

# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM IN MALAYSIA: EVOLUTION IN POLICY AND CHALLENGES

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## **Abstract**

Inclusive education was strengthened through the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. However, there are some issues encountered in its implementation in schools. Questions of how the development of Inclusive Education Programme in Malaysia and what are the issues faced in implementing the Inclusive Education Programme in schools have been raised. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify the development of inclusive education and issues encountered in its implementation in Malaysia. This research was the analysis of documents and information obtained and compiled based on six categories: pre-independence, post-independence, education development during the era of new economic policy, education development during the era of national development policy, education development during the era of national vision policy and education development through the national key result areas (NKRA). The study also examines at the evolution of inclusive education starting from preindependence to date, and is limited in Malaysia only. The study found that the evolution of inclusive education in Malaysia as an international education and support requirements of the Education for All (EFA) and receives special attention from the government through Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. There are three issues in the implementation of inclusive education, which are inconsistencies in the implementation of Inclusive Education Programme, collaborative parties involved in the school and the adaptation.

**Keywords:** Issues of Inclusive Education Programme, students with special education needs, development of Inclusive Education

## Introduction

The Ministry of Education (MoE) gives emphasis on special education students, indigenous students, and other minority groups such as the *Orang Asli* and *Penan*, gifted students, and students in under-enrolled schools to have the opportunity to get an education that is relevant to their needs. Therefore, special education needs students in Malaysia currently can choose from three different schooling options. There are (1) Special Education Schools for students with hearing and vision/or learning disabilities; (2) Special Education Integration Programme (SEIP) for students with special education needs attending class in mainstream schools that have special classes; and (3) Inclusive Education Program (IEP) which is one to five special education needs students learning in mainstream classes (MoE, 2013).

In 2012, 89% of special education needs students are a part of the Special Education Integration Programme, 5% are enrolled in a special education school and only 6% of special education needs students are placed in an inclusive programme. Thus, in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, the action plan has been prepared to provide flexible, relevant and high quality of special education and IEP. This is because by Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), the most high-performing education system is already practicing inclusive approaches to special education. The statement mentioned that students with special education needs should have access to mainstream schools. School-oriented mainstream inclusive education programme is the best way to fight discrimination against special education needs students. Thus, in Wave 1 (2013-2015), MoE is targeting a 30% increase in enrollment of student special education needs that are registered following the Inclusive Education Program.

The MoE have placed much effort to adopt a policy whereby schooling options for special education needs schools will be linked by carefully identified competency levels. This means that high-functioning special education needs students who can cope with the mainstream curriculum and assessment, are encouraged to attend in the Inclusive Education Programme. Moderate-functioning students with special needs will be attending Special Education Programme. Low-functioning students with special needs are also encouraged to attend in special education schools that allow them to learn the simplified curriculum and are more focused on basic skills and social skills. Checklist detection *Pengesanan (SSP) Perkembangan Bayi, Kanak-kanak (0-6 tahun)*, (MoE, 2014), which is the instrument of evaluation to identify the level of competence of students and place them in the appropriate schooling options have also been constructed. The several efforts such as involving more vocational skills, improving infrastructure and equipment in mainstream schools and special schools, improving special education service center facilities, providing basic module training of special education at the Institute of training modules with the differentiated level of expertise (from basic to expert), and Teacher Education (IPG) and Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA), providing in-service provides specialized curriculum and assessment in accordance with the level of student abilities.

In Wave 2 (2016-2020), an initiative in Wave 1 will scale up provisions of early intervention services and increase inclusion programme within mainstream preschool settings. Teacher training programmes will continue to be strengthened and cooperation

between government and non-government agencies will also be improved. Some workshops and programmes for students will be held in collaboration with International organizations.

In Wave 3 (2021-2025), initiatives from the waves 1 and wave 2 will be evaluated. A roadmap for the future will be developed. Those entire action plan aims to ensure that every special education needs student gains access to a high quality education that is relevant with their specific needs. By 2025, it is targeted that 75% of students with special needs are enrolled in inclusive programmes so that all teachers are also equipped with basic knowledge of special education.(MoE, 2013).

### **Problem Statements**

Inclusive Education Programme started getting extensive attention and is listed in the 25 major initiatives Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MoE, 2013). The main goal of Inclusive Education Program is to enable all children regardless of race, background, economic status and disabilities have the same right to education with no exception to students with special needs. All these children should have a barrier-free learning environment. On October 1 1994, an inclusive education Implementation Guidelines was issued. On 7<sup>th</sup> September 1995, *Surat Siaran* (BS-PK) 8501/036 / Jld.11 (17) as a letter of instruction was issued (MoE, 1994; MoE, 2014) and after that, no aggressive actions was implemented. Therefore, this study aims to identify the development of Inclusive Education Programme before homogenization by the Ministry of Education (MoE) until now. To answer this question, this study will discuss the evaluation of Inclusive Education Programme starting from pre-independence and the implementation issues.

### **Aims**

Generally the aims of this study is to identify the evolution of inclusive education in Malaysia and issues encountered in its implementation by focusing on the implementation of the incompatibility issues, collaborative in school and adaptation in an inclusive classroom.

### **Literature**

Inclusive education is transformed as a result of re-conceptualization of special education in the late 1980s by UNESCO and the University of London (UNESCO, 1988). There are some researchers that have studied the development of Inclusive Education Programme in Malaysia, which are Ang, (1999); Bosi, (2004); as well as Muhammad and Wan Mahmud, (2010).

According to *Concepts and Methods of Teaching with emphasis on Inclusive Education*, Inclusive Education is a programme that integrates special needs students into the regular school system. Therefore, students with special needs will enjoy the opportunity and learning as felt, understood and enjoyed by their peers in the classroom in a mainstream school. Thus, Inclusive Education Programme should be given attention by all parties for responding to the call of Education for All (EFA) and create awareness in a society (Ang, 1999).

Referring to *The Pilot Implementation of Inclusive Education In Malaysia: A review* by Bosi (2004), a study of teachers and school administrators about the concept of inclusive education, understanding regarding inclusive education policies and their altitude over the implementation of pilot Inclusive Education Programme has been implemented. The advantages of this study were to involve non-pilot and pilot schools through survey and interview methods. The study found that the constraints of mainstream teachers and school administrators are a class of workloads and conditions that are not conducive for students with special needs (Bosi, 2004).

Thus, Muhammad and Wan Mahmud (2010) on *The Implementation of Inclusive Education Program Autistic Students in A Primary School: A Case Study* noted that efforts to provide educational opportunities for students with special needs into mainstream classes has also experienced positive changes and the Inclusive Education Programme has become the goal of efforts to provide opportunities to all students regardless of disability and deformity. Therefore, all schools and students have opportunities to excel. Thus, the access, equity and quality in school can be improved. The autistic students were join in full inclusive approach and accompanied by a resource teacher for every class.

According to the Interim Strategic Plan 2011-2020, (MoE, 2010), Inclusive Education is a comprehensive education that is based on the involvement of all children. The underlying philosophy of inclusive education is the belief that every child, whether they have physical developmental disorders/mental, intelligent and disabilities are entitled to education like a normal child.

Therefore, in general Inclusive Education means that a normal child or children with special needs are assessed and marginalized children should be educated together in a mainstream situation. This means that they do not pursue purely academic ability, but they also learn about life itself.

## **Methodology**

In this study, researchers used document analysis. Documents used in the study are journals, books, reports from the Ministry of Education, legislative materials, proceedings, conference and so on. Researchers studied intensively progress in implementing inclusive education in Malaysia for a long time from pre-independence to educational development through the national key result areas (NKRA).

## **Results**

In this study, researchers will discuss the development of inclusive education preindependence to educational development through the national key result areas (NKRA) and issues encountered in its implementation.

### *Pre-Independence: Education during the British occupancy (1924-1957)*

In 1926, special education was conducted among volunteers for visual disability (Lee and Low, 2014) and at that time St. Nicholas Primary School opened to students with visual disabilities by the Anglican Church in Malacca. Later, St. Nicholas moved to Penang. In 1948-1950, Princess Elizabeth School in Johore opened for visually impaired children.

*Post Independence: Education during the post-independence (1971-1990)*

Prior to independence and six years later, a school for hearing disabilities students opened in Penang (Tambi, 1997). Around 1960, a special education student from St. Nicholas Penang began to be integrated into mainstream schools. In this program, four students were involved, with two pupils integrated in Girls' School St. George and two pupils integrated in Penang Free School (Tambi, 1997).

In 1962, the MoE introduced a programme of convergence (integration) and implemented it at national level (Tambi, 1997) for students with visual and hearing disabilities. This means that there are two systems of education for children with visual disabilities practiced in Malaysia, namely "Residential System" and "IntegrationSystem" (Mohd, 1992). Inclusive Education Program began in 1962 when the Special School Deaf Children Federation faced a shortage of classrooms and accommodation. Therefore, the MoE opened up opportunities for hearing disabilities students in English Primary School, Jalan Kuantan, Kuala Lumpur (Mohd, 1992).

In 1964, many changes and improvements in special education were done after the Special Education Unit at Schools Division was established. However, according to Ang (1999), the beginning of the 70s and 80s showed a trend change where the development of special education was towards re-segregation. This is because at that time, students with special needs rationale views should be given education in special environments, special services and special programs. Many special schools for students with visual and hearing disabilities was built throughout Malaysia.

In 1979, the Cabinet Committee Report reviewed the implementation of the educational policy which represents another major step that places emphasis on the development of Malaysian society who are willing to face the future. This report provides a holistic view of education which aims to create a balanced student intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. The report also reiterated Malaysia's goal of student education-focused education system holistically, and provide for the future of the country. Cabinet Committee Report, Chapter IV also focus on the education of disabled children:

*"With the realization that the government should be responsible for the education of handicapped children, is recommended the government to take over full responsibility for the education of the organizations that operate them at this time. In addition, participation by voluntary bodies to advance the education of disabled children should be encouraged.*

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(Cabinet Committee Report, Chapter IV 1979)

For Integrated Education Programme, under the operating State Education Department, Federal Territory (JPN) unofficially opened two special classes for pupils with learning difficulties in January 1988 (Abdul, 1996). However in October 1989, once again there was a change in the policy regarding special education. This is because the approach is not an appropriate segregation and contrary to the declaration of the United Nations Organization (1983) about people with disabilities. In this declaration, students with special needs are also being exhorted to be placed in a normal environment in regular

schools and have the same right to receive the same education as peers. Developed countries like United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and so also joined students with special needs in inclusive class. However, the results of segregation program that was carried out was found to be satisfactory for students with special needs that are given the opportunity to integrate with mainstream students (Ang, 1999)

Drastic development occurred in the last decade of the 20th century through the development of education in the Era of the National Development Policy (1991-2000). In 1993, three students were placed in lower 6 class of SM Methodist (male) Kuala Lumpur. In 1994, Malaysia participated in the "World Conference on People with Special Needs", which was held in Salamanca, Spain from 7 to 10 June 1994. In this declaration, inclusive education further emphasized and recognition raised when a large number of delegates representing 92 governments (including Malaysia) and 25 international organizations made a joint statement supporting the implementation of inclusive program (Ang, 1999). At the same time a seminar was held in Pulau Langkawi, which also emphasizes the inclusive education of children with special needs are given equal opportunities to education in the same environment with mainstream students.

Inclusive Education Programme pilot project subsequently introduced in December 1994 and involved 14 primary schools throughout the country (Bosi 2004; Tambi, 1997). On October 1, 1994, an inclusive education Implementation Guidance was issued to schools that implemented the program. After that in March 1995, the MoE launched "Towards an Inclusive Program Completion Insight Education" by emphasizing the concept of "Education for All" (MoE, 1995)

In September 1995, *Surat Siaran (BS-PK) 8501/036 / Jld.11 (17)* dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 1995 (MoE, 2014) was issued to schools throughout the country for the purpose of implementation and guide the implementation of Inclusive Education Programme. Progress and rapid changes again occurred when the Special Education Unit upgraded to the Department of Special Education in October 1, 1995 (MoE, 1995). Following this, the Programme for Inclusive Education Learning Issues in secondary schools was implemented.

Special education and inclusive education grew continuously in Malaysia when the Education Act 1961 was revised and renamed as the Education Act 1996. Special Education was also given special attention by allocating The Education Regulations 1997. In 1999, Inclusive Education Programme at technical schools were also implemented (Shaari, 2005).

#### *Development of Education during the Era of National Development Policy (2001-2010)*

In Educational Development during the Era of the National Development Policy (2001-2010) through the education development plan (2001-2010) and the Education Development Master Plan (2006-2010), the focus is on improving access, equity, quality, efficiency and effectiveness of educational management. The five core principle is also in line with the aspirations of the National Dialogue. Action in implementing is important and no one should interfere with the implementation of the initiative or affect the progress of other aspirations.

*Development of Education through the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) 2010-2012 Interim Strategic Plan 2011 to 2020 (MoE, 2010), Chapter 12, page 87 states that one of the aspects highlighted in the democratization of education is access to education for all in accordance with Article 28 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely:*

*"Children have a right to an education, and be the duty of the state to ensure that free and compulsory primary education, promote secondary education in various forms readily available to every child and to make higher education accessible to all on the basis of place of capabilities."*

Interim Strategic Plan 2011 to 2020 (MoE, 2010)

#### *Education Development Plan (2013-2025)*

The evolution of the Inclusive Education Program continues along with the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) and it has become one of the 25 key initiatives. Then in 2013, the Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education Programme was distributed throughout the country and the related Letter of Release issued on May 16 2014 (MoE, 2014). Also, in 2013, The Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013 reviewed and Regulations of Education (Special Education) 1997 PU (A) 532/1997 replaced and Inclusive Education redefined as:

*"Educational programme for pupils with special educational needs which is attended by pupils with special educational needs together with other pupils in the same class in government school or government-aided schools"*

### **Issues of implementation of Inclusive Education Programme**

#### *Inconsistencies in the implementation of Inclusive Education Programme*

Inconsistencies in the implementation of Inclusive Education Programme not only in Malaysia but also in other countries occurred because of the strategies and methods of Inclusive Education Programme in each country is different (UNESCO, 2002). This inconsistency is caused by every country having its culture and traditions vary with even differences also occurring by state, city, county and school (Susanto, 2010).

In Indonesia, the implementations of inclusive programmes have involved the government sector and the private sector. Private sectors also allow parents to provide a personal assistant for their child inclusive (Susanto, 2010).

In Malaysia the implementation of Inclusive Education Programmes vary by school. This is because there is no clear procedure on how to implement the inclusive programme in Malaysia (Ali, Mustafa and Low, 2006). Special Education Schools are governed solely by the Division of Special Education, and Special Education Programme Integration is governed entirely by the State Education Department respectively (Wijaya, *et al.*, 2010). Although the Inclusive Education Programme was implemented in 1962, "Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive" was only be issued on October 1, 1994 (MoE, 2004) and 'Guidelines for Inclusive Education Programme Students with Special Needs "was released in 2013 in a trial edition (MoE, 2013). This shows there is still no absolute uniformity of the implementation of Inclusive Education Programme in Malaysia especially in their operational procedures.

Collaborative parties involved in school

According to Kasim (1999), the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process is dependent on collaboration of the school, administrators, teachers, parents and pupils. In the United States, cooperation and collaborative professionals such as psychologists, speech and language therapists, and counselors are part of the school system (Low, 1990). In Malaysia, cooperation and collaborative professionals such as psychologists, speech therapists, administrators, teachers, parents and students are still unstructured. The administrator in Sabah was found to have less relevant in-depth knowledge of the Special Education Programme integrated in their school (Yasin, Salleh, Toran, Tahar and Ibrahim, 2010).

Reviews by Ibrahim (1998) found that mainstream primary and secondary teachers have a negative attitude towards Inclusive Education Programme. This is due to a lack of exposure on Inclusive Education Programme for teachers in mainstream schools. A study conducted by Bosi (2004) on 54 primary school teachers involved with Inclusive Education Programme of 6 zones in Malaysia found that only 18 teachers attended a seminar, training, short courses and briefings on the Inclusive Education Programme, while 36 teachers have never attended any courses, briefings and training on Inclusive Education Program. Similarly, a study conducted by Matt (2010), found that mainstream teachers feel uncomfortable. They complain that the inclusive students will make their burdens increased (Bosi, 2004).

#### *Adaptation*

Education in Malaysia is still suffering from a lack of variety in terms of expertise in the field of special education (Ahmad, 2003), especially in the aspect of adaptation. There are teachers who are not willing to adapt to the teaching and learning methodologies. Adaptation cannot be done due to lack of teachers with the experience, exposure, skills and training. A study conducted by Tahar, Alias and Majzub (2010) to 400 special education teachers found that 71.85% of special education teachers in SEIP have adapted to the teaching learning. While Majzub (2011), found that most teachers do not have the skills to make the adaptation of the teaching process.

#### **Limitations and Delimitations of the study**

In this study, the researchers limit the study only on the Inclusive Education Programme in Malaysia and evolution development of Inclusive Education pre-independence to date. The weakness of this study involves the analysis of documents from the years after independence from documents published and does not include government documents that were confidential. Delimitation in this study is only based on the inconsistency of implementation, teacher collaboration at school and adaptation in an inclusive classroom.

#### **Importance of Research**

This study is expected to provide an overview and preliminary information about Inclusive Education Programme to researchers who are interested in the present development of education in Malaysia. It could also explain the changes that occur in terms of the legislation, act, and policy for Inclusive Education Programme in Malaysia



for pre-service teacher in Malaysia. It can even act as a reference and guide for all those involved in planning and implementing Inclusive Education Programme.

### **Conclusion**

Inclusive Education Programme development in Malaysia are in line with the Education for All (EFA) target groups. These three issues highlighted often arises when a new program is executed. Among the problems that occur are: (1) communication system and a lack of effective coordination of the various parties; roles, functions, less accountability and less expertise; (3) little or no in-service courses to improve the level of professionalism and; (4) low additional allocation for the purchase of teaching and learning materials. Therefore, it is expected that in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, Inclusive Education Programme (IEP) can be strengthened. In Wave 1 (2013-2015), MoE implemented the policy of school choice for students with special needs at level of competency, assessment instruments and screening process to identify the level of student competence and placed them in the appropriate schooling options, involvement of more vocational skills, improve infrastructure and equipment in mainstream schools and special schools, improve service center for special education facilities, provide basic module training of special education at the higher education and Institutions, providing in-service training modules with different levels of expertise (from basic to expert), and provides a special curriculum and assessment in accordance with the level of student abilities. In Wave 2 (2016-2020), an initiative in Wave 1 will be increased, and even directed to inclusive education teacher training program will be further strengthened and cooperation between government and non-government agencies, international organizations are improved. In Wave 3 (2021-2025), evaluation and consolidation initiative needs to be done to develop a blueprint for the future. Therefore these volunteers aim to make each student with special needs have access to high quality education that is relevant to their specific needs, teachers that are knowledge about special education, and 75% of students with special needs enrolled in inclusive programs by 2025 (MoE, 2013).

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