

# **INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN SARAWAK: A DECADE OF PROGRESS (2015-2025) - AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLISHED JOURNAL ARTICLES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the development of special education and inclusive educational practices in Sarawak from 2015 to 2025 through a systematic review of published journal articles. The research aims to identify key trends, challenges, and innovations in the implementation of special and inclusive education policies, early intervention programs, special education services, teacher training initiatives, resource allocation, and instructional strategies. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, relevant academic publications were analyzed to assess the effectiveness of various initiatives in supporting students with special educational needs (SEN). Findings indicate that Sarawak has made significant progress in integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, driven by policy reforms, increased awareness, and professional development efforts. However, challenges such as inadequate teacher preparedness, limited resources, and socio-cultural barriers persist. The study highlights the role of individualized education plans, differentiated instruction, collaborative teaching strategies, and early intervention programs in enhancing student learning outcomes. This analysis provides insights into the successes and limitations of special and inclusive education implementation, offering recommendations for future policy improvements, teacher development programs, and the expansion of special education services in Sarawak.

**Keywords:** Special Education, Inclusive Education, Early Intervention, Special Education Services, Sarawak.

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education in Malaysia has evolved significantly over the past few decades, reflecting a broader global movement toward equity and accessibility in education. The foundation was laid with the implementation of the Education Act 1996, which recognized the right of children with special needs to access education. This was further reinforced by the Special Education Regulations 2013 and the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which emphasized the integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream schools. These national policies aimed to shift the educational paradigm from segregation to inclusion, in alignment with international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Despite initial resistance and infrastructural limitations, Malaysia has gradually developed a more inclusive educational landscape through legislative support, increased awareness, and growing efforts in teacher training and curriculum adaptation.

In the context of Sarawak, the largest state in Malaysia by land area and home to a rich tapestry of indigenous communities, inclusive education presents unique challenges and opportunities. Geographical dispersion, cultural diversity, and limited access to specialized educational resources have posed significant barriers to the widespread implementation of inclusive practices. Nevertheless, over the past decade, Sarawak has shown marked progress through targeted policy interventions, professional development programs for teachers, and greater collaboration between schools and community stakeholders. Sarawak is administratively supported by 30 District Education Offices, which play a critical role in coordinating and implementing educational policies at the local level. These offices serve as important touchpoints for schools in both rural and urban settings, facilitating resource distribution, teacher deployment, and monitoring of inclusive practices. Recent studies indicate an increasing trend in the integration of SEN students into mainstream classrooms, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. Initiatives such as early intervention programs, individualized education plans (IEPs), and differentiated instruction are gradually being adopted to support learners with diverse needs. While disparities in implementation remain between rural and urban regions, Sarawak's commitment to inclusive education signals a transformative shift towards a more equitable and accessible educational system.

This research conducts a systematic review of journal publications from 2015 to 2025 to explore the progression of special education and inclusive practices in Sarawak. It seeks to uncover prevailing trends, notable challenges, and emerging innovations related to the execution of inclusive education policies, early intervention efforts, support services for special education, professional development for educators, resource distribution, and pedagogical approaches.

### Rationale of the Study

Inclusive education is a growing global priority, but its implementation varies across regions. In Sarawak, Malaysia, unique geographical and socio-cultural factors pose both challenges and opportunities in meeting the needs of students with special needs. This study reviews journal articles from 2015–2025 to examine the development of inclusive education in Sarawak, highlighting key trends, challenges, and innovations. The findings aim to inform policy, improve teacher training, and support context-specific strategies, aligning with the goals of the International Conference on Special Education to promote inclusive practices and cross-border knowledge-sharing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Policy Frameworks and National Commitment

Malaysia has demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusive education through comprehensive policy frameworks. The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025 emphasizes the integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream schools, aligning with global initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Chua and Low (2024) highlight that these policies have led to increased enrollment of SEN students in inclusive programs, reflecting a national effort to provide equitable educational opportunities. However, the implementation of these policies varies across regions, with challenges in standardizing practices and ensuring consistent support for educators and students alike.

### Teacher Preparedness and Implementation Challenges

The success of inclusive education heavily relies on teachers' readiness and the resources available to them. Studies indicate that while many Malaysian teachers possess a positive attitude towards inclusion, they often face obstacles such as limited training, insufficient resources, and unclear guidelines. For instance, Salleh and Omar (2025) found that secondary school teachers require more comprehensive training and support to effectively implement inclusive practices. In Sarawak, Manogharan et al. (2018) observed that teachers in Sibu district exhibited high levels of readiness and positive attitudes towards inclusion, yet they still encountered challenges related to resource allocation and specialized training. These findings underscore the need for targeted professional development and systemic support to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

### Technological Advancements and Inclusive Pedagogy

The integration of technology in education presents new opportunities for enhancing inclusivity. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital tools, prompting educators to adapt to online teaching environments. Jamil et al. (2024) discuss how inclusive digital pedagogy in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has evolved to accommodate diverse learners, emphasizing the importance of personalized learning and digital skills development. Furthermore, the development of assessment instruments for inclusive online education, as explored by researchers in 2023, provides educators with tools to evaluate and improve their inclusive practices in virtual settings. These technological advancements highlight the potential for innovative approaches to support inclusive education, provided that educators receive adequate training and resources to implement them effectively.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the development and implementation of inclusive education practices in Sarawak over the past decade. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025, using targeted keyword searches such as "inclusive education" and "Sarawak." The search was conducted across reputable academic databases and repositories, including e-Repository UKM (e-Repo@UKM), the International Conference on Special Education (ICSE) website, MyJurnal by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE), and Google Scholar.

These platforms were selected to ensure comprehensive coverage of locally and regionally relevant research and also due to their ease of access to full papers. The selected articles were analyzed thematically to identify recurring trends, challenges, and strategies related to inclusive education implementation in Sarawak. The analysis focused on themes such as policy development, teacher preparedness, individualized support, and community involvement, in alignment with established qualitative research standards (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of how inclusive education has evolved contextually within the unique sociocultural and geographical landscape of Sarawak.

## RESULTS AND FINDING

Despite ongoing efforts, challenges such as limited teacher preparedness, resource shortages, and socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices. Key strategies identified include individualized education plans (IEPs), differentiated instruction, collaborative teaching, and early intervention programs to enhance learning outcomes for students with special needs.

Figure 1 illustrates the geographic distribution of case study areas in Sarawak highlighted in this review, including Kuching, Serian, Lubok Antu, Kanowit, Sibul, Mukah, Kapit, Bintulu, and Belaga. These areas represent a mix of urban, semi-urban, and rural locations across the state, providing a geographical context for the diverse experiences and challenges in implementing inclusive education practices. The highlighted areas were selected based on the availability of relevant journal articles focusing on these regions during the review period, offering insights from various parts of Sarawak.

**Table 1: Catalog of Journal Articles Related to Inclusive Education in Sarawak (2015–2025)**

No.	Author(s)	Year	Title	Journal	Location
1	Ong Puay Liu, Sivapalan Selvadurai, Ong Puay Hoon, & Mohd Asyraf Aniff Mohd Najib	2016	EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL COHESION: PROMOTING 1R+3R THROUGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM	Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities	Sarawak
2	Lee Swee Poh, Mohd Mahzan Awang, & Shahian Surat	2017	COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS	Journal of Sustainable Development Education and Research	Bintulu
3	Chua Lee Chuan	2017	CHALLENGES OF NOVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF TEACHING	Proceedings of the International Conference on Special Education	Institute of Teacher Education Batu Lintang Campus, Kuching
4	Wong Woei Ling	2017	A PROPOSITION FOR AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY FOR THE DEAF	Proceedings of the International Conference on Special Education	Kuching
5	Jennifer Marshall, Elizabeth Doone & Mindy Price	2018	CULTURAL MODELS OF CHILD DISABILITY: PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS IN MALAYSIA	Disability and Rehabilitation	Kuching & Lubok Antu
6	Melissa Wane Manogharan, Gunasegaran Kanuppannan, & Kung Lung Chiong	2018	EXPLORING TEACHERS' READINESS, KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE DISTRICT OF SIBU, SARAWAK, MALAYSIA	Contemporary Educational Researches Journal	Sibu
7	Mohd Isa Hamzah, Mohd Hanafi Yasin, Mokhtar Tahar, Safani Bari, Zokepli Haron, Mohd Jasmy Abdul Rahman, Mohd Anis Abdul Razak, Aminuddin Abu Samah, & Nur Kamariah Ensimau.	2019	AN AWARENESS AMONG LEVEL ONE TEACHERS TOWARDS SEN IN KAPIT, SARAWAK: A QUALITATIVE STUDY	Proceeding of the International Conference on Special Education in Southeast Asia Region	Kapit
8	Manisah Mohd. Ali & Muhamad Al Amran Hamzah	2019	COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT OF TYPICAL STUDENTS IN DEVELOPING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT IN MAINSTREAM CLASSES	International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development	Serian
9	Joanna Mah Tjun Lym, Loh Sau Cheong, & Noor Aishah Reali	2020	MAINSTREAM VERSUS SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATORS: COMPARISONS OF KNOWLEDGE LEVELS TOWARDS THEIR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	Jurnal Pendidikan Malaysia	Sarawak
10	Pau Swee Lin & Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yasin	2021	KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF MAINSTREAM TEACHERS TOWARDS THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM IN SIBU DISTRICT	Jurnal Dunia Pendidikan	Sibu
11	Mohd Afizan Zahri & Manisah Mohd Ali	2022	PERSPECTIVES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SENIOR ASSISTANT TEACHERS ON POLICIES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS	International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development	Kapit
12	Teng Kie Yin, Emma Syateka Sam, Kelvin Yung Shi Hong, Lee Wen Qing, & Mohd Harris Haikal Ahmad Muzini	2023	GENDER POLARISATION AND PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BEHAVIOURAL AFFECTION TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	Jurnal Pendidikan Bitara UPSI	Sarawak
13	Kong Kie Soon & Hasnah Toran	2023	PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BINTULU DIVISION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, SARAWAK	Jurnal Dunia Pendidikan	Bintulu
14	Nur Kamariah Ensimau Abdullah, Mohd Isa Hamzah, Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yasin, Mohd Mokhtar Tahar, Mohd Jasmy Abd Rahman, Zokepli Haron, Mohd Zukamain Abdul Wahab, Mohd Anis Abdul Razak, Mohd Faris Idham Zaimin, Nuramiah Hazwani Kamaruzaman, Salmah Jopri, & Safani Bari	2023	TEACHER'S ACCEPTANCE AND READINESS IN IMPLEMENTING ZERO REJECT POLICY (ZRP) IN RURAL SCHOOL IN MALAYSIA	Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities	Kapit
15	Bong Lie Chen, Felicia Gene Tersan, & Ng Lee Boon	2023	ENHANCING THINKING SKILLS AMONGST CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER THROUGH PLAY THERAPY: A CASE STUDY IN AN INCLUSIVE CHILDCARE CENTRE IN KUCHING, SARAWAK	Proceedings of the International Conference on Special Education	Kuching
16	Chong Chiat Yee	2023	SKILLS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN MANAGING THE BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN SCHOOL	Best Practices in Disability-Inclusive Education	Kuching & Padawan
17	Nur Kamariah Ensimau Abdullah, Mohd Isa Hamzah, Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yasin, & Nurfaradila Mohamad Nasri	2023	IMPLEMENTING ZERO REJECT POLICY: THE STUDY OF ADAPTIVE TEACHING SKILLS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN RURAL SARAWAK	Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers	Rural Area Sarawak
18	Mohamad Taha Abol & Zaimuarifudin Shukri Nordin	2023	DIVERSITY OF LEARNING STYLES AMONG STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN SARAWAK	Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities	Sarawak
19	Veron Zhen Liang Hi, Aaron Ken Kiat Lo, Ida Pei Xin Lee, Alec Vince Gonzales Abuan, Sue Han Lee, & Patrick Hang Hui Then	2024	TWO-WAY MALAYSIAN SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	Proceeding of the Asia Pacific Signal and Information Processing Association Annual Summit and Conference	Sarawak
20	Mohd Norazmi Nordin, Siti Noor Aneeis Hashim, Maryati Abd Wahab, Irma Wani Othman, Siti Mastura Bahardin, Shalza Alwi, & Mohamed Maulana Magiman	2024	LATEST ISSUES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND HEALTH RISKS FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN MALAYSIA	Journal of Chemical Health Risks	*Author from Sarawak
21	Karen Anak Day & Vestly Kong Liang Soon	2024	IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN XTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN BELAGA DISTRICT PRIMARY SCHOOL, SARAWAK	Semarak International Journal of Innovation in Learning and Education	Belaga
22	Shannen Ansk & Vestly Kong Liang Soon	2024	MAINSTREAM TEACHERS' READINESS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN KANOWIT	International Journal of Advanced Research in Future Ready Learning and Education	Kanowit
23	Nur Hanani Anne & Syar Neeze Mohd Rashid	2024	UNDERSTANDING AND ENHANCING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES FOR INCLUSIVE PRACTICE: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS	International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research	Sarawak
24	Allanty Nyabal & Kamariah Abu Bakar	2024	PRE-SCHOOLERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS	Jurnal Dunia Pendidikan	Sibu & Mukah

**Figure 1: Geographic Distribution of Case Study Areas in Sarawak**  
Geographic Distribution of Case Study Areas in Sarawak



Source: [paintmaps.com](https://www.paintmaps.com)

### **Trend Synthesis: A Decade of Progress (2015–2025)**

Over the ten-year period reviewed, inclusive education in Sarawak has demonstrated a clear trajectory of growth. Early years (2015–2017) were characterized by limited awareness, low teacher confidence, and fragmented implementation of inclusive policies. As the decade progressed, especially after 2018, increased government initiatives such as the Zero Reject Policy and national training programs began to enhance teacher preparedness and policy awareness. By 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital innovation, prompting the integration of assistive technologies and adaptive learning platforms. More recent studies (2022–2025) highlight improved adoption of differentiated instruction, greater involvement of community stakeholders, and a growing acceptance of inclusive practices in both academic and co-curricular settings. While rural–urban disparities remain, the overall trend reflects a positive shift toward more inclusive, equitable, and technology-supported education for students with special needs in Sarawak.

The review also highlights disparities in the implementation of inclusive education between urban and rural areas of Sarawak. Several studies (e.g., Nur Kamariah Ensima Abdullah et al., 2023, focusing on rural schools) suggest that schools in rural regions often face more significant challenges related to resource allocation, access to specialized training for teachers, and the availability of support services compared to their urban counterparts (e.g., studies focusing on Kuching and Sibu). For instance, findings indicate that while awareness of inclusive policies may be increasing across the state, the practical application and availability of individualized education plans and assistive technologies appear less consistent in more remote areas. Geographical isolation and infrastructural limitations contribute to these disparities, impacting the extent to which inclusive practices can be effectively implemented.

## **Inclusive Education Policy and Awareness**

Over the past decade, Sarawak has demonstrated notable advancements in inclusive education, underpinned by national reforms such as the Zero Reject Policy (ZRP) and the Inclusive Education Program (IEP). Several studies reveal that policy awareness among educators has increased, especially among senior assistant teachers and mainstream educators who are progressively adopting inclusive practices (Articles 10, 11, 14, 17, 22). While most teachers display positive attitudes towards inclusion, studies also note that teacher understanding of inclusive policies remains varied, particularly in rural areas (Articles 7, 13, 17). Importantly, inclusion efforts are extending beyond academics into co-curricular activities, as evidenced by successful integration in sports and extracurricular domains (Article 21).

## **Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development**

Although the intent to support inclusive education is evident among teachers, numerous challenges related to teacher preparedness persist. Articles highlight the gap between perceived readiness and actual competence, particularly in applying adaptive teaching strategies (Articles 3, 9, 17, 23). While many educators express willingness and positive attitudes, insufficient training and lack of clarity regarding their roles in inclusive settings continue to hinder effective implementation. Moreover, novice and mainstream teachers often struggle with the shift from traditional to inclusive roles due to limited access to professional development (Articles 3, 9, 16).

## **Teaching Strategies and Classroom Practices**

The research emphasizes the importance of differentiated instruction, individualized education plans (IEPs), and collaborative teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities (Articles 6, 8, 16, 20). Play therapy and problem-solving activities have been shown to enhance cognitive and behavioural outcomes for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Article 15). Similarly, promoting peer collaboration among students, particularly through group activities, helps build inclusive classroom cultures (Article 8). Several studies also underscore the importance of teacher flexibility and the ability to manage diverse learning styles effectively (Articles 18, 23).

## **Parental and Community Perspectives**

Parental engagement and community acceptance are vital for the success of inclusive education. Findings indicate a moderate level of understanding and mixed perceptions among parents regarding the IEP (Article 13). Nonetheless, some communities, such as the Chinese community in Bintulu, show positive social inclusion of children with special needs (Article 2). Cultural beliefs and societal attitudes continue to shape parental support, highlighting the need for schools to strengthen home–school communication and provide clearer information about inclusive practices (Articles 2, 5, 13).

## Technological and Support Innovations

Innovative tools and technological interventions are emerging to support inclusive education. Notably, the development of a two-way Malaysian Sign Language communication system, powered by AI, represents a significant step forward in addressing communication barriers for deaf students (Article 19). Collaboration with Pupil Management Assistants (PPMs) and the proposed development of specialized training modules further emphasize the need for systemic support to facilitate inclusive teaching and learning (Article 20).

Cumulatively, findings indicate that Sarawak has made significant progress in integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, driven by policy reforms, increased awareness, and professional development efforts. However, challenges such as inadequate teacher preparedness, limited resources, and socio-cultural barriers persist. The study highlights the role of individualized education plans, differentiated instruction, collaborative teaching strategies, and early intervention programs in enhancing student learning outcomes. Continued investment in teacher training, community engagement, and technological innovation will be essential for sustaining and advancing inclusive education in Sarawak over the next decade.

## DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The past decade has witnessed significant strides in Sarawak's journey toward inclusive education, marked by policy reforms, growing awareness, and increased efforts in teacher development. However, the findings reveal that while progress is evident in areas such as inclusive co-curricular activities and the adoption of differentiated instruction, challenges such as insufficient teacher preparedness, limited resources, and persistent socio-cultural attitudes continue to hinder full inclusion.

There remains a noticeable gap between policy intentions and classroom realities, especially in rural and under-resourced areas. The literature also highlights the need for a stronger focus on individualized education plans, early intervention, and collaborative teaching models, suggesting that inclusive practices are most effective when supported by contextual understanding, consistent training, and community engagement.

### Recommendations

1. Prioritize Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Equip educators with essential knowledge and skills in inclusive pedagogies, behavioral management, and differentiated instruction through ongoing CPD initiatives.
2. Enhance School-Based Support Systems. Increase the number of trained Pupil Management Assistants (PMAs) and ensure the provision of appropriate assistive technologies for students with disabilities.
3. Strengthen Policy Implementation. Accompany inclusion policies with clear guidelines, regular monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms to ensure consistency and effectiveness at the school level.
4. Promote Inclusive Leadership. Foster inclusive leadership within educational institutions to promote a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusive values across school practices.

5. Strengthen Partnerships with Families and Communities. Launch targeted awareness programs to engage parents and local communities in shaping positive cultural perceptions and building support for inclusive education.
6. Leverage Innovative Digital Tools. Explore the integration of adaptive learning technologies and digital tools to improve access, participation, and learning outcomes for all students, especially those with special educational needs.

## Conclusions

From 2015 to 2025, Sarawak has made steady progress in inclusive education through stronger policies, improved teacher attitudes, and more inclusive teaching practices. National initiatives like the Zero Reject Policy have increased awareness, while strategies such as IEPs and differentiated instruction are gaining traction. Technological tools and digital learning have enhanced accessibility, particularly after the COVID-19 shift.

Parental and community support has also grown, though rural areas still face challenges in training, resources, and awareness. Continued efforts in teacher development, innovation, and community engagement will be essential to ensure inclusive education for all students beyond 2025.

In line with the International Conference on Special Education's emphasis on promoting equitable and accessible education for all, this review underscores both the progress and persistent regional disparities in Sarawak's journey towards inclusive practices. Addressing the identified challenges, particularly in rural areas, will be crucial to fully realizing the goals of inclusive education championed by international forums like ICSE.

## Limitation

One of the key limitations of this study is that it exclusively reviews open-access journal articles that are publicly available. As a result, research findings published in subscription-based or restricted-access journals may not have been included in the analysis, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness and depth of the review. This constraint may have excluded some relevant studies, particularly those in high-impact or specialized journals, which could have contributed additional insights into the development of inclusive education in Sarawak.

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