EXAMINING THE ATTITUDES OF SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS TOWARD INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

ABSTRACT

Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in America. Academic environments, such as general education classrooms, have increasingly become important learning environments for children with autism. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine whether there were significant differences in attitudes of secondary general and special education teachers in a specific school system toward inclusion of children with autism in general education classrooms. This quantitative study utilized the modified Scale of Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms (STATIC) instrument to survey 50 secondary English, science, social studies, and mathematics general education and 32 special education teachers with experience in teaching children with autism selected from 13 high schools in a large school system. Data were analyzed using independent-samples t tests to compare differences in attitudes of secondary general and special education teachers toward inclusion of children with autism in general education classrooms. The findings from this study showed no statistically significant difference in the overall attitudes and logistical concerns toward inclusion of children with autism in general education classrooms. The lack of significant difference in overall attitudes and logistical concerns by secondary general and secondary special education teachers might have resulted from more acceptance of children with autism, an increase in training experiences, more classroom accommodations, and administrative support for inclusive classrooms. There were statistically significant differences in the
attitudes of secondary general and secondary special education teachers pertaining to professional and philosophical issues toward inclusion of children with autism in general education classrooms. The secondary special education teachers reported more positive attitudes toward professional issues. The secondary general education teachers reported more positive attitudes toward philosophical issues. An important finding of this small study revealed that secondary general education teachers had positive attitudes toward inclusion of children with autism in general education classrooms. This represents an attitudinal swing not embodied in the related literature. The implication of this attitudinal swing from negative to positive attitudes by secondary general education teachers might suggest that general education classrooms are finding their place in the future of special education services. More studies need to be conducted for this attitudinal swing to be validated.