

INSTITUTIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF PENANG

by

KHU LI HUANG

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Social Science (Anthropology and Sociology)**

April 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am forever indebted to my academic supervisors, Dr. Premalatha Karupiah and Dr. Bala Nikku, for their unrelenting support and helpful criticism in my thesis throughout this process. Their professional expertise guide me to learn the precious knowledge and research skills. This work would not be possible without their input, influence and expert knowledge.

To my loving mother, father and my siblings, their supports and generosity make my academic accomplishment possible.

I also would like to express my deepest gratitude and respect to my good friend, Maureen Anne Muthu, for her sincere support and proofreading. She spurred me to continue to seek the higher knowledge. My greatest mentors, Chong Hai Yong, Chan Wing Hon and Tan Kwan Au, for their supports and encouragements. Their unwavering supports are the source of my strengths to face any challenges in my future.

Most importantly of all, I show extensive gratitude to all of the participants: principals, special education teachers and parents who warmly contributed their experiences and their times to provide all these valuable information. Without this willingness to share, the research would not have even been possible.

I thank the fellow students and staffs of School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia for their support and advice throughout the research.

Lastly, I thank Universiti Sains Malaysia for providing fellowship for this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
List of Abbreviations.....	xi
List of Appendix.....	xii
Abstrak.....	xiii
Abstract.....	xv

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background of Study.....	3
1.1.1 Special Education System in Malaysia.....	6
1.2 Statement of Problem.....	8
1.3 Research Questions.....	10
1.4 Research Objectives.....	10
1.5 Definition of Terms.....	11
1.6 Thesis Organization.....	15

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction.....	16
-----------------------	----

2.1	The Concept of Inclusive Education and its Importance.....	16
2.2	Policy context.....	18
2.2.1	Local Policies of Inclusive Education.....	19
2.3	Stakeholders in Supporting Inclusive Education.....	22
2.4	Debates related to Inclusive Education.....	25
2.5	Inclusive Education from Sociological perspective.....	26
2.5.1	Two Paradigms of Disabilities.....	28
2.5.1(a)	Medical Model of Disability.....	28
2.5.1(b)	Social Model of Disability.....	29
2.6	Barriers of Inclusive Education.....	30
2.6.1	Barriers at the Institutional Level Perspective.....	31
2.6.2	Barriers at the Individual Level Perspective.....	33
2.7	Facilitating Factors of Inclusive Education.....	34
2.8	Theoretical Perspectives.....	36
2.8.1	Institutional Theory.....	37
2.8.1(a)	Element of Policy.....	38
2.8.1(b)	Element of Norm.....	38
2.8.1(c)	Element of Cognition.....	39
2.9	Conclusion.....	40

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

3.0	Introduction.....	43
3.1	Research Design.....	43
3.2	Research Strategy.....	44
3.3	Researcher's Position.....	45
	3.3.1 I as the Insider.....	46
	3.3.2 Researcher as the Outsider.....	48
3.4	The Research Settings.....	49
3.5	Gaining Access to the Settings.....	50
	3.5.1 School A.....	50
	3.5.2 School B.....	51
3.6	Sampling Process.....	52
3.7	Data Collection.....	52
	3.7.1 In-depth Interview.....	53
	3.7.2 Observation.....	54
3.8	Data Analysis.....	55
3.9	Ethical Matters.....	56

CHAPTER 4 - DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

4.0	Introduction.....	57
4.1	Description of the School Settings in School A.....	57

4.2	Description of the Students’ Demographic Profiles in School A.....	58
4.2.1	Characteristics of Students with Disabilities.....	59
4.3	Teachers’ Demographic Profile.....	61
4.4	Parents’ Demographic Profile.....	62
4.5	Researcher’s Experiences at School A.....	63
4.6	Description of the School Setting in School B.....	67
4.7	Description of the Students’ Demographic Profiles in School B.....	68
4.7.1	Characteristics of Students with Disabilities in School B.....	70
4.8	Teachers’ Demographic Profile.....	71
4.9	Parents’ Demographic Profile.....	73
4.10	Researcher’s Experiences in School B.....	74
4.11	Conclusion.....	78
CHAPTER 5 - INSTITUTIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS		
5.0	Introduction.....	81
5.1	Institutional Barriers.....	81
5.1.1	Inadequate Classification of the Disability Group.....	82
5.1.2	Limited Early Childhood Intervention or Kindergarten.....	86
5.1.3	Transportation Problem.....	91
5.1.4	Inaccessibility of the School Environment.....	94
5.1.5	Lack of Collaborative School-Family Relationship.....	97
5.1.6	Limited Training for Special Education Teachers.....	98

5.1.7	Lack of Resources.....	102
5.1.8	Learning Braille and Students with Visual Impairment.....	106
5.2	Individual barriers.....	110
5.2.1	Unsupported Actions of the Principals.....	111
5.2.2	Negative Attitudes towards Disability.....	113
5.2.3	Degree and Nature of Students’ Disabilities.....	116
5.2.4	Emotional and Behavioural Disabilities.....	118
5.3	Conclusion.....	119

CHAPTER 6- FACILITATING FACTORS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

6.0	Introduction.....	122
6.1	Facilitating Factors for Improving Inclusive Education.....	122
6.1.1	Good Instruction Begins with Good Assessment.....	122
6.1.2	A Strong Education Philosophy.....	125
6.1.3	Productive Approach in Teachings.....	127
6.1.4	Strong Parental Support.....	128
6.1.5	Support of Principals.....	130
6.2	Conclusion.....	132

CHAPTER 7- CONCLUSION

7.0	Introduction.....	135
7.1	Summary of Findings.....	135

7.2	Recommendation of Studies.....	137
7.3	Limitation of Studies.....	138
7.4	Significance of the Research.....	138
7.5	Conclusion of this Study.....	139
	REFERENCES.....	144
	Appendix 1: Interview Questions.....	168
	i. Sample Principal Interview Questions.....	168
	ii. Sample Teachers Interview Questions.....	170
	iii. Sample Parents Interview Questions.....	175
	Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form in English.....	177
	Appendix 3: Transcription of Interviews.....	182
	Appendix 4: List of Publications.....	192

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 1.1	Brief description of three types of special education system	7
Table 3.1	Number of inclusive and integrated schools in Penang, disabled students and teachers (April 2014)	49
Table 3.2	Total respondents from both School A and School B.	52
Table 4.1	The demographic profiles of students with disabilities in School A	59
Table 4.2	The demographic profiles of special teachers in School A	62
Table 4.3	The demographic profiles of parents of child with disability in School A	63
Table 4.4	The demographic profiles of students with disabilities in School B	69
Table 4.5	The demographic profiles of special teachers in School B	72
Table 4.6	The demographic profiles of parents of child with disability in School B	73

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 4.1 Closed-Circuit Televisions (or CCTVs) or reading machine assists students with low vision to see the learning materials with maximum available visibility.	58
Figure 4.2 Accessible toilet for students with disabilities in School B	67
Figure 4.3 Computers equipment in School B for students with disabilities.	68
Figure 4.4 Accessible toilet for students with disabilities in School B.	75

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DOSW	Department of Social Welfare
EFA	Education for All
IEP	Individual Education Plan
JEPeM	Jawatankuasa Etika Penyelidikan (Manusia) of USM
JPN	Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri
JPPP	Jabatan Pendidikan Pulau Pinang
LINUS	Literacy and Numeracy Screening
MOE	Minister of Education
SED	Special Education Department
SEIP	Special Education Integration Program
SPM	Sijil Pendidikan Malaysia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

LIST OF APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview Questions.....	168
Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form in English.....	177
Appendix 3: Sample Interview Transcription	182
Appendix 4: List of Publications.....	192

**PENGHALANG INSTITUSI DAN INDIVIDU DALAM PENDIDIKAN
INKLUSIF UNTUK PELAJAR KURANG UPAYA DI SEKOLAH RENDAH
PULAU PINANG**

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian penyelidikan ini ialah untuk mengenalpasti halangan institusi sekolah dan tindakan pihak-pihak berkepentingan yang menghalang penyertaan pelajar kurang upaya. Beberapa faktor fasilitasi pendidikan inklusif di sekolah awam juga dikaji. Pendidikan inklusif bukan hanya langkah untuk menggalakkan kemasukan dan penyertaan pelajar kurang upaya di sekolah awam tetapi juga merupakan usaha untuk menghapuskan kekangan demi membolehkan penyertaan pelajar kurang upaya di alam sekolah yang mesra. Pada peringkat antarabangsa, dasar menyatakan bahawa kepentingan pendidikan inklusif untuk menangani marginasi yang berlaku pada pelajar kurang upaya. Kerajaan Malaysia berusaha untuk memasukkan program pendidikan inklusif di dalam sistem pendidikan arus untuk membolehkan pelajar kurang upaya menyertai pendidikan umum tetapi bukan mengasingkan mereka dalam pendidikan khas. Pihak berkepentingan seperti pengetua, guru dan ibu bapa bertanggungjawab untuk merealisasikan dasar-dasar yang menyokong pendidikan inklusif bagi menggalakkan penyertaan pelajar kurang upaya. Oleh itu, dua buah sekolah yang melaksanakan pendidikan inklusif telah dipilih dan data dikumpulkan melalui pendekatan penyelidikan fokus etnografi untuk memahami integrasi antara dasar, norma dan sikap di kalangan guru pendidikan khas, pengetua dan ibu bapa. Dalam kajian ini, lapan tema halangan institusi dan empat tema halangan individu telah dikenal pasti. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa halangan institusi/struktur dan individu yang wujud menghadkan peluang pelajar kurang upaya untuk mengakses ke dalam program pendidikan inklusif. Tambahan pula, lima tema faktor fasilitasi

pendidikan inklusif menunjukkan kepentingan membangun sistem sokongan untuk melanjutkan kemasukan pelajar kurang upaya dalam persekitaran sekolah yang mesra. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa dasar adalah asas untuk membangun sistem pendidikan inklusif yang mementingkan penilaian, kerjasama antara pihak berkepentingan, akses dan inklusif untuk mewujudkan persekitaran pembelajaran yang kondusif. Oleh itu, pelajar kurang upaya boleh belajar dalam persekitaran yang kurang kekangan dan menyediakan pendekatan pembelajaran yang sesuai untuk membimbing mereka. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pembangunan dasar yang boleh memberi peluang pelajar kurang upaya supaya mendapat manfaat daripada program pendidikan inklusif adalah sangat penting. Kajian masa depan dicadangkan untuk mengenal pasti pengaruh latar belakang keluarga untuk mendapatkan peluang yang sama untuk menyertai pendidikan inklusif.

**INSTITUTIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS OF INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN PRIMARY
SCHOOLS OF PENANG**

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to identify the institutional and individual barriers that prohibit students with disabilities to gain equal opportunity and rights to access and participate into inclusive education. It also explored some factors which facilitate inclusive education in public schools. Inclusive education is not only a move to encourage the participation of students with disabilities in public schools with able bodied students but it is also the efforts to remove barriers in order to enable participation of students with disabilities in an engaged school environment. At the international level, inclusive education policies have stated the importance of inclusive education implementation to replace marginalization of students with disabilities. Malaysian government strives to include inclusive education programme into the general education system to allow the participation of students with disabilities in mainstream education rather than place them in segregated special education. Stakeholders such as principals, teachers and parents are responsible to actualize the policies that support inclusive education in order to enable participation of students with disabilities. Thus, two schools which have implemented inclusive education in Penang were selected and the data were collected through the focused ethnography research approach to understand the influences of policies, norms and attitude of special education teachers, principals and parents in the implementation of inclusive education. In this study, eight themes of institutional/structural barriers and four themes of individual barriers have been identified. Results showed that the existing institutional/structural and individual barriers strongly limit the opportunities of

students with disabilities to access into inclusive education programme. Furthermore, five themes of facilitating factors of inclusive education demonstrate the importance of developing a support system to further the inclusion of students with disabilities in an engaging school environment. The results showed that policy is the cornerstone to develop the system that can incorporate assessments, stakeholders' collaboration, accessibility and inclusion to create a conducive learning environment. Therefore, students with disabilities can learn in the least restrictive environment and provide appropriate learning approach to guide them. The study shows that policy development that enables students with disabilities to get an opportunity to benefit from the inclusive education programme is very important. Future studies are suggested to identify influences of family background to get equal opportunity to participate in the inclusive education.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Inclusive education for students with disabilities is a major concern in most countries. It has become an important aspect of both international and national educational policies in many countries. It is equally important to emphasize that students with disabilities have equal access and opportunities to learn in a conducive school environment. There are strong evidence to show the benefits of inclusive education to both disabled and non-disabled students, for example, improving academic achievement and social engagement (Feldman, Carter, Asmus & Brock, 2015). However, various barriers exist between expanding access to education and school constraints that limit the full participation of students with disabilities (Alavi, Irajpour, Giles, Rabiei & Sarrafzadegan, 2013). Educational rights of students with disabilities appear to be lagging behind and their educational rights are considered as something outside the normal education system (Cosier, Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2013).

Many international organizations actively push ahead for equal education opportunity not only for those who are sensory or physically disabled but also students with non-apparent disabilities such as learning disabilities. These students are vulnerable and are excluded and stigmatized because of their disabilities. Clearly, students either with apparent or non-apparent disabilities are embedded into traditional and cultural beliefs that portray them as “disabled” and “uneducable”. They have no access to education and are less educated because cultural beliefs conceptualize education as not essential for them (Rothman, 2010).

Traditionally, society views disability as an inherent individual problem that needs to be overcome. Traditional education systems such as rehabilitation and special education programmes play a part to normalize their disabilities (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001) and try to fit them to be “whole” persons in order to fulfill social expectation (Frattura & Capper, 2006). However, sociology of disability has strongly criticized the normalization practice in rehabilitation which is used to justify the exclusion, segregation and stigmatization of students with disabilities (Garland-Thomson, 2002). Further exploration towards different perspectives of disability models reveal the social construction of disability and justify exclusion on the basis of a disability.

It is noteworthy that the implementation of inclusive education is an effort to replace segregated schools or separate classes and eliminate the exclusion of students with disabilities (Powell, 2006). The Malaysian government pays considerable attention to policies in order to mobilize inclusive education. One can observe the changes from the segregated education system to recognize and accept the inclusiveness of students with disabilities into mainstream education as stated in the Special Education Act 2013. The policy as a tool to transform segregated education into inclusive education and the targets of inclusive education are twofold: increasing participation and removing barriers (Bevan-Brown, Heung, Jelas & Phongakorn, 2014).

Nevertheless, many students with disabilities are still largely excluded and the schools are unprepared to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities (Wilson, Kim & Michaels, 2013). The resistance of school stakeholders to create a conducive environment to advance the educational rights of students with disabilities as a result of a negative attitude toward disability and inaccessible school structure and an unsupportive system are the persistent problems (Peters, 2010). Clearly, students

with disabilities are embedded into the disabling structure and system that has a direct consequence to rob the opportunity of schooling for students with disabilities.

Thus, understanding barriers to access into inclusive education in the local cultural context of the study is important to identify how the disability labelling and practice restrict the enrollment and full participation of students with disabilities in an inclusive education programme (McMahon, 2012). It is imperative to have an understanding of the progress of current inclusive practices that reflect the inter-influences of the national inclusive education policies and local cultural norm (Sharma, Loreman & Macanawai, 2016). This study further explores the deep-rooted conceptualization of school stakeholders towards disability and the inclusive education programme through their experiences and interaction with disabled students. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide an insight into the nature of these barriers in an inclusive school context from the perspective of principals, teachers and parents who have a disabled child. The following section is the background study that provides the context to understand the education system for students with disabilities in Malaysia.

1.1 Background Study

In Malaysia, only one per cent of children with disabilities have access to education, even though it is estimated that there are 10 to 15 per cent people with disabilities in developing countries (UNICEF, 2013). This particular group has been segregated from mainstream schools for a long time and has the lowest school enrollment rate in these countries (UNICEF, 2013). In Malaysia, only 445,006 (1 per cent of the population) people were registered as disabled by the Department of Welfare in 2012. Eighty-five per cent of them are children in the 7 to 18 age group. The number of registered

disabled people has increased compared to 359,203 in 2011. The number of persons with disabilities is constantly increasing for various reasons and disability limits the function of their sensory, physical or mental condition (Cohen, Roth, York & Neikrug, 2012).

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCDD) (2011), categorizes disability into seven categories which are: hearing disabilities, vision disabilities, learning disabilities, speech disabilities, physical disabilities (including spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, stroke, dwarfism, traumatic brain injury and limb defect), mental disabilities and multiple disabilities (a combination of more than one type of disability).

Every disability type has different types of needs. For example students who are deaf need the sign language interpreter to assist them in school. On the other hand, students with visual impairment require study materials that are in Braille or in large print. They have different types of needs to assist them in the learning process due to the differences in their disabilities. Other than that, the same type of disability may have different degrees of special needs. For example, those who are categorized as visually impaired are not totally blind, but may have additional sensory impairments (Salleh & Ali, 2010). Every student with a disability has special needs and suitable teaching and learning techniques are needed to facilitate his/her learning (Frattura & Capper, 2006). Thus, national policies in education to support the rights of students with disabilities to access and participate in the schools are important.

Malaysia has adopted its national policies for addressing inclusive education for disabled people under the agreement of international policies (UNICEF, 2013), e.g., the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action, Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Incheon Strategy. These international policies suggest

that proactive strategies and guidelines should respond to the needs of students with disabilities. Several important strategies as recommended in the international policies. Some of these strategies to make inclusive education a reality are changing the perception of disability, training and hiring of quality educators including teachers with disabilities (UNICEF, 2013).

The international initiatives and policies motivate and guide nation states to adopt their own policy. Therefore, Malaysia has made an attempt to outline special education policies after signing the Salamanca Statement of 1994 and the Incheon Strategy of 2012 (Lee & Low, 2014). Other than that, in 2010, Malaysia signed the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), but has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol¹.

Disability policies related to education such as the Salamanca Statement and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) and Article 28 of Malaysia's Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, make it possible for students with disabilities to obtain equal opportunity for enrollment and participation in mainstream education. It builds upon UNESCO's principle of Education for All (EFA). Malaysia has been signatories with UNESCO since 2000, and this principle of Education for All (EFA) is part of the agenda of the Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The aim is to achieve universal access and enrollment of all students thus ensuring that everyone gets equal opportunity to access a minimum level of schooling.

¹ The Optional Protocol is the complaining mechanism that allows the intervention of CRPD Committee for investigating the violation rights of disability as stated in the CRPD.

1.1.1 Special Education System in Malaysia

In Malaysia, there are three types of special education systems: special education, Special Education Integration Programme (SEIP) and inclusive programme for disabled students that have been delimited in the Special Education Act 1997.

Special education provides special training or instructions that cater for the particular educational needs of pupils with disabilities at the special needs schools. These schools offer special training as dictated by regulations made under subdivision 41 of the Malaysian Education Act (Laws of Malaysia, 2012, p. 18). Only five per cent of the disabled students are in special needs schools as stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MOE, 2012, p. 4-17). Students in these schools are categorized as a special group and segregated from mainstream schools. Most often, their individual needs are classified as special. Sometimes the term “special” implies the inability or difficulty due to their physical limitations. For example, there is the separate school for students who have learning disabilities and students who have visual impairment respectively. Students labelled as disabled not only experience the segregated placement but also a separate programme that requires special study materials and infrastructure to accommodate their special learning needs.

The Special Education Integration Programme (SEIP), on the other hand, places disabled students in mainstream schools. However, due to the different needs among students with special needs, they are placed in segregated classrooms away from non-disabled students. According to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, 89 per cent of disabled students are involved in SEIP (MOE, 2012, p. 4-17). It requires specially trained teachers to develop the Individual Education Plan (IEP) in order to accommodate the students’ special needs. The main purpose of the IEP is to

fulfill the needs of students with special needs by stating the learning objectives, assessment and evaluation so as to monitor progress in their learning (Torana, Yasina, Chiria & Tahara, 2010).

The inclusive programme is the placement of disabled students in classrooms, with non-disabled peers in mainstream schools. Only six per cent of the disabled students are involved in inclusive programme that follow standardized learning courses as stated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MOE, 2012, p. 4-17). In fact, inclusive education requires the entire school system to embrace inclusive practices to create an environment for teaching and administrative strategies that are oriented towards inclusive development. It requires embracing of students with inclusive mindsets and compassionate hearts, regardless of their different backgrounds, race, gender and disabilities.

Table 1.1: Brief description of three types of special education system

Type of School	Characteristics
Special School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorting disabled students based on type of disability into homogeneous schools. • Teaching the basic daily living skills, for example, toileting. • Five per cent of disabled students are in special schools.² • Students possess low intellectual aptitude that focuses on basic skills of learning through particular equipment, life skills and social skills.
Integrated School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate a separate classroom in the mainstream school. • Mainly to accommodate learning needs of disabled students by developing the Individual Education Plan (IEP) • Eighty nine per cent of disabled students join this programme.³ • Students possess moderate intellectual aptitude that needs special teaching techniques to facilitate their learning

² Ministry of Education, *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, (Preliminary Report)*, September 2012, p. 4-17.

³ Ministry of Education, *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, (Preliminary Report)*, September 2012, p. 4-17.

Inclusive School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate both disabled students and non-disabled students into the same classroom. • Follow the standardized learning courses • Six per cent of disabled students are in this inclusive program.⁴ • Able to cope with mainstream academic curricular as their peers
------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

(Source: Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025)

1.2 Statement of Problem

In Malaysia, only one per cent of disabled children have access to education (UNICEF, 2013). Despite both international and local policies, the development and progress of the disability rights to gain access into education lags behind the mainstream development especially in developing countries (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001). Even though the policies mandate the implementation of inclusive education in the least restrictive environment to enable participation of students with disabilities but it does not delineate how to make the schools fully accessible and the services delivered (Fasting, 2013).

Scholars have often highlighted the difficulty in identifying the best way to implement inclusive education (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Ali, Mustapa & Jelas, 2006; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Furthermore, very little is known why students with disabilities have been excluded in the natural school environment (Kearney, 2009). In Malaysia, the past research has contributed to examine various issue related to special education needs of students with disabilities. Lee and Low (2014) have made an excellent review on the development of special education system in Malaysia. Other scholars have explored various issues related to inclusive education such as examining leadership styles among special education

⁴ Ministry of Education, *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, (Preliminary Report)*, September 2012, p. 4-1

teachers in Malaysia and China (Ngang, 2012; Jelas, 2010), accessibility of physical infrastructure in schools (Yasin, Toran, Tahar & Bari, 2010) and the stress among special education teachers (Ghani, Ahmad & Ibrahim, 2014).

Furthermore, some research papers focused on the issue of special education intervention in the classroom practice (Aliee, Jomhari, Rezaei & Alias, 2013; Hashim, Tasir & Mohamad, 2013; Omar, Hussin & Siraj, 2013; Leong, Stephenson & Carter, 2011; Peters, 2010; Salleh & Ali, 2010), the Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Bandu & Jelas, 2012; Mislán, Kosnin, Jiar, Said & Hamid, 2011; Torana, Yasina, Chiria & Tahara, 2010), misconception of disability (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001), placement and benefits of inclusive practices in schools (Jelas, 2000) and teachers' attitude towards involvement of students with disabilities in rural area without special designed programmes (Lee & Low, 2013). From all these past research, one can take note that scholars studied many different aspects of inclusive education in Malaysia in an effort to improve various aspects in the implementation of inclusive education.

Nevertheless, the problem of exclusion is usually tied to students with disabilities because they are disadvantaged on the basis of their disabilities (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001). The special education system still adheres to the outdated traditional education system for students with special needs (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001). Literature review shows that there is a gap in the study on inclusive education particularly in examining the barriers of inclusive education in Malaysia. A comprehensive understanding of both structural and individual levels is important to understand the persistent problem of exclusion from and within the school environment. The purpose of this study is to understand the barriers experienced by students to enroll and participate in inclusive education by taking schools as a unit of analysis and focusing on the school structure and cultural conditions. This allows the researcher to explore

not only the nature and constitution of disabilities but also the interaction between impairment, rights of inclusion and structural condition in the context of the schools. Therefore, this study covers a wide range of relevant and significant discussion in inclusive education by bringing together stakeholders who have a wealth of information and knowledge to share in relation to barriers to inclusive education.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions in this study are as follows:

1. What are the institutional barriers of inclusive education for the disabled children in the public schools in Penang?
2. What are the individual barriers of inclusive education for the disabled children in the public schools in Penang?
3. How to improve inclusive education for disabled children in the public schools in Penang?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To investigate the institutional barriers of inclusive education for the disabled children in the public schools in Penang.
2. To explore the individual barriers of inclusive education for the disabled children in the public schools in Penang.
3. To analyze the facilitating factors to improve inclusive education of disabled children in public schools in Penang.

1.5 Definition of Terms

The definition of terms in this study are as follows:

- i. Disabled people/children or children with disabilities

There is no standard definition of disabled people. In Malaysia, different definitions of disabled people have been used by different departments and government agencies (Taub & Fanflik, 2000). For example, Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia (DOSW) defines disabled people as

“Any person who is unable to obtain for himself or herself, fully or partially, the normal requirements of an individual or is unable to participate fully in the community due to shortcomings either physically or mentally and whether it occurred since birth or later in life (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001, p. 657).”

On the other hand, Special Education Department (SED) defines disabled people as those who are visual or hearing impaired, with severe learning difficulties and gifted. Both definitions were criticized as being inappropriate because it reinforces the inability of disabled people (Pheng, 1999 as cited in Adnan & Hafiz, 2001). Such definitions would confine us to think about one’s inability compared to his/her ability and is not useful for the field of education which is meant to enhance one’s ability.

According to Curran and Runswick-Cole (2014), disabled children are those under eighteen years characterised as being “children in special need” and “disability” is defined in terms of impairment and function. In other words, discussion of disabled children and his/her special education needs is dominated by deficit discourses that concentrate on the impact of impairment instead of focusing on basic educational rights of disabled children (Oliver & Sapey, 2006). As argued by Moore, Beazley and

Maelzer (1998), the definition states disabled children as “abnormal” without considering their diverse and full identities so that disparity between disabled and non-disabled children continues.

On the other hand, Bjarnason (2013) mentioned that the emphasis of definition on the way that disabled children are constrained by disabling social structure and system. Their special educational needs should be viewed, valued and included (Beckett, 2014) but not act as an obstacle to prevent their participation in the normal school environment (Goodley & Runswick Cole, 2015). The adjustment to accommodate special education needs of disabled children is the rights-based approach that leads to the full participation rather than exclusion and discrimination.

Furthermore, Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS) 1975 defined disability

“...as something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society....and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization, which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments, and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities (Oliver, 1996, p. 22).”

This definition further portrays disability as caused by social barriers instead of impairment. The focus is how disability is constructed by society and as the product or outcome of social barriers.

From these different definitions of disabled children, one can understand that impairment and inability to learn affecting their competency but their different body conditions cannot be viewed as a problem or an excuse to deny their educational rights.

Therefore, in this study, the researcher defines disabled children as those between the ages of seven and eighteen who experience some sort of difficulty due to physical, sensory or mental impairment and need an accessible environment, services and facilities to cultivate their full potential and facilitate their independent living.

ii. Inclusive education

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined inclusive education as a process intended to respond to students' diversity by increasing their participation and reducing exclusion within and from education (UNESCO, 2009). In developed countries, providing children with disabilities the opportunity to study in a normal educational environment is obliged by law and emphasizes on equality and social justice (Michailakis & Reich, 2009). As defined by Waitoller and Kozleski (2013), inclusive education is a process to redistribute the equal opportunity for learning, recognize the special needs of disabled students and facilitate their representation in making decisions. In developing countries, on the other hand, children with disabilities are given limited opportunity to attend normal school and offered by intensive support system in education (Slee & Allan, 2001). According to this view, the emphasis of inclusive education in most of the developing countries is on the opportunity to access into general school with age-appropriate peers in a normal school environment (Nind, 2014). In this study, the researcher thinks that inclusive education should be understood in a broader sense and defines the inclusive education as the process to enable and empower disabled children to access into and participate in the general school.

iii. Institutional or structural barriers

According to Saar, Täht and Roosalu (2014), institutional or structural barriers include institutional practices and procedures such as lack of provision or opportunity that discourage or prevent participation. In other words, institutional or structural barriers are a source of rejection towards differences and diversity. This definition developed in response to the obstacles that prohibit social actors to perform and actualize the policy and make rational decisions to achieve the desirable outcome (Genova, 2015). In this study, the researcher defines it as macro-level institutional and educational policy factors that prevent students with disabilities to have an opportunity and access to education and providing a conducive learning environment. Institutional barriers are associated with school architecture, national policy, school structure and system or other contextual factors may directly or indirectly prohibit an opportunity to access into the inclusive education programme.

iv. Individual barriers

Individual barriers is a discussion not only about attitudinal barriers (Avoke, 2002; Ludwig, 2012) but also one's family background (Wang & Brown, 2009) individual characteristic (Flynn, Brown, Johnson & Rodger, 2011), concerns, values and personal experiences by the stakeholders. Such barriers poses insurmountable challenges to engage students with disabilities into inclusive education (Kang, 2010). In this regard, their unique standpoint offers insight to understand the disadvantaged status quo of students with disabilities in the school context (Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Existing research on individual barriers to inclusive education is to state a micro view and microanalysis that reflect the barriers of enrollment and participation in that particular schools context. The micro level of analysis not only focuses on the disability causation that constraints their sensory, mobility and cognitive abilities in access to

education but other unique individual, family and school factors (García-Huidobro & Corvalán, 2009). In this study, individual barriers refer to the intangible elements such as negative values, beliefs and personal factors that hinder admission into school, participation and influences the experiences of disabled students.

1.6 Thesis Organization

Following the introduction of the study, chapter two is the literature review that describes the concept of inclusive education, the roles of national policies in institute education and the reciprocal relationship of institute family and school in supporting inclusive education. The arguments of inclusive education and the reviews of institutional and individual barriers will be discussed. Chapter three provides an overview of the methodological approach that was used in collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter four presents the findings of the demographic data of respondents. Chapter five is the findings and discussions pertaining to the institutional and individual barriers. Chapter six is the discussion and findings of facilitating factors to improve inclusive education. Chapter seven is the conclusion, contribution, limitation and recommendation of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines some literature that is related to the obstacles to achieve success of inclusive education in Malaysia. The aim is not only to understand the barriers but also to scrutinize and evaluate the influences of policies and norms from sociological perspectives towards development of inclusive education. Thus, the literature review serves as a platform to understand the future direction in researching inclusive education. The first part of the literature review is to review the concept and importance of inclusive education. The critical review reveals the different aspects of the policy context that involves the principle of Education for All (EFA). Therefore, the second part of the literature review is to look at how the EFA integrated into the local policies of inclusive education. The other parts of reviews are about stakeholders in supporting inclusive education, several contested debates of inclusive education and inclusive education from a sociological perspective. Subsequently, the past studies on both institutional and individual barriers of inclusive education and facilitating factors of inclusive education have been discussed. The last part of literature review is the theoretical perspectives used in this study.

2.1 The Concept of Inclusive Education and its Importance

The concept of inclusive education is popular in both developed and developing countries (Washington, 2010). The concept of inclusive education which was introduced by Salamanca Statement (1994) was the turning point to reform the education system in general school where students with and without disabilities can

learn together. It is an effort to cultivate the potential, skill and knowledge of every student regardless of their physical condition (UNICEF, 2013). Inclusive education is a platform to include students with disabilities in an engaged school environment who have previously been traditionally excluded from the normal school system (Higgins, MacArthur & Kelly, 2009). In inclusive education, both disabled and non-disabled students can learn together and interact with one another in the same school environment. The inclusive education system is based on the strong belief that every child deserves an equal opportunity to learn regardless of their diverse characteristics of disability, cultural and learning background (Ainscow & Booth, 1998). Inclusive education is the best practice in the special education provision (Lee & Low, 2013) and against the exclusion of disabled students in mainstream schools (Slee & Allan, 2001).

The emergence of inclusive education is very important to challenge the traditional view of the public and enhance the argument that inclusive education aims to protect the rights of children with disabilities to eliminate social exclusion (UNESCO, 1994, 2009). Inclusive education provides important context and insights not only to break through the barriers that prevent their participation, but also to redefine the role and identity of students with disabilities (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). An engagement between disabled and non-disabled students enhances the mutual understanding towards the special condition and needs of disabled students. Throughout the interaction, negative attitudes are reduced to create a society that can embrace the diversity, be more compassionate, provide social support (Neff & Beretvas, 2013) and build more positive interpersonal relationships (Mongrain, Chin & Shapira, 2011). This is how the disability identity can be continually reconstructed through social interaction with non-disabled people in the school context.

2.2 Policy context

The issue of inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream schools is a major concern for policy makers in both developed and developing countries. The policy of inclusive education is the principles of behavior to guide the implementation of inclusive practice and defines the engaged school phenomena (Scott, 1995). Prior to the introduction of inclusive education into federal strategic plans, UNESCO launched the movement of Education for All (EFA) to reinforce the educational rights of children with disabilities and to receive equal opportunity to access into their neighbourhood school, was already in place.

Education for All (EFA) is an important guideline to ensure universalizing access and promoting equity (Tabatabaie & Manuchehr, 2012). The agenda of EFA become the focus of international policies for the attainment of equal educational rights of students with disabilities. International policies, namely, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nation, 2006), focus on the right to inclusive education in neighbourhood schools. Other than that, Incheon Strategy (WHO, 2012) is the disability-specific regional framework that aims to “Make Rights Real” for Asia and the Pacific.

The international initiative to achieve “Education for All” (EFA) become a common goal for students with disabilities and it has concerted efforts to mobilize the inclusive education system. It is not merely to integrate special needs education into mainstream schools but also the policies emphasizing on coordination and partnership among stakeholders such as principals, teachers and parents that can provide equal opportunities for education (UNICEF, 2013). The educational opportunities which are

not only free and compulsory must also provide reasonable accommodation for the teaching and learning needs of students with special needs without discrimination (United Nation, 2006).

In Malaysia, the government has made an attempt to amend Special Education Act after signing the Salamanca Statement of 1994 (Lee & Low, 2014), the Incheon Strategy of 2012 (UNICEF, 2013) and the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010. Malaysia is one of the countries mandated to establish local policies in accordance with the international initiatives to re-contextualize educational opportunity for all and access to school (Hunt, 2011). It is not an exaggeration to say that inclusive education is one of the most important federal programme in education. The international initiatives have influenced the current local policies to address the needs and to support the basic educational rights of children with disabilities (Keogh, 2005).

2.2.1 Local Policies of Inclusive Education

The policy of inclusive education in Malaysia builds upon the principle of Education for All (EFA) regulated by UNESCO, in which Malaysia is one of the signatories since the year 2000 and makes it part of the agenda in the Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The aim is to achieve universal access and full enrollment of all students to ensure that everyone gets equal opportunity to access a minimum level of schooling. In 1995, Malaysia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which is the treaty to protect child-specific needs and rights for those under the age of eighteen. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) aims to protect children' health, safety, education, freedom of expression etc. for their healthy development. Article 28 (1) (a) under the CRC concerns free and compulsory primary level education. As a corollary,

Malaysia enacted the Child Act 2001 to implement its obligation under the CRC. Under Education Act and Regulations, in section 40 of the Education Act, it states that the Minister of Education (MOE) is responsible for providing special education in special schools or designated primary and secondary schools.⁵ In accordance to this, primary level education has been compulsory in Malaysia since 2003⁶.

Other than the Education Act, the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (Act 685) was passed in the Malaysia Parliament in 2007 and came into operation in 2008. In the Article 28 under the Person with Disability Act 2008, it also states that all children regardless of their disability, are eligible for equal enrollment and participation in mainstream education. Therefore, the restructuring of our education system is oriented towards full inclusiveness and embracing diversity.

In 2010, Malaysia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) but has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol. Article 24 of CRPD, clearly highlights the need to make appropriate accommodation to facilitate and support the education of children with disabilities into the general education system. The aim is to nurture their human potential that will help in their social participation. Thus, ratification of CRPD by state members can guide them to implement the new laws or amend the existing laws to fulfill their responsibilities under CRPD. It is important to ratify the CRPD to guide the state members to implement, incorporate or change the laws to protect the rights of disabled (Le Fanu, 2013) in order to provide inclusive, quality and free compulsory education without exclusion or discrimination to them due to their impairment.

⁵ Laws of Malaysia, Education Act 1996, Section 40.

⁶ Laws of Malaysia, Education Act 1996, Section 29A. The Minister's Order prescribing primary education as compulsory education was gazetted on 8 November 2002 [P.U. (A) 459].