

IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN MALAYSIA

Teng Kie Yin, Yeo Kee Jiar and Hadijah Jaffri

1. INTRODUCTION

Taylor (2006) described inclusion as serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the mainstream classroom with appropriate in-class support.

Inclusion is defined as students with disabilities are being included in age appropriate mainstream classrooms where supports and services are provided to both students and teachers to enable the disabilities students to participate fully in academic and extracurricular activities as their peers in school communities (Snow, 2013).

Since 1990s, United Nation (UN) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have cultivated awareness of equal education rights among all children globally via several UN policies such as *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), the *UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (1993), the *UNESCO Salamanca Statement* (1994) and the *UNESCAP Biwako Millennium Framework* (2002).

In line with the children's rights movement, Malaysia has taken its initiative to advocate special education in the Malaysian Education Act 1996 (1998) for the children with special educational needs (SENs) who have a learning difficulty or disability that hinder them from making use of educational facilities provided in schools. Besides that, in the Education

(Special Education) Regulations 2013 (Government of Malaysia, 2013), the students with special educational needs will be provided with Special Education either in special schools or schools which implement Special Education Integrated Programme or Inclusive Education Programme at all school levels.

Government of Malaysia has put in lots of effort to improve the quality of inclusive education among the students with special needs. Based on the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) and the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act (2008), Ministry of Education of Malaysia set up its mission to give full and equal participation to those students with special needs in education as stated in National Education Blueprint (2013-2025) (MOE, 2013). In year 2013 too, "*Garis Panduan Program Pendidikan Inklusif Murid Berkeperluan Khas (Edisi Percubaan)*" (MOE, 2013) has been released in order to give guidelines on the implementation of Inclusive Education Programme.

The purpose of this article is to examine the implementation of inclusive education programme at school levels. Thus, some issues will be highlighted in this article for the betterment of Malaysia education system.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN MALAYSIA

Based on latest released "*Garis Panduan Program Pendidikan Inklusif Murid Berkeperluan Khas (Edisi Percubaan)*" (MOE, 2013), there are two types of inclusive education available in Malaysia: full inclusion and partial inclusion.

In full inclusion, students with special needs are placed in the mainstream classrooms full-timely with their typical peers for all the academic subjects. For partial inclusion, students with special needs are included for certain academic subjects or co-curricular activities based on their abilities, talents and potentials.

Under Inclusive Education Programme, the included students will be following the national curriculum or modified national curriculum with or without services and supports provided.

There are five elements being highlighted in the implementations of Inclusive Education Programme:

1. *Students' Criteria*

For the qualification to be included in Inclusive Education Programme, a student with special needs has to pass certain assessment which is determined by Ministry of Education (MOE). Besides, the qualified student will be included in age appropriate mainstream classroom or different at one year older than the mainstream students.

2. *Students' Placement*

Committee of School Special Education Programme will approve the qualified students with special needs to follow the Inclusive Education Programme. The student will be given a maximum of three months trial period in Inclusive Education Programme. For those who fail the trial, they will return to integration programme in special education. The students with special needs are encouraged to be placed in the mainstream classrooms with not more than thirty five students. Each of the mainstream classrooms will not being placed more than five students with special needs. They will be included in the mainstream classrooms which are equivalent to their achievement.

3. *Teacher*

Mainstream teachers should be given professional development to manage the special needs students in their classrooms. The assistance provided by special education teachers to mainstream teachers is crucial in determining the success of Inclusive Education Programme.

4. *Teaching and Learning*

The included students should follow the national curriculum in mainstream classrooms. Modifications on

teaching, materials preparation and delivery approaches can be made to ease their learning. Lesson planning should be made based on students' medical reports, profile and achievement records. Mainstream teachers should include the specific learning needs of the students in their daily lesson plan. In addition, Individual Education Planning can be prepared in order to look into their appropriate intervention needs. Both mainstream and special education teachers should collaborate in planning the teaching and learning process in mainstream classrooms.

5. *Assessment*

The students with special needs in Inclusive Education Programme should be given same assessment as well as evaluation either in curriculum or co-curriculum. They will be given equal chance to sit for public examination too.

3. DISCUSSION

Malaysia has yet to put inclusion education programme into full practice. We are still practicing a dual system education: a special education system for students with moderate, severe or profound disabilities and a regular system for those without or mild disabilities.

According to Zalizan and Manisah (2012), Malaysians and educators should recognise that all children included those with disabilities are eligible for equal access to education. UNESCAP (2002) has declared that education is a fundamental right for every child. Criteria chosen and qualification assessment for students with special needs to be included have gone against this legislation and restricted their learning environment.

ALLFIE (2014) defined the integration as the special educational needs students should fit in the existing learning environment in mainstream classrooms by some provided accommodations and resources. It seems MOE's intentions is

aligned with the integration models which mainly focuses on placing special needs students in mainstream classrooms and they are expected to adapt to the existing education system rather than the education system adapting to the learner (UNESCO, 2008).

Furthermore, collaboration between mainstream and special education teachers is vital in an inclusive classroom and there should be a clear guideline on Inclusive Education implementation (Manisah, Ramlee and Zalizan, 2006). Thus, professional development towards exposure and training in special education for mainstream teachers as well as pedagogical training for special education teachers should be provided. Both mainstream and special education teachers should attend more courses or training on collaborative classroom planning and teaching so that the responsibilities do not merely fall on special education teachers in assisting the mainstream teachers in the skills of handling special needs students.

Malaysia education field is still implying an examination-oriented system which can be clearly seen from the great emphasis on assessment in the implementation of Inclusive Education Programme. Schools are pressured to strive for excellence via the best examination results (Hamzah, 2007). Therefore, special needs students are normally not welcomed to be placed in mainstream classroom due to probable poor examination results obtained. The government, should therefore established alternative assessment system or rewarding system for the teachers, or schools of which showed their great effort to include these special needs students in examinations (Lee and Low, 2014).

In my opinion, the five elements in the “*Garis Panduan Program Pendidikan Inklusif Murid Berkeperluan Khas (Edisi Percubaan)*” (MOE, 2013), currently used in Malaysia are insufficient in its coverage to provide effective Inclusive Education for Students with Special Needs. We can therefore refer to other resources for a more comprehensive details such as “Quality Indicators for Effective Inclusive Education Guidebook” by New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (NJCIE, 2010) of which

also look into other elements such as curriculum, leadership, school climate and so on.

4. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, Inclusive Education Programme is still in its infancy stage in Malaysia. MOE should look into the feedback above and review accordingly so that we will be on the right track in moving towards inclusionary for students with special needs.

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