely result in a positive outcome for students for particular identified issues like academic performance, self-esteem, or social well-being. Is the level of belief for educators more a function of teacher preparedness or the particular issue affecting students?

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