Support Services for Students with Special Education Needs in Colleges and Universities

Hsiu-Fen Chen, Fang-Liu Su, and Ya-Wen Chang

Abstract—purpose of this study was to investigate the current status of support services for students with special education needs (SEN) at colleges and universities in Taiwan. Seventy-two college and universities received a questionnaire on its resource room operation process and four resource room staffs each from different areas were interviewed through semi- structured interview forms. The main findings were (1) most colleges and universities did offer sufficient administrative resources; (2) more efforts on preventions for SEN students and establishment of disability awareness should be made for all campus faculties ; (3) more comprehensive services were required to help students to have better transition into post-school life; (4) most schools provided basic administrative resource requirements but qualities of the resource room programs needed to be enhanced; and (5) most resource room staffs lacked of professional knowledge in counseling the SEN students which needed to be strengthened in the future.

Keywords—support services, students with special education needs, higher education, resource room program

I. INTRODUCTION

ACCORDING to Taiwan's Special Education Act [1], every individual is entitled to receive an appropriate education. Since 1963, Taiwan government had established a special entrance examination to universities and colleges for students with visual and/or hearing impairment to study in universities/ colleges. In the last decade, the opportunities had extended to other students with autism, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and emotional/ behavioral disturbance. The statistics data of Taiwan Special Education Transmit Net showed that in 2010 there were 10,274 students with special education needs (SEN) studying in universities/ colleges, and 155 universities/ colleges had set up resource room programs to provide support services for these students. Since it is often the final stage of education for the SEN students before they transit to the society, it is worthy of putting in efforts to help them adapt to the school lives. Therefore, the researchers aimed to investigate the current status of the support system in the universities and colleges in

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Taiwan—resource room programs, and from this starting point to have better thinking on planning of the support service delivery system.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

An appropriate education means one can receive effective instructions suitable for his/her abilities, and can get supporting services when needed. Chang [2] mentioned that the purpose of setting up resource room programs in schools was to facilitate SEN students to achieve the best learning effects in the regular education settings, by connecting the resources in and out of the campus to meet their needs.

According to the viewpoints of the scholars Finn [3], Hung [4], Lin [5], and Tutton [6], the contents of support services could be summarized into six dimensions: (1) organization execution and human resource management; (2) academic support; (3) mental health services and guidance; (4) living support; (5) transition services; (6) administrative resource provision. The details were described as follows:

A. Organization operation and human resource management

The resource room program plays an important role as a main organization for the services in universities/colleges. The service starts from the very beginning when the SEN students enroll in the universities/colleges, throughout the whole school years, and do not stop until six months after they graduated from school. The services could include: (1) assessing students' strengths and needs; (2) planning for the individualized support services of SEN students; (3) executing the decisions of the school committee in special education; (4) holding the guidance meetings if needed for tutor teachers, parents, and students themselves; (5) training the peer volunteers as assistants or tutors.

B. Academic support

The resource room teachers are the key persons to provide educational support for SEN students to complete the course requirements. The services could include: (1) enhancing academic achievements by offering tutoring, study skills, and exam preparation; (2) conducting individualized accommodations and adaptations for exams; (3) providing human resources for sign language interpretation, note-taking assistance, and transcriptions or transformation of materials to accessible formats (Braille/Audio Tape); (4) providing learning equipments and aids, such as any kind of assistive technology and devices; (5) training for important skills such as Braille computer usage, orientation and mobility, auditory training,

articulation/speech correction practice, and physical rehabilitation.

C. Mental health services and guidance

The guidance includes (1) individual consultation; (2) group consultation, and any kind of psychological assessment such as aptitude or personality tests.

D. Living support

The service providers also concern about students' daily life adjustment during the semester period, and often think about the various ways to better help the students: (1) promoting student participation in social activities to foster friendship between SEN students and their normal peers; (2) arranging volunteers as life assistants; (3) providing opportunities of part-time jobs for SEN students with financial difficulties; (4) holding activities on disability awareness in classes for peer acceptance.

E. Transition services

For better career development of SEN students, the resource room teachers provide the following services: (1) conducting the evaluation of their vocational aptitude or interests; (2) facilitating the profession preparation; (3) offering career consultation and suggestions.

F. Administrative resource provision

To establish an inclusive education environment, the resource room teachers should also strive to negotiate other resources in and off campus. The services could involve: (1) fund-seeking for building an accessible learning environment; (2) searching for possible opportunities of scholarship or allowance for SEN students; (3) introducing special education awareness for facility members or staff in campus for public acceptance; (4) providing information about available services in campus or community; (5) editing publication and propaganda material; (6) managing equipment and facilities, and audio-visual books.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researchers applied literature analysis, questionnaire, and semi-structure interviews to gather related data. The yearly reports to Taiwan Ministry of Education, provided from the resource room programs of 72 universities and colleges, served as reliable and valid documentations for analysis. The researchers also designed a questionnaire to investigate the contents of the services as a supplement of the yearly reports for data validation. To further explore their opinions on related issues, the researchers interviewed resource room teachers from 4 representative universities and colleges from the northern, middle, southern, and eastern Taiwan, as selected by judgment sampling method.

IV. RESULT

The main findings and suggestions were concluded as follows:

A. Most schools did offer sufficient administrative resources, but should put more efforts on transition.

As a whole, the universities/colleges under investigation provided services of the six dimensions of support services mentioned above to varied degrees, as shown in Table I. More than 83% of schools offered administrative resources, and over 50% schools provided support services in academic support, psychological health and guidance and living support; whereas only one third of schools did more works on organization operation and management of the resource room program, and even less than 20% of the schools provided transition services for SEN students.

TABLE I
THE PERCENTAGES OF SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED

dimensions	percentage
organization operation and human resource management	35.28
academic support	65.28
mental health services and guidance	62.97
living support	55.90
transition services	19.93
administrative resource provision	83.73

B. Further and comprehensive design was needed for the service delivery.

In dimension one, only 47% of the schools provided formal or informal assessments for diagnosis of SEN students' abilities and strengths, but the percentage was down to 30% for future planning on individualized support services to fit students' individual needs (as shown in Table II). The guidance meetings seemed to be the most popular way for mutual communication and information exchange among faculty members and the resource room personnel; however, very little schools (only 5.6%) set up the school committee in special education to steer the school's policy on special education and monitoring its realization. The fact that less than 20% of schools would train the peer volunteers first before they were assigned to be assistants or tutors would make the researchers wonder the efficacy of the services they provided.

TABLE II
THE REACHED PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT

Contents	percentage
Assessing students' strengths and needs	47.2
planning individual support services	30.6
executing the decisions of school committee in special education	5.6
guidance meetings	73.6
training peer volunteers	19.4

C. Schools should put more efforts on preventive intervention for SEN students and special education awareness.

Generally speaking, most schools provided better support services in academic, mental health and living guidance for the

SEN students. In academic support, nearly all of the schools offered compensatory tutoring and related equipment for academic learning, but only half of them reported any type of accommodations or adaptations in term exams, and hardly any provided specific study skills training based on students' needs. In mental health services, individual consultation was constantly provided to students. Emphasis shift to group consultation and assessments was recommended for they were more preventive to detect the possible emotional/ behavioral problems and to reduce the degree of injury with less cost. In living support, student social activities were common in schools, whereas orientation on special education awareness should not be ignored.

TABLE III
THE REACHED PERCENTAGE OF ACADEMIC GUIDANCE

contents	percentage
offering tutoring, study skills, exam preparation	95.8
individualized accommodations and adaptations for exams	54.2
providing human resources	69.4
providing learning equipments	93.1
training for important skills	13.9

TABLE IV
THE REACHED PERCENTAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND GUIDANCE

contents	percentage
individual consultation	94.4
group consultation	54.2
psychological assessments	40.3

TABLE V
THE REACHED PERCENTAGE OF LIVING GUIDANCE

contents	percentage
students social activities	98.6
arranging volunteers	79.2
opportunities of part- time jobs	37.5
special education awareness	8.3

D. More comprehensive services were required to help better transition to adult life.

Transition services were ill-designed in most resource room programs for less than 30% of schools provided SEN students some opportunities on career consultation. It was of vital importance that SEN students, with their disabilities and without enough job-finding and maintenance skills than their normal peers, needed more guided preparation for profession development and more précised vocational evaluation by experienced facilitators.

TABLE VI
THE REACHED PERCENTAGE OF TRANSITION SERVICES

contents	percentage
evaluation for the profession aptitude or interests	16.7
profession preparation	16.7
career consultation and suggestions	26.4

E. Basic requirement of the administrative resources was met but the quality could be enhanced.

Since the provision of administrative resources was the basic requirement of any of the universities and colleges who receive financial subsidy from the Ministry of Education, very high percentage of schools provided scholarship or fellowship for SEN students, accessibility of equipments and facilities, useful information and all kinds of written or online materials, audio-visual books, et al. However, the quality of the services could be enhanced by holding various kinds of special education awareness for staff and faculty members.

TABLE VII
THE REACHED PERCENTAGE OF ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

contents	percentage
applying funding for accessible environment	63.9
scholarship or fellowship	100.0
special education awareness to staff and faculty	36.1
information about available services	100.0
publication and propaganda material	98.6
equipments and facilities	100.0
audio-visual books	87.5

F. The promotion of staffs' professional knowledge was the fundamental urge for the progress of the services.

From the results of the documentation and questionnaire, the researchers had found a similar phenomenon among the different dimensions -- the more professional the services were, the harder they were to execute. It was further cross-examined by the interviews of 4 excellent resource room teachers with more than five years of experience in resource room grogram. From the interview results two possible reasons were concluded: (1) educational background of the resource room teachers varied highly, from social work, consultation, special education, to many other specialties. However, the opportunities of on-the-job training offered specially for them were very limited and failed to meet their urging needs of professional development. The Ministry of Education provided once a year and lasted for only 18 hours. Elsewhere seldom offer training courses on college level resource room program operation and management; (2) the role orientation and expectation of the resource room program staff by the school administrators was influential. If the staff were defined as an administrator, related consultation or educational support plans would not be supported, and the services would not have any chance to be improved.

V. CONCLUSION

The support services provided by the resource room program in Taiwan's universities and colleges could be divided into six dimensions. Most schools provided basic requirements in organization management, learning/ psychological/ living support, and administrative resources in these dimensions. Some schools had their unique characteristics in the services they provided to meet the specific learning or living needs of SEN students; however, not so many schools could supply them with more comprehensive services in study skills or career development. Based on the finding of this study, it was concluded that qualified personnel was of crucial importance to the success of the whole support system in universities/colleges. Thus, it was recommended that professional development of the resource room program staff be held more regularly and comprehensively in order to improve the qualities of support services for SEN students in universities and colleges in Taiwan.

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