

A REVIEW ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES AND EFFECTIVENESS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *Special education is a branch of educational services provided to students with special needs. This field is growing rapidly along with the development of the national education system. In addition to services at the Special Education School and Special Education Integration Programme, inclusive education approach is also implemented in certain schools across the country to meet the needs of students and current education demand. Existing policies adopted long ago provides the right for formal education for children with special needs, and the policy is reinforced by the introduction of compulsory education and education for all policies, which is now serves as the basis in planning the implementation of special education in Malaysia. Through a review, this study aims to explore the principles and practices of inclusive education in Malaysia. In addition to that, this study also aims to get an insight on the pedagogical practice of inclusive education in Malaysia. Through the review that has been conducted, gap in the current practice can be identified which can help to highlight further improvement that can be done in ensuring a successful implementation of inclusive education in Malaysia.*

Keywords: *Inclusive Education in Malaysia, Inclusive Education Effectiveness, Inclusive Education Pedagogical Practice*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful factor in determining the success of a country's vision to achieve a fully developed nation status in terms of economic development, social justice, as well as spiritual, moral and ethical strength towards a united and dynamic community. World class education system should develop individual potential and achieve the education aspirations of a country. Inclusive education is therefore introduced as a long term strategy to improve the existing special education program in Malaysia. This is because, education is a right to every individual including those with special needs. Disability cannot be used as a reason to miss education since variety of methods can be implemented in order to provide services to students with special educational needs.

Inclusive education provides an opportunity for students with special educational needs to learn together with mainstream students. This helps students to interact within a diversified learning environment and help to prepare them with diversified situation when they join the workforce later. Inclusive education should be implemented not

only in selected schools but in every school in order to provide an easy access to education for student with special educational needs. By the implementation of inclusive education, Anuar and Che Rozubi (2010) stated that this initiative helps to save time, energy, and material production to various parties such as students, families, teachers, and school due to the fact special education classes has become part of mainstream classes.

The introduction of Compulsory Education Policy in 2002 has made primary education for all children, including children with special educational needs to be mandatory. Parents who fail to enroll children that has reached school age can be penalised. This policy is further reinforced by Article 8 in the Malaysia Constitution on Disabled Person Act 2002. Through these, it can be seen that Malaysian government is committed with their effort to provide appropriate education according to the needs of all children, including those who need special attention in learning. According to Saad (2010), Ministry of Education Malaysia also has been working hand in hand with other related ministries to provide the best educational facilities

they could for children with special educational needs. At the moment, special education program in Malaysia is administered together by four ministries which are the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, and Ministry of Human Resources.

Inclusive Education Approach in Malaysia and Global Context

Since 1962, education in Malaysia has experienced the introduction of *program integrasi pendidikan* (integrated education program) and *program percantuman* (merger program) (Adam, 1997). From the introduction of these two programs, it can be seen that inclusive education is not a new thing to Malaysian education system where a new term –

inclusive education is being used globally to refer to the two previously established programs. In Malaysia, students that are enrolled in inclusive education program are those that have difficulty with sight, hearing, speaking, as well as those with learning disabilities. This program has allowed students with special educational needs to receive education and they were given three options of program that they can attend to namely, special education school, special education integration program, or inclusive education program.

To carry out inclusive education class in schools, Heiman (2004) has outlined four models that can be followed by practitioners. The four models are full inclusion, rejection of inclusion, two-teacher, and in-and-out. The summary of these models is tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of inclusive education models

Model	Descriptions
Full inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with special educational needs learn together with mainstream students at all times.
Rejection of inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No practice of inclusive education. • Both mainstream and special needs students learn separately.
Two-teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two teachers jointly teach in a classroom that consists of mainstream and special education students. • Teacher with special education background will be responsible for students with special educational needs in the class.
In-and-out (partial inclusion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with special educational needs spend some time of their day at school to learn with students in the mainstream class and spend the other portion of their day learning in special education class.

To explore the approach that is being used globally, Heiman carried out a research on inclusive education practice that took place in Israel and the United Kingdom and in her research, she concluded that most of the special education teachers in the United Kingdom practiced in-and-out model of inclusive education. According to the teachers that participated in this research, in-and-out model of inclusive education is the best to be applied for classes of students with learning disabilities that this model allows them to gain experience from both special and mainstream classes. This model allows students with special educational needs to experience interaction and learning process from two different perspectives which are from the special education classes and mainstream classes. Differently, teachers in Israel practice two-teacher model of inclusive education more as compared to teachers in the United Kingdom.

However, finding from the research also shows that teachers from both countries agreed that full inclusion is not the best approach to be used. However, there are also teachers that rejected the implementation of inclusive education in school. As for them, students with special educational needs are better left to learn in their own special classes which allow them to progress according to what has been planned for them. If the two countries' approach in inclusive is to be compared with Malaysia's approach in inclusive education, it displays different finding where most teachers choose to apply a combination of any two of the models in order to have a more operative and successful implementation of inclusive education in their school.

Inclusive Education and the Issue in Pedagogical Practice

The universality of inclusive education has provided a new dimension to the education system globally. Students with moderate learning disabilities are now given the opportunity to learn together with mainstream students. In order to support the learning of students with special educational needs in the mainstream classes, a few adjustments has been made on curriculum, pedagogical practice, and the evaluation of learning outcomes to better support inclusive education.

In line with what has been urged by UNESCO at Jomtien, Thailand on the “Education for All” policy, the Ministry of Education has introduced this concept with the hope that an equal education opportunity can be established. This concept offers and well-adjusted education opportunities for all students regardless of their religion, race, gender, or individual differences. According to Mittler (1995), the concept of “Education for All” should also include students who dropped out of the ordinary schooling system students from the underserved community, as well as students with disruptive behaviour and abused experience. This is supported by Stainback and Stainback (1990) where according to them, students regardless of their background and capability should be given equal opportunity to education where with accurate approach, they could also excel in education on a par with mainstream students.

Students with special educational needs that are to be included in mainstream classes has to first, undergo several diagnosis which include educational and psychological tests to assess their suitability for inclusive education (Heiman, 2004). Students with special educational needs that are included in inclusive education will still receive the usual supplementary academic support by their own special education teachers in special education classes. For inclusive education to become more effective and feasible to be carried out, more mainstream teachers need to be trained on how to manage students with special educational needs in mainstream classes. This effort will also help to promote the practice of flexible inclusion in the least restrictive surrounding.

Nevertheless, most of the mainstream teachers are concern with the practice of inclusive education that it causes the adoption of additional teaching and learning tools and skills to better handle the educational, social, and emotional needs of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes. This is not a current issue as Idol (1997) has reported the same concern years ago. Due to this, Vaughn et al. (1996) has argued that this could be the reason why there are still

small number of teachers that declined the implementation of inclusive education in school despite the apparent benefits that it brings to both mainstream and special education students. Vaughn et al. also stated that the introduction of inclusive education in school has challenged the *status quo* of how teaching and learning has been carried out in mainstream classes; where mainstream teachers are advised to learn special pedagogical approach to better handle students with special educational needs. Other than that, Danne and Beirne-Smith (2000) have highlighted other constraints that inhibit the adoption of a distinct pedagogical approach for inclusive education which includes shortage of monetary support, large number of students in mainstream classes, and additional amount of work for teachers.

The Effectiveness of Inclusive Education in Malaysia

There are a lot of factors that can contribute to the effectiveness of inclusive education in Malaysia. The most commonly talked about is the role and support of school administrators in the implementation of inclusive education program at schools. Schools that receive ultimate support on inclusive education often show high value and attitude towards inclusive education. In school, the highest school administrators (i.e. principal and assistant principal) are said to play a critical role on the implementation of new education policy; where in this case, the implementation of inclusive education. This is supported by a research that has been done by Salisbury and McGregor (2002) where in their research, they found out that the ability of a principal to delegate roles among teachers concerning inclusive education implementation in schools determine the success of the program. As what has been mentioned earlier, when a communication channel for teachers to share knowledge and suggestions existed, this will also help to provide teachers with peer support to better cope with challenges throughout the inclusion process. Other than that, incredible support that is shown by school administrators will portray the important of inclusive education to be carried out in school.

Next, a research that has been done by Mohd Ali et al. (2006) found that an effective inclusive education program depends on teacher’s competency. Therefore, teachers with no background in special education should be given courses and trainings on special and inclusive education. Special education teachers can also provide personal coaching on special education to mainstream teachers. This type of collaboration helps to narrow skills gap between mainstream teachers and special education teachers. According to Bender et al. (1995), an effective inclusive

education program relies on teachers' acceptance of the program itself. Teachers that are open towards the implementation of inclusive education will be willing to provide "rooms" for students with special educational needs in the mainstream classes.

Last but not least, pre-service teachers' education can also contribute towards the effectiveness of inclusive education program. Institutes that provide preparation for pre-service teachers should familiarize the concept of inclusive education throughout the training. For instance, courses on special education should be open to all future teachers regardless of their major. This will help to prepare the future mainstream teachers on how to handle students with special educational needs in the inclusive education program. When the trainee teachers go for practical training, it is advisable for them to obtain first-hand experience on inclusive education to help prepare and manage their expectation.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of inclusive education in Malaysia provides an opportunity for the education system to be holistic. Nevertheless, improvement is possible to be made in order to ensure a successful implementation of inclusive education in Malaysia. For a successful inclusive education to be established, mainstream and special education teachers need to work together and create a communication channel that will be useful for suggestion and knowledge sharing between mainstream and special education teachers. Teachers that involved in inclusive education must be prepared to overcome challenges that lie ahead. Other than that, they also need to learn to compromise and ready to do something beyond what has been planned. The implementation of inclusive education in schools also requires collaboration from all parties including school administrators and parents in order to ensure the durability of the program.

For students with special educational needs, changes irritate them. Therefore, changes in pedagogical approach used in inclusive education need to be subtle and familiar enough to help them adapt successfully to the program. Regarding this matter, special education teachers need to be the source of strength and comfort for the special students. In order to generate a conducive learning environment for students with special educational needs, positive relationship between teachers and students is essential. Students with special educational needs have poor self-concept as a result of negative interactions and unconstructive experiences in education. Therefore to build their self-concept,

continued efforts and hard work from family, teachers, and friends are needed continuously.

Most of the mainstream teachers are positive towards inclusive education and very accepting towards special education students in mainstream classes. However, they do not know how to teach and handle students with special educational needs due to lack of experience. Therefore, to further enhance inclusive education program in Malaysia, teachers who are not exposed to special education need to receive proper training and guidance from experienced special education teachers. Even though inclusive education program is not mandated at national secondary school, effort shown by several teachers to informally practice inclusive education at secondary school level is praiseworthy.

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