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The Effect of a Special Education Advocacy Training Programme on Problem-Solving Skills and Attitudes Towards Learning Design and Management for Children with Special Educational Needs: A Perspective from Pre-Service Teachers in Thailand

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Abstract

Pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills did not meet educational standards regarding the understanding of learning management and preparation for children with special educational needs (SEN). To overcome this issue, a special education advocacy training program (SEATP) was applied in this study. The purpose of the research was to compare pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and attitudes towards learning design and management for children with SEN prior to and after taking part in the SEATP. Research participants consisted of 54 pre-service teachers who enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme in the second semester of 2025 at a Capital City University (pseudonym) in Bangkok, Thailand. Prior to and after the implementation in the quantitative phase, the participants were tested using a Problem-Solving Skills test and an Attitude Questionnaire. In the qualitative phase, ten voluntary participants were invited to share their opinions and experiences regarding the understanding of special education in a focus group discussion. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed and corroborated using a triangulation method. The findings showed that although the pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and attitudes towards learning design and management for children with SEN were higher than prior to the intervention, the participants needed to gain further discussion opportunities given by academic advisors to overcome individual students' learning problems in the classroom. The results also suggest that the SEATP benefited pre-service teachers by providing more confidence and knowledge about inclusive teaching and support for children with SEN. In addition, future studies can explore the academic and socio-cultural backgrounds of children with SEN alongside individualized tutorials for pre-service teachers. This study highlights the need for future teacher education programmes in Thailand to incorporate dynamic special education training and long-lasting professional support into initial teacher preparation.

Keywords: Special Education Advocacy Training Programme (SEATP), Pre-service Teachers, Problem-solving Skills, Attitudes towards Learning Design and Management for Children with SEN, Inclusive Education, Teacher Training, Classroom Management, Special Educational Needs

Introduction

Special education is a fundamental subject offered to pre-service teachers in Thailand. They are expected to apply pedagogical knowledge and experience regarding special education to the classroom in their field experience and future career as school teachers (Szumski et al., 2020). However, pre-service teachers found it difficult to prepare for teaching and learning for children with special educational needs (SEN). Additionally, pre-service teachers did not feel confident communicating with children with SEN (Borkett, 2018). Additionally, previous studies have shown that limited self-efficacy regarding inclusive practices negatively affects pre-service teachers'

confidence and classroom preparedness for working with children with SEN ([Tumkaya & Miller, 2020](#)). Within the classroom, pre-service teachers frequently waited for a mentor or special education teacher to help them guide appropriate communication with children with SEN. Some children with SEN were ignored throughout an entire teaching session because pre-service teachers were confused about classroom management and working with students with SEN ([Eggen & Kauchak, 2016](#)). Due to these drawbacks, these students were discriminated against. Moreover, pre-service teachers lack opportunities to improve their problem-solving skills and teaching and learning experiences in connection with special education ([Moberg et al., 2020](#)).

Recent studies have indicated that pre-service teachers across different educational contexts continue to experience challenges regarding inclusive classroom management, communication with children with SEN, and confidence in applying inclusive teaching practices ([Greenbank 2023](#)). Additionally, literature reviews have highlighted the importance of strengthening practical and experiential learning opportunities within teacher education programmes to prepare pre-service teachers for inclusive classrooms and disability support ([Lucena-Rodríguez et al., 2025](#)).

To overcome these issues, pre-service teachers need to gain an understanding of special education and its practical application related to the combination of students with and without SEN in the same class ([Woolfolk, 2018](#)). Therefore, a Special Education Advocacy Training Programme (SEATP) was adopted in this research. This research aimed to investigate the impact of the SEATP on Thai pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and attitudes toward designing and managing learning for children with SEN. This research could arguably develop Thai pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and teaching experience in association with special education ([Burke et al., 2016](#)). In addition, to prepare pre-service teachers for inclusive education and classroom management for children with SEN, continuous mentoring is important ([Kheng & Rusli, 2025](#)). Furthermore, the research could present a broader picture of pedagogical preparation and management of children with SEN. However, there

is limited research that has sought to determine how systematic special education training can enhance the problem-solving skills and attitudes towards designing learning and managing classrooms for children with SEN among Thai pre-service teachers as an aspect of their inclusive education preparation programmes. Thus, this study aimed to explore the impact of the SEATP on pedagogical readiness and beliefs towards inclusive classroom practices among pre-service teachers in Thailand.

Literature Review

To provide a clear picture of the SEATP in the Thai teacher training context, the following two sub-sections are 1. special education and teacher training in Thailand, and 2. fundamental characteristics of the SEATP.

Special Education and Teacher Training in Thailand

According to [The Office of Higher Education Commission \(2016\)](#), special education was a compulsory subject offered to Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) students in all majors. B.Ed. Students were required to have fundamental knowledge and experience in special education and classroom management for school students with SEN. However, when the Thai B.Ed. students who were not studying Special Education became pre-service teachers in the final year of B.Ed. programme, they found it difficult to provide appropriate learning activities for students with SEN. To solve this problem, pre-service teachers were introduced to gain further knowledge and experience in special education ([Borkett, 2018](#)). Although this idea was recommended for developing the B.Ed. programme following the requirements of the Teachers' Council of Thailand, the advice was limited to helping and supporting those pre-service teachers who were facing difficulties during their field experience regarding teaching students with and without SEN in the same classroom ([Woolfolk, 2018](#); [Phiukhao et al., 2025](#)). Due to this issue, a special education training programme was considered to advocate for pre-service teachers' teaching preparation and classroom management. Offering a teacher training programme to pre-service teachers arguably helps them gain a

clear understanding of pedagogical knowledge and skills, which can help them overcome their specific teaching and learning problems in the class ([Eggen & Kauchak, 2016](#); [Gunpinar & Mackin, 2020](#)). Teacher self-efficacy is also an important component of inclusive education because teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to use effective classroom management strategies and feel more confident in supporting children with SEN ([Tumkaya & Miller, 2020](#)).

However, recent studies continue to reveal that even in countries with rich and divergent histories of preparing preservice teachers for inclusive classrooms, challenges remain. Despite the theoretical knowledge of special education being included in teacher preparation curricula, many pre-service teachers still lack confidence and sufficient classroom experience in supporting children with SEN during teaching practicum ([Greenbank, 2023](#)). Moreover, inclusive education requires teachers to apply communication skills, classroom management strategies, and problem-solving abilities to support children with diverse educational backgrounds and needs. Therefore, practical training opportunities and continuous professional support are essential components of teacher education programmes related to inclusive education. This highlights the significance of practical training opportunities and continuous professional support in teacher education programmes associated with inclusive education. Such challenges are indicative of a persistent disconnect between the theoretical preparation for inclusive pedagogy in teacher education programmes and its practical implementation in teaching ([Lucena-Rodríguez et al., 2025](#)).

The Fundamental Characteristics of SEATP

The Special Education Advocacy Training Programme (SEATP) was an American teacher training programme created by [Burke et al. \(2016\)](#). The SEATP was designed to support people involved with children with SEN, such as parents, teachers, and caretakers. The training program aimed to develop an understanding of special education and the practical application of special education knowledge in different cases of children with SEN ([Woolfolk, 2018](#)).

Advocacy and training programmes in special education have been shown by prior studies to enhance teachers' pedagogical confidence, their awareness of inclusive education and their ability to support students with diverse learning needs ([Burke et al. 2016](#); [Greenbank 2023](#)). However, other researchers claim that short-term training programmes may not adequately support pre-service teachers in coping with the complexities of classroom practice, as inclusive education needs ongoing skills development through mentoring and engagement in reflective dialogue based on actual classroom experiences.

Likewise, mentoring systems and opportunities to engage in reflective discussions have been shown to greatly support pre-service teachers' skill development for inclusive classrooms through the provision of additional preparation, emotion support, and problem-solving ([Kheng & Rusli, 2025](#)). Thus, special education training programs should also be evaluated in relation to the sociocultural context, teacher support systems, and collaborative opportunities for professional development.

SEATP trainees were expected to provide appropriate communication, interpersonal interaction, and care for children with SEN. However, the application of SEATP in research faces challenges with respect to training activities for pre-service teachers. In accordance with the SEATP, its design did not particularly support pre-service teachers. They probably struggled to encounter difficult content and training activities related to special education ([Woolfolk 2018](#)).

Hence, the SEATP content and activities need to be clarified to pre-service teachers prior to their participation in the training programme. Additionally, the SEATP was the American special education training programme, and its characteristics and activities might or might not be appropriate for Thai pre-service teachers regarding their learning styles and teaching problems in the classroom. To be aware of this challenge, the SEATP needs to be considered in relation to its strengths and weaknesses within the Thai teacher education context ([The Office of Higher Education Commission, 2016](#)).

However, research into special education training programmes in relation to general teacher

preparation and attitudes towards inclusive education has mainly focused on the development of problem-solving skills in light of real situations encountered by teachers working with children with SEN while there is currently limited evidence about how well international special education advocacy protocols can be applied to Thai teacher education contexts.

Since early teacher education is experiencing some difficulty with getting ideas about inclusive classroom practices into pre-service teachers' professional lives and there is a lack of application in Thailand of recently structured special education advocacy programmes for classroom management, how the SEATP might function to enhance learning design and learning climate for children with SEN indicates an area which could inform further research.

Taken collectively, previous studies indicate that although teacher education programmes have an increasing emphasis on inclusive education, many pre-service teachers continue to face issues in classroom readiness, perceived efficacy and practical aptitude with respect to children with SEN.

Research Questions

Considering the research problem regarding special education, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- Why do pre-service teachers find it difficult to provide learning activities and classroom management for children with SEN?
- What are the effects of SEATP on pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and attitudes toward learning design and management for children with SEN?

Methodology

The research methodology adopted in this study was considered with respect to the research design, research participants, research instruments, and data collection and analysis. To answer the research questions, the research design combines quantitative and qualitative methods and data. [Denscombe \(2017\)](#) argues that the researcher can systematically and rationally design the mixed methods process to reduce weaknesses as the findings can reasonably be integrated. Thus, the research results were examined using quantitative and qualitative methods, which

led to greater reliability ([Bryman, 2016](#); [Creswell & Guetterman, 2019](#)). The research methodology consisted of three phases: quantitative, qualitative, and interpretation of research results. In the quantitative phase, the pre-service teachers who enrolled in the B.Ed. programme at a Capital City University (pseudonym) in Bangkok, Thailand, were invited to participate in the research. The research participants were all volunteers. They comprised 54 pre-service teachers undertaking the B.Ed. program in different majors: Early Childhood, Thai, Mathematics, and Social Studies. However, these participants could not be considered a particular population for statistical measurement purposes. In an ideal statistical analysis, samples are normally used to infer population characteristics. The research sample can only be considered representative of the research population if it is truly randomized. If these participants were considered the research population, the representativeness of the research sample could not be demonstrated. This limitation was apparent when attempting to conduct fieldwork at a university to obtain research results.

All participants answered a Problem-Solving Skills Test and an Attitude Questionnaire, which were quantitative research instruments. The Test was a multiple-choice test that consisted of 20 items regarding the fundamental concept of special education and its practical application in different problem-solving cases. The Test had a total of 20 scores.

The Questionnaire had two parts, each consisting of ten distinct items related to teaching activities and classroom management for children with SEN. Attitude scores were graded using five measurement criteria of attitude agreement, namely, strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree and Strongly disagree, according to the Likert scale.

To ensure that the research instruments were suitable for data collection, the instruments were piloted with 15 voluntary pre-service teachers who were not the respondents at a Capital City University (pseudonym) in Bangkok, Thailand. Amendments were made following comments from experts in special education and the interpretation of statistical calculation results. The Test and the Questionnaire were checked for reliability using

Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The reliability of the quantitative instruments was 0.81 and 0.72, respectively. Additionally, long questions and jargon within the Test, the Questionnaire, and open-ended questions were checked to remove any possible confusion (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Prior to the experiment, the participants answered the Test and the Questionnaire in the quantitative phase. All respondents attended five learning modules designed according to the SEATP. Each module consisted of a fifty-minute training session. The modules consisted of teaching and learning content in association with the terminology of special education, teaching and learning preparation for children with SEN, classroom management, the development of student behaviors, and supporting and caring for children with SEN in different cases (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016). After the completion of training, the respondents were tested again using the same Test and Questionnaire.

After completing the Test and the Questionnaire in the quantitative phase, ten research participants were randomly selected to share their ideas and teaching experiences in a focus group discussion in the qualitative phase. To gain diverse perspectives from the research participants, six open-ended questions were employed in the face-to-face focus group discussion. The six questions were based on the same pedagogical ideas regarding special education as mentioned in the Test and the Questionnaire. Research ethics were approved prior to undertaking the pilot study, data collection, and analysis. Data collection was conducted from 7th November to 18th December 2025. The research was completed in five weeks.

Research data were analyzed and interpreted following the interpretation of the research results phase. The quantitative research data comprised scores resulting from the Test and the Questionnaire. Qualitative research data were opinions resulting from the focus group discussions. The scores resulting from both quantitative instruments were examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software program regarding

percentage, average score (mean), standard deviation, normal distribution, and dependent sample t-test. Qualitative data were categorized and interpreted using a thematic analysis approach (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Thomas, 2017). Regarding the combination of quantitative and qualitative research data, a triangulation technique was employed in this study to confirm the integrity of the research data (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Following this data interpretation phase, quantitative and qualitative research data were compared, corroborated, and interpreted by considering each element in connection with the research questions.

Results

Research Question 1: Why do pre-service teachers find it difficult to provide learning activities and classroom management to students with SEN?

The results indicated that pre-service teachers have difficulties in teaching and managing the classroom due to some drawbacks related to less practice in special education and feelings of discrimination. Quantitative data showed that, before the intervention, Test and Questionnaire scores were lower than other parts for the practical application of special education in the classroom and relationship with children with SEN. Descriptive statistical results also demonstrated that participants had low mean scores on confidence for classroom management and communication with children with SEN before the intervention. These scores indicate that the pre-service teachers had a rudimentary awareness of teaching children, and special needs children in particular, while moderate-to-low attitudes towards inclusive learning design and teacher-child interaction with special-needs children were reflected in the questionnaire data. Preliminary statistical analyses also revealed differences between pre- and post-intervention scores large enough to enhance what was considered practically significant with regard to supporting inclusive classroom practices among pre-service teachers through the SEATP. The following Table 1 shows the results

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Service Teachers' Problem-Solving Skills and Attitudes Towards Learning Design and Management for Children with SEN Prior to the Intervention

Variables	Full Score	M	SD	Level
Problem-solving skills regarding learning design and management for children with SEN	30	10.14	9.32	Low
Attitudes towards learning design and management for children with SEN	150	102.42	12.16	Moderate

These quantitative statistical findings were supported by the qualitative data collected from the focus group discussion, which indicated that most pre-service teachers would remain silent when finding students with SEN. Furthermore, the qualitative findings reflected a lack of confidence and limited experience related to communication and classroom interaction strategies for children with SEN. A sample view was presented by a female pre-service teacher in Thai who claimed that 'I was afraid of them (children with SEN) because I was not sure what they felt and thought about.' Another perspective was shown by a male pre-service teacher in Mathematics who stated that 'I used to meet a child with SEN who was very aggressive in my class. I was shocked and felt that they should not participate in my class because they looked dangerous'. Additionally, within the focus group discussion prior to the intervention, a few pre-service teachers stated that students with SEN should be taught and looked after by a special education teacher and/or an expert rather than pre-service teachers. Furthermore,

two pre-service teachers stated that they had limited opportunities to communicate with children with SEN prior to their teaching practicum. Three participants explained that they were unsure about providing proper communication and classroom design and management techniques in inclusive classrooms.

Research Question 2: What are the Effects of the SEATP on Pre-service Teachers' Problem-solving Skills and Attitudes toward Learning Design and Management for Children with SEN?

The findings showed that after the pre-service teachers were trained following the SEATP, they developed a clearer understanding of special education and attitudes toward learning design and management for children with SEN. In accordance with the quantitative data, the total scores resulting from the Test and the Questionnaire were higher than those prior to the intervention (sig.=0.026, 0.018 respectively). The data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Service Teachers' Problem-Solving Skills and Attitudes Towards Learning Design and Management for Children with SEN Prior to and After the Intervention

Variables	Pre-Test		Post-test		t	Sig.	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Problem-solving skills regarding learning design and management for children with SEN	14.84	9.32	26.04	8.33	10.45	0.026*	1.42
Attitudes towards learning design and management for children with SEN	107.42	12.16	139.67	10.84	11.52	0.018*	1.57

*P < 0.05

The descriptive statistical results showed that the post-test mean score was higher than the pre-test mean score with regards to both problem-solving skills and attitude towards learning design and management for children with SEN: scores resulting from the Problem-Solving Skills Test increased from a mean of 14.84 before the

intervention to 26.04 after, and scores resulting from the Attitudes Questionnaire increased from a pre-intervention mean of 107.42 to a post-intervention mean of 139.67. In addition, the lower standard deviations in the post-test scores indicate better agreement between participants' responses after the intervention. The comparison results of the pre-test

and post-test scores of problem-solving skills and attitudes towards learning design and management for children with SEN in terms of inferential statistics revealed significant differences ($p < .05$). The results demonstrated that the intervention greatly enhanced participants' pedagogical knowledge and readiness to implement inclusive classroom practices. Additionally, the Cohen's d values (1.42 and 1.57, respectively) indicated large effect sizes, suggesting that the intervention had strong practical effects on the development of pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and attitudes towards learning design and management for children with SEN.

These numerical data were comparable to the qualitative findings resulting from the focus group discussion. Seven pre-service teachers claimed that they had additional knowledge and experience in dealing with children with SEN in the classroom. Most of the focus group members were willing to have children with SEN in their class. A sample idea was presented by a female pre-service teacher in Early Childhood who pointed out that 'everybody should learn to respect each other. They (children with SEN) have the right to sit in the class and learn about the same subject'. Another view was given by a female pre-service teacher in Thai who argued that 'I realized that they (children with SEN) were still my students. I should support and care for them. I have many ideas regarding special education and classroom management. I wanted to create learning activities for them'. Although the SEATP advocated for pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and attitudes toward learning design and management for children with SEN, the training programme was limited to providing discussion activities between pre-service teachers and an academic advisor and/or a special education teacher. A sample idea was shown by a male pre-service teacher in Thai who claimed that 'due to the time limit, I still wanted to have additional opportunities to discuss with my academic advisor or a special education teacher to help my student with SEN'.

Discussion

Discussion for Research Question One

The findings showed that the pre-service teachers experienced difficulties in designing appropriate

learning activities and classroom management for children with SEN. This challenge is considered because of the limitation of pedagogical experience in different cases and a lack of confidence in special education. Prior to the intervention, the participants claimed that they were not certain about communicating and interacting properly with children with SEN. These results are consistent with previous studies that suggested that pre-service teachers often feel unprepared to support children with SEN because they have limited opportunities to apply special education knowledge in different classroom situations ([Borkett, 2018](#); [Woolfolk, 2018](#)).

In addition, the participants tended to avoid communicating with children with SEN because they were uncertain about appropriate interaction and behavioral management. This issue is connected to the limited exposure to inclusive classrooms during teacher preparation programmes. Similar findings were reported by [Eggen and Kauchak \(2016\)](#), who explained that pre-service teachers require both theoretical understanding and practical teaching experience to manage different special education classrooms. Without sufficient skills required for problem resolution and learning design and management, pre-service teachers may experience anxiety when teaching children with SEN ([Greenbank, 2023](#)).

Additionally, the findings showed that a few participants believed that children with SEN should be taught by special education teachers or specialists. The findings reflect an unclear understanding of inclusive education and schoolteachers' responsibilities to support students with different backgrounds and characteristics. Previous research has similarly shown that limited interaction with children with disabilities can negatively impact teachers' confidence and attitudes towards special education ([Szumski et al., 2020](#)). Therefore, teacher education programmes should provide greater opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage with inclusive teaching practices, classroom observations, and communication with children with SEN.

Discussion for Research Question Two

The findings showed that the SEATP advocated for the pre-service teachers' problem-solving skills and

attitudes towards learning design and management for children with SEN. After participating in the training program, the participants had higher scores on the problem-solving skills Test and the Attitude Questionnaire. In addition, qualitative findings showed that the participants had greater confidence and willingness to support children with SEN in the classroom. The findings support previous studies that showed that teacher training programmes can improve pre-service teachers' pedagogical skills, confidence, and attitudes towards special education (Burke et al., 2016; Moberg et al., 2020).

Additionally, the findings showed that the pre-service teachers realized the importance of respecting and supporting children with SEN. The participants reported that children with SEN should have more opportunities to communicate and learn from their classmates. The results referred to equal participation and non-discrimination in the classroom (Borkett, 2018). Furthermore, exposure to different cases and classroom situations during the SEATP helped the participants enhance their understanding of special education and classroom design and management.

However, although the SEATP produced positive outcomes, the participants still required further opportunities to discuss their teaching problems with advisors and special education experts to improve their teaching. The findings indicate that short-term training programmes alone cannot prepare pre-service teachers for the complexities of inclusive classrooms. Consistent with Woolfolk (2018), ongoing support, mentoring, and opportunities for professional discussion are important components for improving pre-service teachers' confidence and problem-solving skills regarding special education.

The results also indicate that teacher education programmes and curriculum designers would be better served by focusing their pre-service teacher preparation on practical special education training, reflective discussion activities, and inclusive classroom management. Additionally, policymakers and higher education institutions should work together to strengthen the relationships among universities, schools, and special education experts to provide additional ongoing support for pre-service teachers through professional mentoring in inclusive contexts.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further research should explore the longitudinal effects of special education advocacy training programs on classroom practices and professional development for pre-service teachers. For further research, longitudinal designs across time and comparative studies by universities, where larger samples from varied educational settings could be used, would help obtain a wider picture of what inclusive education represents in Thailand in terms of teacher preparation programmes.

Conclusion

To address Research Question One, the pre-service teachers found it difficult to create learning activities and classroom management for children with SEN because of the drawback factors regarding insufficient practice in special education and feelings of discrimination. To address Research Question Two, after taking part in the training modules designed following the SEATP, the pre-service teachers can enhance their problem-solving skills and attitudes toward learning design and management for children with SEN. However, owing to the time limit of the training duration, the SEATP was limited in providing additional discussion opportunities between the pre-service teachers and their academic advisor and/or a special education teacher.

The findings of this study also highlight the importance of strengthening teacher preparation programs related to inclusive education in Thailand. Practical training activities, reflective discussion opportunities, and continuous mentoring support can contribute to improving pre-service teachers' pedagogical confidence and preparedness for classroom management for children with SEN. Furthermore, the findings suggest that Thailand's inclusive education policy and teacher education curriculum should place greater emphasis on practical special education experience and collaboration between universities, schools, and special education specialists to support sustainable inclusive classroom practices.

To obtain a fuller picture, future studies should investigate the academic and sociocultural backgrounds of students with SEN and individual tutorials for pre-service teachers. Longitudinal

studies, comparisons across teacher education programmes, and studies with larger samples from multiple educational contexts may also help provide more generalizable insights into inclusive education and special education training programmes in Thailand.

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