



Whole School Approach on Social and Emotional Guidance among Rural Elementary Schools: Regular Teachers' Involvement

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This study explored the implementation of the whole school approach (WSA) on social and emotional guidance (SEG) in rural primary schools in Sarawak, Malaysia. Regular teachers (N = 2,532) in Sarawak responded to an electronic survey. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the socio-emotional guidance model were employed to explore the level of implementing the WSA on SEG among the respondents. Factors affecting the intention to be involved in SEG were also explored. This paper provides insights for policymakers and educational administrators to promote the social and emotional well-being of rural students in a developing country.

Keywords: social and emotional guidance, whole school approach, teacher engagement, rural education, elementary education

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the whole school approach (WSA) on the social and emotional guidance (SEG) among students has been the philosophy of education policy around the world (Dudu, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; Hearne et al., 2017; International Bureau of

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Education-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [IBE-UNESCO], n.d.; Jacobs & Struyf, 2013; Jamtsho, 2015; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Lam & Hui, 2010; Meyers et al., 2019; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018; Yue, 1995). A common saying illustrates the importance of the WSA on promoting the social and emotional development (SED) of children: “It takes a whole village to raise a child.” The WSA implies a “collective and collaborative action in and by a school community” (IBE-UNESCO, n.d.). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2003) has been advocating for the creation of a conducive school environment that promotes the social and emotional well-being (SEW) of students. Among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, Hong Kong and China actively promote the SEW of students in schools (Hui & Lo, 1997). The National Education Philosophy in Malaysia also emphasizes the balanced and harmonious development of students, which includes addressing their intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical needs (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2018). Notably, studies have proven that the WSA has a substantial impact on the SED of students (Goldberg et al., 2019). Consequently, a healthy SED will have a positive influence on the development of their physical, mental, and learning outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; WHO, 2003).

Regular Teachers’ Involvement in SEG

The regular teachers, who comprise the majority of school personnel, play a key role in the implementation of the WSA on SEG (Hearne & Galvin, 2015; Hearne et al., 2017; Hui, 2002; Lam & Hui, 2010). However, studies have revealed that regular teachers face difficulties in providing SEG to their students (Jacobs & Struyf, 2013; Nichols et al., 2017; Yuen et al., 2007). For example, Nichols and colleagues (2017) mentioned that the confusion of roles between educators, school counselors, and school psychologists undermines the WSA on SEG in the United States. Yuen and colleagues (2007) suggested that one of the reasons Hong Kong primary school teachers were less involved in SEG tasks was the time constraints they faced. Likewise, Malaysian teachers have also reported similar challenges, with the additional burden of perceived redundant clerical work (“Teachers: Teaching No Longer A Passion,” 2018). In addition to the burdensome clerical work, teachers’ enthusiasm for ensuring their students’ well-being is weakened when they are assigned to rural schools, which often lack basic infrastructure and resources, particularly in the often hard-to-reach outskirts of Sarawak, Malaysia (“Manyin: Education Ecosystem,” 2018). According to the Minister of Education, Science, and Technological Research, Sarawak has 428 rural schools without a treated water supply and 721 rural schools without proper road access, let alone Internet connectivity (“Manyin: Education Ecosystem,” 2018). These constraints are attributed to the large geographic area of the state, the fragmented rural population, and the lack of funds. As a result, the state government faces difficulty in placing a sufficient number of qualified teachers in rural schools because most prefer to teach in urban schools with sufficient resources (“Teachers’ Woes in Rural Sarawak,” 2010). Teachers in rural Sarawak have been struggling with transportation and communication barriers that separate them from their families; these struggles indirectly cause them to lose focus