

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE TEACHERS VIEW

<sup>a</sup>Rosmalily binti Salleh

<sup>b</sup>John Woollard

<sup>a</sup>*Curriculum Development Division, MOE, Malaysia*

<sup>b</sup>*University of Southampton, UK*

<sup>a</sup>*rosmalily@moe.gov.my*

<sup>b</sup>*J.Woollard@soton.ac.uk*

### ABSTRACT

Malaysia, like many countries in the world, is recognising inclusive education and has pledged a commitment in the 2013-2025 Malaysia Education Blueprint. However, the journey of providing a quality and inclusive education for all is complex, leading to inconsistency in practice. The Malaysia context with its diverse ethnicity, language, culture, religion besides the education and school systems have implications for the promotion and implementation of inclusive education. This study explores and highlights teachers' relevant yet overlooked perspectives on inclusion and inclusive education in the period of educational system reformation. By focusing on teachers' perspectives, the research aims to provide a better understanding of the promotion of inclusive education in Malaysia's primary schools. This interpretative, exploratory, qualitative study employed multiple methods to obtain rich and in-depth data. Participants are purposely sampled from five national primary schools: three schools with the Special Education Integration Programme (SEIP) and two schools without SEIP. They were 76 participants; 25 teachers were interviewed individually and 51 participated in eight focus-group interviews. Ten classroom observations were conducted prior to the individual interviews. The data were analysed thematically by the inductive approach, using NVivo software. Theories of inclusive education were adopted to analyse teachers' responses. The results show that teachers view inclusive education as a challenging concept to implement. Such views are influenced by multiple factors, such as miscommunication between departments, sociocultural attitudes to disability, educational systems, inefficient utilisation of resources, insufficient facilities, and teachers' lack of knowledge and skills about special education and pupils with special educational needs (SEN). The findings will be of value to those responsible for planning and developing the policy and programmes regarding inclusive education, special education, and specifically educational systems in moving towards inclusive systems and schools.

**Keywords:** Inclusion, Inclusive education

### 1. Introduction

Malaysia highlights its commitment to quality and inclusive education through the 'Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025' (MOE, 2013b). The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) targets that "75% of students with special needs enrolled in inclusive programmes by 2025"

(MOE, 2013b p. 4-17). This journey to improve the education system began during the early stage of post-colonialism. To enable the transformation of the educational system, the government has put forward effort, energy, and initiatives towards its aspirations of an economically advanced inclusive society (EPU, 2015) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The educational systems, policies, laws as well as the various context of Malaysia as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual nation, however, bring challenges. In addition, the successful promotion of inclusive education also requires a significant role of the teachers, the practitioners.

Therefore, this study investigates in-service teachers' views about inclusive education to better understand their perceptions and so inform the strategies that can bring about the transformation.

## **2. Malaysia's Context**

As a result of colonisation, Malaysia has become a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual country. Since then, the country's education system has responded to building ethnic unity, identity, equal opportunity, lifelong education, quality culture and international competitiveness. The MOE emphasises that the system focuses on developing pupils holistically, with a strong sense of national identity (MOE, 2013b). Through the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (MOE, 2013b), the MOE outlines 11 shifts for the educational system transformation to enable it to keep abreast of rising international standards. These actions involve system and student aspirations with clear performance benchmarks to assess reformation progress. There are five system aspirations: access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency. The student aspirations are knowledge, bilingual proficiency, thinking skills, ethics and spirituality, leadership skills and national identity (MOE, 2012).

### **2.1 Malaysia Primary School System**

Malaysia provides preschool, primary, secondary, post-secondary, special education, religious teaching, private and technical education (MOE, 2012). Education is accessible from free multilingual public schools, private schools or through home schooling. The elements of access involve obtaining education at school and remaining to achieve a minimum level of schooling (MOE, 2013b). The Education Act 1996 stipulates the adoption of the standard national curriculum by all schools, including pre- and private schools, specifying the knowledge, skills and values to be acquired by pupils by the end of their schooling (MOE, 2011). Pupils sat the Primary School Achievement Test (Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah, UPSR) at the end of Year 6 since 1988 until the recent abolishment in April 2021.

There are 20 schooling options at primary and secondary levels (MOE, 2012). The availability of choices is due to the school development during the British colonialism with the 'divide and rule policy' which has resulted in Malay, English, Chinese, Tamil and religious Madrasah types of school (Othman et al., 2011). The dualism system is influenced by the political, economic, sociocultural, and religious factors. The national education system was proposed in the 1950s to develop unity among ethnicities, hence the framing of National Education Philosophy (NEP) (Ibrahim, 2007). Therefore, the Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools were preserved and maintained mother tongue and cultural schooling, providing that they used the national curriculum (Othman et al., 2011). Currently, there are three main types of schools: National schools (Sekolah Kebangsaan, SK) and National-type schools (Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan): either Chinese (SJKC) or Tamil (SJKT) (MOE, 2012). Each is defined by

their medium of instruction. Malay is the primary language of instruction at SK, while Chinese is used at SJKC and Tamil at SJKT. These three types of schools jointly account for almost 99% of total primary enrolments. There are also a variety of niche school choices, including religious and special education schools, private schools, international schools, and independent Chinese schools. Consequently, these have resulted in complex education system that has implications for a quality education and inclusive society (Salleh & Woollard, 2019).

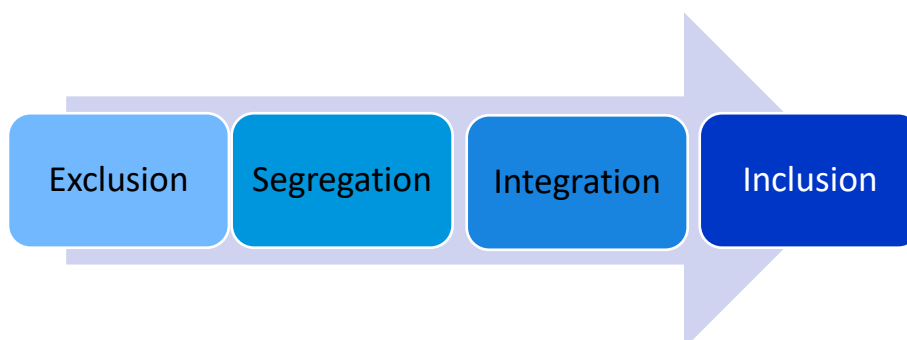
## 2.2 Education and Nation Building

The government continuous effort and initiatives in the face of pressing demands from various interest groups to promote nation building via education is undeniable. However, after more than half a century, the government still struggles to promote nation building and enhance national unity via a unified education system (Khader, 2012). Programmes such as the 'Vision School' (Sekolah Wawasan) and RIMUP have been implemented. Vision School is a concept school, introduced in 1995, to cultivate racial unity through integrated schools of all three types – SK, SJKC and SJKT together (MCM, 2018) whereby the three share the facilities yet maintain separate administrative bodies and teachers. The 2006 Student Integration Plan for Unity (Rancangan Integrasi Murid Untuk Perpaduan, RIMUP) was a reintroduction of a similar programme halted in 1985 (MOE, 2012). Nevertheless, the programmes successiveness to promote inclusiveness and to foster interaction and understanding among pupils of the various schools is questionable.

## 3. Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusive education is related to the field of special education and disability (Salleh & Woollard, 2019). This concept is continuously debated which resulted in the evolution of the concept of inclusion (Opertti et al., 2009). Literature reviews highlight the significance of the historical context (M. Ainscow, 2000; Armstrong et al., 2011; Clough & Corbett, 2000; Gibson, 2015) to its theoretical and empirical transformation (Opertti et al., 2014). Figure 1 shows the development of the concept although a non-linear process (Rosmalily & Woollard, 2019; Salleh & Woollard, 2019).

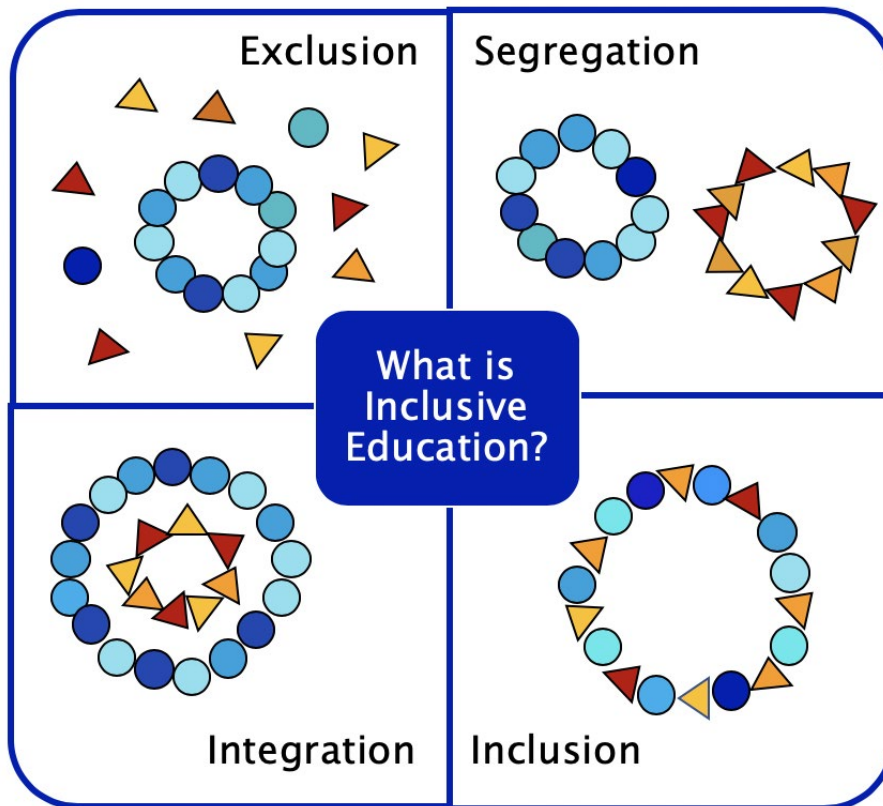
Figure 1: The development of inclusive education



Source: (Rosmalily & Woollard, 2019; Salleh & Woollard, 2019)

Figure 2 is a visual representation of our understanding of the terminology

Figure 2: What is inclusive education?



Source: (Rosmalily, 2018)

The blue hue colours represent typical learners, while the yellow hues represent the people with SEN. The different shapes and shades denote that everyone is unique. **Exclusion**, as seen in the diagram, is the denial of access to the mainstream. Messiou (2006) highlights that other pupil could also be at risk or vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation, not only the pupils with SEN. **Segregation** emphasises on SEN, focuses on deficits, and is supported by the medical model of disability (Clough & Corbett, 2000; Winter & O’Raw, 2010). **Integration** is the placement of pupils with SEN in existing mainstream education/schools, providing that they fulfil the necessary requirements (Farrell et al., 2004) is based on assimilation model (Winter & O’Raw, 2010). **Inclusion** however, means all pupils must be supported and facilitated to prosper (Farrell, 2000). Inclusion is not just about placement but full participation of pupils (Jorgensen & Lambert, 2012) to experience all aspects of school life and obtain the quality education to fulfil their potential. Inclusion therefore, involves educational equity and equality (Allan, 2000), for all pupils irrespective of difference (Rosmalily & Woollard, 2019; Salleh & Woollard, 2019). From this wider perspective, transforming the educational system (Allan, 2000) and emphasising on inclusive practice (Ainscow, 2014; Farrell, 2000) are vital for inclusive education.

The recent Incheon Declaration for ‘Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality’ reaffirms the commitment to make the necessary changes in worldwide policies (UNESCO, 2015). This certainly requires inclusive values being demonstrated by all stakeholders. The process is certainly demanding, requiring changing ways of thinking (Ainscow, 2005), roles of organisational cultures and leadership (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2011); requiring inclusive values in policy formulation (Booth & Ainscow,

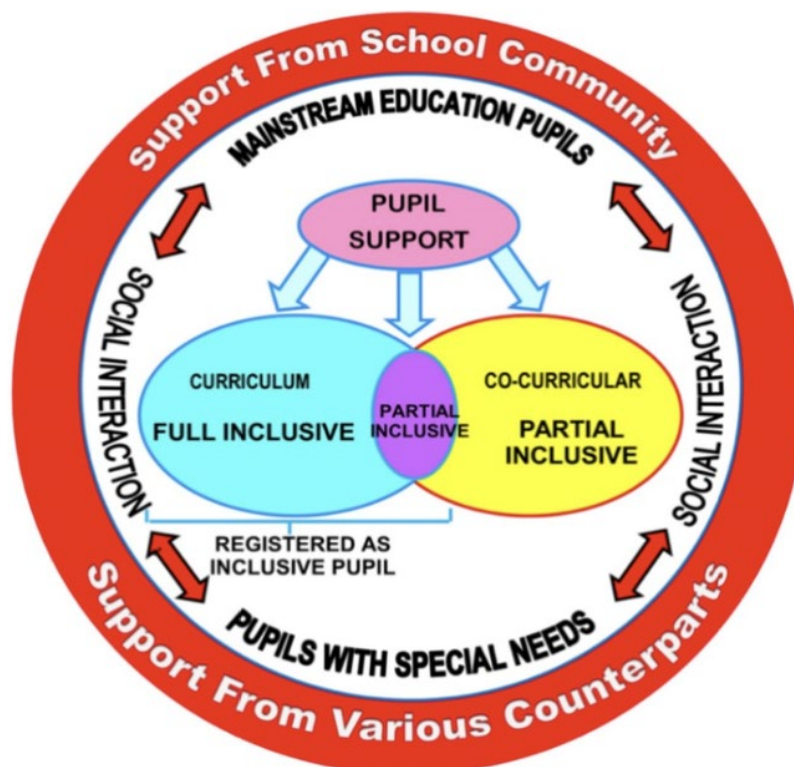
2002; UNESCO, 2015); implementing practices at all levels (Ryan, 2011); and accepting the core pedagogical of transformability to enhance learning capacity of pupils of the co-agency and everybody (Hart & Drummond, 2014).

### 3.1 Inclusive Education in Malaysia

Inclusive education was introduced in the Education Act 1996 as an extension of educational provision for children with special needs (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014). It is a continuation of the opportunity for pupils with educational needs to be educated alongside mainstream pupils, apart from the provision of special education. However, the amended Education Act 1996 (1998) did not explicitly identify the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Inclusive education is defined by the Ministry as 'mainstream schools that integrate one to five pupils with special needs into mainstream classes' (MOE, 2013b, p. 4-17). There are two approaches taken by the inclusive education programme involving pupils with SEN in SEIPs (MOE, 2016): the first is 'full inclusion', whereby pupils with SEN learn full time with mainstream pupils in all subjects, either based on the national curriculum or its modified version, with or without support services. The second is 'partial inclusion', in which pupils with SEN learn certain academic subjects or are involved in co-academic or co-curricular activities alongside mainstream pupils, also referred to as a 'pull-out' programme. Participation in co-academic and co-curricular activities is based on the pupils' potential, talent, and ability. There are criteria for pupils' selection, their placement, and eligibility to sit a national examination, as summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The concept of inclusive education in Malaysia



Source: (translated (MOE, 2013a, p. 4))

Jelas and Mohd Ali (2014) argue that the inclusion of pupils with SEN is consistent with the 1980s integration model. This practice is based on an exclusionary process grounded in the legitimised paradigm of an 'ideal' concept of inclusive education (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014). The notion of inclusive education also focuses on pupils with SEN which is a narrow definition as described by (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). It is not a total inclusion without conditions as stated in the national report of Malaysia (MOE, 2004).

The current development of inclusive education could be observed in the government's vision: "75% of students with special needs enrolled in inclusive programmes by 2025" as highlighted in the Blueprint (MOE, 2013b).

## 4. Methodology

This interpretative qualitative research employs multiple methods to obtain rich and in-depth data. The methods are 60-minute semi-structured individual interviews and 90-minutes focus group interviews. There are also 10 overt non-participant classroom observations before the individual interviews that help the interviewer understand the context and inform some of the questions. The analysis of the individual interviews and focus group interviews is integrated to serve the dual purpose of exploring the phenomenon of interest and completing or confirming the data of group perspectives and individual views. Interviews were conducted in Malay language (the national language) to avoid language barriers and recorded with participants' consent.

### 4.1 Data Collection

Data were collected from five national primary schools. There were three schools with the Special Education Integration Programme (SEIP) for learning difficulties and two non-SEIP schools. Purposive sampling is adopted to recruit the participants. There were teachers, senior assistants, mainstream, and special education teachers (at SEIP schools only) involved in the study. Table 1. shows the participant distribution.

Table 1: Participant Distribution

Schools		Number of Participants	
SEIP	Non-SEIP	Individual Interviews	Focus Group Interviews
1		11	13 (2 groups)
2		0	7 (1 group)
3		2	5 (1 group)
	4	6	13 (2 groups)
	5	6	13 (2 groups)

Source: (Rosmally & Woollard, 2019)

### 4.2 Data Analysis

Data are thematically analysed via inductive approach using the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) NVivo 11 through the lens of interpretivist and constructivist approaches. The eclectic coding involves a constant splitting and lumping process of the coded text to re-assess and crystallise the codes, categories, and themes.

Analysis was carried out in Malay language by a native Malay speaker. Only the themes, nodes and excerpts are translated to English.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

Participants viewed inclusive education as a challenging concept to be implemented. Their responses are based on the understanding of the Malaysia practice which reflected a narrow concept. The excerpts presented are the translated version, without changes in the meaning and nuance of the original. The illustrated excerpts are cited from individual interviews (II) and focus groups (FG) 'a' and 'b'. The 'S' denotes school and '\*' indicates special education teacher. All names and schools are anonymised.

### 5.1 Mixed Views on the Vision and Inclusive Education

Participant conveyed mixed reaction and were sceptical about the Vision because of their insights into its discrepancy from reality. The significant negative viewpoint about the government's vision on inclusive education:

*I don't care about policy, development plan or whatever. Once heard, forget it. Pupils' performance is important. With school programmes and pupils, no time for other interests. Too much work.*  
(II, S4, Nia)

This perception exposed teachers valuing on academic performance. Participants believed that policies that do not focus on academic results is insignificant. Nia's detachment was due to teachers' heavy workload and other school priorities. Similarly,

*Government must inform teachers, ensure their understanding. But I don't see any effort to inform and support them. Only a few days ago since 2014, a JPN officer briefed the headteachers. Still, unclear. And, for non-SEIP schools, why should we bother. Our main concern is the remedy for pupils who've issues with LINUS skills.*  
(II, S5, Rafi, Headteacher)

Another viewpoint:

*Some of MOE's criteria: pupils, eligible to be included if they're able to learn, behave and manage themselves... have minimum problems, high-function pupils. We could familiarise them for inclusive education.*  
(II, S1, Tuah, Senior Assistant)

Tuah pointed out the differing policies on the inclusion of pupils with SEN. The chance to realise the Vision was, therefore, slender. The statements also implied issues concerning teachers' understanding about inclusive education and, more importantly, what the government, represented by staff from the higher level, such as from the Ministry and State Education Department (JPN), told the administrators (see earlier Rufqa's extract) and hence the teachers.

Another common negative view was that the Vision was impossible and unrealistic for Malaysia, as a developing country.

*75% is too high; difficult. Malaysia hasn't reached the level of developed country – too demanding.  
(II, S5, Nur)*

Concern was expressed at Malaysia's capacity in many areas, including technology, expertise, facilities, and educational system.

However, there are also positive reactions about the Vision. One view was that the Vision portrayed the government's effort and seriousness in implementing inclusive education:

*It's a good effort, should be maintained. So, pupils with SEN could undergo realistic learning experiences, enjoy a fair share of the educational rights.  
(II, S1, Sofea)*

Mainstream education was mentioned to provide a naturalistic learning experience. Sofea's expression of educational rights to mainstream inclusion, however, was only to the rights of pupils with SEN getting similar resources, curricula and activities. This 'realistic' reference is questionable and having access to the 'mainstream' does not guarantee an inclusive education for pupils. Although she believed that teachers play an important role in supporting pupils to achieve, her thoughts about inclusive education were settled when she mentioned that it was better to segregate pupils with SEN to boost their confidence.

Another perception involved the integration of pupils with SEN, and was considered to be a development of inclusive education:

*SEN pupils are in the mainstream environment. The SEIP programme is opened in most schools.  
(II, S1, Yaqeen, Headteacher)*

Yaqeen revealed that the SEIP itself was an inclusive education. There were issues with teachers' understanding. First, of government policy and the definition of inclusive education because, as stated in the Blueprint, SEIP is not an inclusive education programme, secondly, there was a narrow view that associates pupils with SEN with their placement. Also, the placement of SEIP at mainstream schools does not warrant that pupils' inclusion achieves success.

One participant supported the Vision thus:

*I support (the Vision). There're pupils with SEN who can be academically upgraded, join the mainstream.  
(II, S1, Ziqri)*

Still, there was an issue with conceptual understanding of inclusive education, that of involving only pupils with SEN learning in mainstream classrooms. Clearly, Ziqri referred to those pupils who can do well academically. Also, his word 'join' signals and emphasises the separate educational systems, with differing requirements for enrolment: 'those who want to join the mainstream need to have a certain level of IQ, otherwise they will receive special education'.



## 5.2 The Influencing Factors

Participants view was influenced by the influencing factors which were identified into categories: government, school, teacher and Malaysian ethos.

### 5.2.1 The Government

Participants voiced issues about policy.

*Similar, but different terms. Because the authorities always change. Complicated education system, many policies. Teachers, as implementers, must execute.*  
(II, S4, Mia)

This statement demonstrated the requirement to adhere to policy, as a practitioner. However, it is confusing, and teachers may lose direction and take unclear actions. In this case Mia referred to MOE's programmes, specifically LINUS and a prior programme called 3M.

There is discrepancy in education system. As Ziqri put it, the segregation does not promote equality but contributes to the communication barriers within society in daily life:

*Weird to talk about inclusive. There're vernacular schools, unnecessary! I don't see equality. Everybody should enrol in SK, to promote the national language in daily life. I tried to communicate with a Chinese, but he couldn't understand, unable to converse in Malay language, which is... So, inclusive education is good.*  
(II, S1, Ziqri)

Obviously, Ziqri was unable to speak Mandarin, and neither could he converse in English. It was considered strange for a Malaysian to be unable to speak the national language.

However, vernacular schools are increasing, seen as due to political interest. Reja said:

*Talking about inclusive, obviously we don't achieve the objective. Separated system: SK, SJKT and SJKC: very challenging for inclusive. How? The policy – develop more SJKs.*  
(II, S5, Reja)

Unanimously, participants viewed that the education system places great emphasis on academic achievement. It was felt that Malaysia practised segregation for special education provision:

*Zania: I want to emphasise our common practice. In mainstream schools, special education classes are segregated, isolated within the same premises. They never mixed up. Today, new category of mainstream schools emerged like Cluster schools – differs from the non-Cluster or suburb schools.*  
(FGa, S4)

Participants also pointed out mainstream schools' segregation was due to the branding practice involved in recognising academic achievement, such as the Cluster school, which was believed to be given to more prestigious and of higher quality than other schools those that were not chosen, or schools in suburban areas. Therefore, having pupils with SEN at such schools would lower the academic results and tarnish their reputation, consequently, the award could be withdrawn. They highlighted this practice (and provision of SEIP – special education within mainstream school) as common and contradicting the notion of inclusive education. From their view, this implied challenges for an inclusive education system

### 5.2.2 The School

Participant raised concerns over facilities, resources and funds that were required for an inclusive classroom. View about different quality between schools could be observed:

*The SK and SJKC are... Well, the school building, the high-rise and handsome SJKC buildings. SK is government's school, but it's of low-quality, different from SJKC.*  
(II, S4, Mia)

Mia compared her school with the neighbouring SJKC, saying that the locality affected facilities and, despite similar government funds, the SJKCs were better off.

Another common concern was a teacher shortage in SEIP and mainstream. Yaqeen said:

*There should be assistants and support from special education teachers when SEN pupils join the mainstream. But, no. So, everything befalls mainstream teachers.*  
(II, S1, Yaqeen, Headteacher)

There was consensus that teachers hold many responsibilities and roles that could be carried out by other staff. Generally, participants expressed frustration that the education system and workload prevented them from being more effective and inclusive. When probed whether a teacher would be able to cater for all pupils, regardless of difference, Rosie asserted:

*The education system emphasises academic achievement. Teachers are pressured with many things. Different teacher at different class from morning until noon. Indeed, you must tackle all pupils, but with time limitation, additional works and other responsibilities, how can we concentrate on pupils with SEN? A teacher holds tasks for pupils' affair, co-curriculum and curriculum.*  
(II, S4, Rosie)

According to Rosie, it was challenging for teachers because they are responsible for administrative matters, pupils' affairs and co-curricular activities, which takes them away from their core task – teaching.

### 5.2.2 The Teachers

Common responses concerned teachers' capability. SEIP teacher-participants doubted mainstream teachers' capabilities to teach pupils with SEN, and most mainstream teacher-participants admitted that teaching pupils with SEN was beyond their capabilities, competencies and unquestionably their knowledge and skills. In general, all mainstream teacher-participants admitted inexperience with pupils with SEN and emphasised the

difference between theory and practice, and that they were not prepared to include pupils with SEN into mainstream classrooms:

*Cuifen: If such, what happens to the mainstream teachers? Do you think teachers are free, trained to teach these inclusive pupils? No. Can you give us LADAP? Can you teach, train us to teach them?*  
(FGa, S1)

The point was made after considering conditional inclusion of pupils with SEN. Still, issues with the workload, pre-service training and need for PD to enhance teachers' inclusive practice was implied. However, a cynical view might be that Cuifen, above, was expressing doubts about mainstream teachers' competencies.

Another example:

*Teacher's skill is important. Not everybody has knowledge and skill to cater to diverse pupils.*  
(FGb, S1)

On this, Adam said that many teachers lacked insight into inclusive education:

*What's needed is the root, the teachers themselves – teachers don't know the Vision. Why? Because we don't know the concept and have no exposure.*  
(II, S1, Adam)

Clearly, it was seen that teachers were prominent figures in the successful promotion of inclusive education. While everyone highlighted issues in government and school, some laid importance on competency as the main challenge to implementing inclusive education.

A lack of knowledge on strategies, implementation and the benefits were observed in interviews:

*Inclusive education means moving towards examination, where... er, pupils are better prepared to sit for UPSR.*  
(II, S1, Selvi)

Selvi was from a SEIP school and had over 10 years' experience yet was still unaware of inclusive education.

Another point related to teachers are their beliefs, values, and attitudes. Positive values and beliefs were demonstrated in relation to pupils' diversity of gender, socioeconomic background, religion, ethnicity, and other identifiable differences, apart from learning disabilities. Special needs and SEN were perceived and described in terms of the medical model. Pupils with SEN must meet certain criteria to be included in the mainstream, as summarised below:

*Abu:\* But, for special education pupils, if given a thousand chances, they still can't, because of their cognitive abilities.*  
(FGb, S3)

Also, many participants expressed that their voices were unheard and that both teachers and pupils suffered the effect:

*Anusha: MOE doesn't call teachers when drafting new policy; there's no survey. After the implementation, then only they asked whether it burdens the*

*teachers.*  
(FGa, S5)

As presented earlier, there was a lack of communication and interaction between teachers about inclusive education, even at SEIP schools, and no opportunity for special education teachers to share information, possibly because of its perceived insignificance and other school priorities

## 5.2.2 Malaysian Ethos

The mentality of Malaysian parents, societies and teachers was coded. This includes the mindset of segregating pupils based on ethnicity, academic excellence, and ability. Most participants believed that Malaysians are comfortable with those of a similar language, religion and culture, thus a segregation mentality challenges the implementation of inclusive education. To illustrate:

*Anusha: It's difficult to implement the programme. Malaysians aren't easy.*

*Kafei: They (SJJC teachers and pupils) don't understand our cultures.*

*Zara: Not respecting other cultures.*

*Kafei: Like us the Chinese (at this school), we too, have problems to mix with those from the real Chinese schools (SJJC). Their culture and thinking are different.*

*Anusha: You send me to SJJTs, I wouldn't survive. They would kick me out.*  
(FGa, S5)

The Chinese (Kafei) and Indian (Anusha) participants above expressed discomfort with vernacular schools because they were not used to their norms and their communities' mentality, different from those of ordinary National schools. They revealed that Chinese parents had run an investigation into sending children to National schools, which had never happened in the past. According to them, their preferences for school type were obvious, although the National-school facilities had improved

As disabilities became a constraint, it would be difficult for pupils with SEN to assimilate into mainstream education unless they could function cognitively. It was perceived to be difficult to include pupils with severe and multiple disabilities, who are mentally retarded, as they described them:

*Qawi:\* Most SEIP pupils with SEN have multiple disabilities. The mentally retarded pupils have severe brain damage. That's a constraint.*  
(FGb, S1)

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Teachers view inclusive education as a challenging concept and practice. The data analysis identified that the views are influenced by the perception of shortcomings in the government's policies and schools' practices. The difficulty to implement inclusive education is mainly associated with SEN according to the teachers. They believe that inclusiveness for pupils with SEN is best provided from the perspective of the medical model of disability. The study

suggests that teachers themselves represent a challenge to the implementation of inclusive education, due to their lack of understanding, knowledge, and skills, as well as their overall values. There is evidence that teachers, under the pressure on them to raise standards, may be adopting a restricted view of special education. Raising standard by increasing the academic excellence is believed by them to constitute the educational transformation for the twenty-first century.

The complex educational system and the Malaysian ethos of segregation of ethnicities, academic achievement and disabilities serve to intensify the challenges to the successful promotion of inclusive education in Malaysia's primary schools. All the issues identified that relate to the government, schools, and teachers are interconnected. Thus, only by changing the political scenario can inclusive education be successfully promoted in primary schools, whether SEIP and non-SEIP.

It is suggested that the definition of inclusive education stated in the Blueprint need to be reviewed. The school system must be re-examined to suit the situation and vision of an enhanced knowledge economy via integrated and holistic education. Schools should not widen the gaps and barriers among pupils of different background, ethnics, religion, languages, and abilities. Conclusively, listening and responding to teachers' views are vital to ensure the successful promotion of inclusive education. Since teachers are practitioners who understand their pupils and the school context, their views provide useful insights into and key messages for both practice and research, whether in SEIP or non-SEIP schools.

This study was carried out before the pandemic COVID-19. Presumably a study is needed to explore teachers' views on inclusive education during or after the new normal due to the pandemic. Teachers' practice and strategies of online teaching and learning are vital in ensuring no education loss and education inequalities of all pupils regardless of abilities.

## **Acknowledgment**

We thank the Ministry of Education Malaysia for the financial support and the University of Southampton for facilitating the research.

## References

- Ainscow, M. (2000). Profile. In P. Clough and J. Corbett (Ed.), *Theories of Inclusive Education* (pp. 39-42). London: Paul Chapman.
- Ainscow, M. (2005). Developing inclusive education systems: What are the levers for change? *Journal of educational change*, 6(2), 109-124.
- Ainscow, M. (2014). From special education to effective schools for all: widening the agenda. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education: Two Volume Set* (Vol. 1, pp. 171-185).
- Ainscow, M., & Sandill, A. (2010). Developing inclusive education systems: the role of organisational cultures and leadership. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(4), 401-416. doi:10.1080/13603110802504903
- Allan, J. (2000). Reflection: Inconclusive education? Towards settled uncertainty. In P. Clough and J. Corbett (Ed.), *Theories of Inclusive Education* (pp. 43-46). London: Paul Chapman.
- Armstrong, D., Armstrong, A. C., & Spandagou, I. (2011). Inclusion: by choice or by chance? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(1), 29-39. doi:10.1080/13603116.2010.496192
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2002). *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (M. Vaughn Ed.). Bristol: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE).
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2011). *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (T. Booth Ed. 3rd ed.). Bristol: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE).
- Clough, P., & Corbett, J. (2000). *Theories of Inclusive Education: A student's guide*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Department Malaysia. (2015). *Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020: Anchoring Growth on People*. Retrieved from <http://epu.gov.my/en/rmk/eleventh-malaysia-plan-2016-2020>.
- Farrell, P. (2000). The impact of research on developments in inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 4(2), 153-162.
- Farrell, P., Ainscow, M., Howes, A., Frankham, J., Fox, S., & Davis, P. (2004). Inclusive education for all: Dream or reality. *Journal of International Special Needs Education*, 7(7), 1-11.
- Gibson, S. (2015). When rights are not enough: What is? Moving towards new pedagogy for inclusive education within UK universities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(8), 875-886. doi:10.1080/13603116.2015.1015177
- Hart, S., & Drummond, M. J. (2014). Learning without limits: Constructing a pedagogy free from determinist beliefs about ability. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education: Two Volume Set* (2nd ed., pp. 439-458). London: SAGE Publications Inc.

- Ibrahim, R. (2007). Multiculturalism and Education in Malaysia. *Culture and Religion*, 8(2), 155-167. doi:10.1080/14755610701424024
- Jelas, Z. M., & Mohd Ali, M. (2014). Inclusive education in Malaysia: Policy and practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 18(10), 991-1003. doi:10.1080/13603116.2012.693398
- Jorgensen, C. M., & Lambert, L. (2012). Inclusion Means More than Just Being "in:" Planning Full Participation of Students with Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities in the General Education Classroom. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 8(2), 21-36. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ991531&site=eds-live>
- Khader, F. R. (2012). The Malaysian experience in developing national identity, multicultural tolerance and understanding through teaching curricula: Lessons learned and possible applications in the Jordanian context. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(1), 270-288.
- Messiou, K. (2006). Conversations with children: making sense of marginalization in primary school settings. *European journal of special needs education*, 21(1), 39-54. doi:10.1080/08856250500491807
- Ministry of Communications and Multimedia (MCM). (2018, 10 October 2018). Sekolah Wawasan (Vision School). *Jenis-jenis Pendidikan di Malaysia*. Retrieved from <http://pmr.penerangan.gov.my/index.php/penafian/1199-sekolah-wawasan.html>
- Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). (2004). *Development of education: The national report of Malaysia*. Retrieved from [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National\\_Reports/ICE\\_2004/malaysia.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2004/malaysia.pdf)
- Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). (2011). Malaysia World Data on Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/Malaysia.pdf>
- Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). (2012). *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015: Preliminary Report*. Putrajaya: MOE
- Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). (2013a). *Garis Panduan Program Pendidikan Inklusif Murid Berkeperluan Khas (The Guidelines for SEN Pupil Inclusive Education Programme)*. Malaysia: MOE
- Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). (2013b). *Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 2025 (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education)*. Putrajaya: MOE
- Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE). (2016). *Perlaksanaan Program Pendidikan Inklusif di Program Pendidikan Inklusif di Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi (PPKI) (The Implementation of Inclusive Education Programme at the SEIP)*. Putrajaya: Special Education Division, MOE.
- Operti, R., Brady, J., & Duncombe, L. (2009). Moving forward: Inclusive education as the core of education for all. *Prospects*, 39(3), 205-214. doi:10.1007/s11125-009-9112-3

- Operti, R., Walker, Z., & Zhang, Y. (2014). Inclusive education: From targeting groups and schools to achieving quality education as the core of EFA. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education: Two Volume Set* (2nd ed., pp. 149-170). London: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Othman, N., Mohamad, K. A., & Ilmuwan, Y. (2011). Eclectic Model in the Malaysian Education System. *International Education Studies*, 4(4), 111-117.
- Rosmalily, S. (2018). Embracing inclusive education: Effective professional development (poster). Southampton: University of Southampton.
- Rosmalily, S., & Woollard, J. (2019). *Towards Inclusive Training for Inclusive Education (Teachers' Views about Effective Professional Development for Promoting Inclusive Education)*. Paper presented at the 13th annual International Technology, Education and Development Conference, INTED 2019, Valencia, Spain.
- Ryan, D. (2011). The Irregular School: Exclusion, Schooling and Inclusive Education - By Roger Slee. *Support for Learning*, 26(4), 189. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=67196331&site=eds-live>
- Salleh, R., & Woollard, J. (2019). Inclusive education: Equality and equity (Teachers' views about inclusive education in Malaysia's primary schools). *Journal Pendidikan Bitara UPSI*, 12(Special), 72-83.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Incheon Declaration Education 2030*. Retrieved from Korea: <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/FinalVersion-IncheonDeclaration.pdf>
- Winter, E., & O'Raw, P. (2010). *Literature Review of the Principles and Practices relating to Inclusive Education for Children with Special Educational Needs*. Retrieved from [http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NCSE\\_Inclusion.pdf](http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NCSE_Inclusion.pdf).