

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME  
(LEARNING DISABILITIES) IN PENANG: AN EVALUATION FROM  
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' AND PROGRAMME  
COORDINATORS' PERSPECTIVES**

**by**

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***IN LOVING MEMORY OF MY FATHER AND MOTHER,  
LEE YEE THOAY AND YEAP BEAN SWEE***

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## ABBREVIATION USED IN THE STUDY

- IEPs = Individual Education Plans
- JPN* = *Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri* (State Education Department)
- LD = Learning Disabilities
- SE = Special Education
- PPD* = *Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah* (District Education Office)
- WHO = World Health Organisation

**PELAKSANAAN PROGRAM PENDIDIKAN KHAS (BERMASALAH  
PEMBELAJARAN) DI PULAU PINANG: SATU PENILAIAN DARIPADA  
PERSPEKTIF GURU PENDIDIKAN KHAS DAN KOORDINATOR PROGRAM**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menilai program pendidikan khas untuk pelajar bermasalah pembelajaran di Pulau Pinang dalam tiga domain yang utama iaitu:- (a) polisi pentadbiran sekolah dalam perancangan and pelaksanaan, latihan dan sokongan untuk guru, dan sumber yang ada untuk pengajaran dan pembelajaran, (b) sistem penyampaian pendidikan khas dalam perancangan dan kolaborasi pengajaran, strategi pengajaran dan aktiviti pembelajaran, aplikasi sumber pengajaran/pembelajaran, sistem penilaian pelajar/proses dan pengurusan kelas, dan (c) hasil program dari segi penglibatan pelajar, perkembangan/pembaikan dan pencapaian.

Kajian ini menggunakan Model Penilaian *CIPP* (Stufflebeam et al., 1971) yang telah diadaptasikan dalam satu sekuen dan corak yang bersepadu dengan bantuan satu matriks seperti yang dicadangkan oleh Singh (2004). Kajian ini menggunakan pelbagai instrumen untuk memperolehi data seperti tinjauan-soalselidik, temubual, pemerhatian bukan penglibatan, dan analisis dokumen.

Sampel kajian ini adalah terdiri daripada 120 orang responden (Guru Pendidikan Khas) untuk soal selidik, 75 sampel telah diperolehi daripada penilaian kompetensi pengajaran yang dijalankan oleh 25 orang pentadbir sekolah/koordinator program, 15 orang peserta dalam temubual separuh berstruktur (5 orang koordinator program and 10 orang guru khas). Kajian ini juga turut meliputi 20 pemerhatian tanpa penglibatan di tiga buah sekolah rendah dan dua buah sekolah

menengah. Bagi tujuan triangulasi data, dokumen/rekod yang dikumpul dari 25 buah sekolah dalam program ini telah dianalisis bagi menyokong dapatan kajian ini.

Data kuantitatif kajian ini telah dianalisis dengan menggunakan SPSS versi 14 untuk memperoleh statistik diskripsi (Koeffisien *Cronbach's Alpha*, peratus, min and sisihan piawai). Data kualitatif kajian ini dianalisis dengan mengadaptasi kaedah yang dicadangkan oleh Miles dan Huberman (1984), dan Trochim (2000). Data temubual dari pelbagai kategori responden, pemerhatian, dan analisis dokumen serta nota kajian bersama dengan data dari soal selidik telah ditriangulasikan dan dikategorikan supaya selari dengan tema kajian ini.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa implementasi program pendidikan khas untuk LD di Pulau Pinang dari segi kontek secara amnya mematuhi kehendak, misi, visi dan objektif Akta Pendidikan 1996 (Pendidikan Khas). Dapatan menunjukkan dengan jelas bahawa pihak pentadbiran sekolah dan guru khas mematuhi misi, visi dan objektif pendidikan khas seperti yang dinyatakan dalam Peraturan Pendidikan Khas 1997. Walau bagaimanapun, hal ini tidak dapat diteliti dengan jelas dari aspek peranan pihak pentadbir sekolah dalam perancangan, pemantauan dan penilaian program.

Dari segi input, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa walaupun 80% dari guru khas telah dilatih dalam pendidikan khas dalam pelbagai bidang, hanya 20% sahaja dilatih dalam bidang masalah pembelajaran. Kurikulum dan sukatan yang digunakan adalah khas direka untuk pelajar-pelajar bermasalah pembelajaran dan memerlukan modifikasi. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan modifikasi tidak dijalankan secara teliti atau dirancang secara formal untuk memenuhi keperluan pelajar-pelajar bermasalah pembelajaran. Ruang untuk aktiviti dan sumber pengajaran-pembelajaran secara jelasnya adalah terhad bagi program ini.

Dari segi proses sistem penyampaian, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa aktiviti pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang telah dirancang dan disampaikan berdasarkan teori konstruktivism bagi membolehkan pelajar menerima manfaat sepenuhnya dari aktiviti pembelajaran, namun demikian ianya terhad. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan guru khas tidak mengamalkan satu sistem perancangan, membina dan mengkaji semula Rancangan Pendidikan Individu untuk pelajar-pelajar bermasalah pembelajaran. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan tiada kolaborasi dalam perancangan dan pengajaran. Penggunaan cara penyampaian yang berasaskan kajian adalah terhad. Keberkesanan pengajaran dihadkan oleh fakta bahawa kebanyakan aktiviti yang dijalankan adalah berfokuskan guru (teacher-centered approach). Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan kurang penglibatan langsung oleh guru biasa dan ibu bapa dalam proses pendidikan pelajar-pelajar bermasalah pembelajaran di sekolah. Selain itu, dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan program itu tidak menggalakkan pembelajaran rakan sebaya malah program ini tersisih dari aliran perdana apabila masa rehat dan aktiviti ko-kurikulum adalah yang berlainan.

Dari segi produk, program untuk masalah pembelajaran membolehkan penguasaan kemahiran pengurusan diri dan 3M yang asas dalam kalangan pelajar. Walau bagaimana pun, motivasi terhadap pembelajaran adalah terhad, dan masalah tingkah dan kelemahan pelajar-pelajar merupakan fokus utama kebanyakan guru khas di bilik darjah.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan program pendidikan khas untuk masalah pembelajaran perlu diperbaiki dan ditingkatkan dalam aspek-aspek berikut, iaitu:- pihak pentadbir sekolah perlu lebih komitted dalam pemantauan program; infrastruktur dan kemudahan perlu ditingkatkan; perkembangan professional dalam bidang pendidikan khas untuk guru khas yang sedang berkhidmat dan akan berkhidmat pada masa depan dan guru biasa mesti dititikberatkan (khususnya

dalam masalah pembelajaran); meningkatkan kefahaman masalah pembelajaran yang betul; dan penggunaan pendekatan dan strategi yang sesuai dalam pengajaran pelajar-pelajar bermasalah pembelajaran harus dititikberatkan.

Kesimpulannya ialah walaupun program pendidikan khas untuk pelajar-pelajar bermasalah pembelajaran di Pulau Pinang boleh dikatakan dilaksanakan mengikut kehendak, misi dan visi Akta Pendidikan Khas 1996, namun demikian masih terdapat ruang untuk penambahbaikan dan tindakan mesti diambil secara serius untuk mengatasi kekurangan yang masih ada sebelum Malaysia boleh bangga dengan wujudnya “pendidikan untuk semua.”

# **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME (LEARNING DISABILITIES) IN PENANG: AN EVALUATION FROM SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' AND PROGRAMME COORDINATORS' PERSPECTIVES**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study evaluates the special education programme for students with learning disabilities in Penang in three main domains: (a) school administrative policy in planning and implementation, teachers' training and support, and resources available for teaching/learning, (b) special education delivery system in planning and collaboration for teaching, instructional strategies and learning activities, application of teaching/learning resources, student evaluation system/process and classroom management, and (c) program outcome in term of students' participation, progress/improvement and achievement.

This study uses an adapted CIPP Model of Evaluation (Stufflebeam et al., 1971) in a sequential and integrated design with the help of a matrix suggested by Singh (2004). It uses various methods of data collection. The research instruments used are survey-questionnaire, an adapted survey to evaluate teaching competency (Guerin & Maier, 1983), interviews, non-participatory observations and document review analysis.

The sample of the study involves 120 respondents (special education teachers) from the questionnaires survey, 75 samples of survey to evaluate teaching competency carried out by 25 school administrators/programme coordinators, 15 participants in semi-structured interviews (5 program coordinators and 10 special teachers). This study also covers 20 non-participatory observations in three primary schools and two secondary schools. As a way of triangulating data,

documents/records collected from 25 schools in the programme were examined to support the findings from the study.

Quantitative data of this study is analyzed by using SPSS version 14 to obtain descriptive statistics (Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, percentages, means and standard deviations). Qualitative data of this study is analyzed by adapting the methods suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Trochim (2000). Data from the interviews with the different category of respondents and data from the observations and document reviews, and field notes, together with the data from the questionnaires, were triangulated and categorized into congruent themes that are summarized in the findings of the study.

The findings from this study reveal that the implementation of the special education programme for LD in Penang in terms of context was in general in accordance with the requirements, missions, visions and objectives of the Education Act (Special Education) 1996. Findings reveal school administrators and SE teachers clearly understood the mission, visions and objectives of special education as stated in the Special Education Regulations 1997. However, it was not clearly reflected in the role of the school administrators in planning, monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

In terms of input, findings reveal that although 80% of the SE teachers were trained in special education in various fields, only 20% of them were trained in LD. The curriculum and syllabus used were designed specifically for students with LD and needed modification, yet findings reveal modification was not carefully and formally planned to meet the needs of students with LD. Space for activities and teaching-learning resources were very limited for the program.

In terms of process of the delivery system, findings show that few teaching and learning activities were planned, constructed and delivered based on the theory of constructivism to enable students to fully benefit from the learning activities. Findings reveal that SE teachers did not employ a proper system of planning, drawing up and reviewing the IEPs for students with LD. There were no collaboration and cooperation in planning and teaching among SE teachers and between SE teachers and regular teachers. There was a limited use of research-based instructional tools as observed by the researcher. Instructional effectiveness was very limited by the fact that most activities carried out focused on teacher-centred approach. Findings also reveal little direct involvement on the part of regular teachers and parents in the education process of students with LD in school. Findings show that the program did not encourage peer-learning and the programme was segregated within the main stream, with different time for recess and different co-curricular activities.

In terms of product, the program for LD had enabled some acquisition of basic self management skills and the 3Rs among students with LD. However, there was limited motivation toward learning, and behavioural problems and students' deficits remained the focus of attention of many SE teachers in the classroom.

Findings reveal that the special education programme for LD needs to be improved and upgraded from the following aspects:- school administrators need to be more committed in monitoring the programme; infrastructure and facilities need to be upgraded; professional development for existing and future special education teachers and regular teachers on special education (specifically on LD) must be provided; proper understanding of LD be upgraded; and use of appropriate approaches and strategies in teaching students with LD be considered.



It can be concluded from the study that, although the programme for students with LD in Penang could be considered implemented in accordance with the requirements, missions and visions of the Special Education Act 1996, there is still room for further improvement and measures must be seriously taken to address the shortcomings before Malaysia can truly be proud of the existence of “education for all.”

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

It is said that education provides a strong assurance that will give birth to a human model that can function constructively in a society. In this respect, the task and responsibility of a government is to make sure that the right of every child to receive education is implemented (Mason, 1999; UNESCO, 1993a). Thus, the Ministry of Education of Malaysia is responsible for realizing the right of every child to receive educational services so that the child can become a useful citizen and contribute to society in future.

However, not all children entering school are physically and mentally able. There are a number of children with certain physical or mental difficulties or disabilities. Kirk, Gallagher and Anastasiow (2000) define children with disabilities as “a child who differs from the average or normal child in mental characteristics, sensory abilities, communication abilities, behaviour and emotional development, or physical characteristics. These differences must occur to such an extent that the child requires either a modification of school practices or special educational services to develop his or her unique capabilities.” They need support and help in school to achieve their full potential. They are known as children with learning disabilities or special needs.

The right of this group of children to receive the same opportunity in receiving education service like their able peers cannot be denied nor ignored. As a member of the society, they too have a role to play in contributing to the welfare and development of a nation after they leave school (Carro, 1996). Thus, children with

special needs represent an important asset of a nation because they will become a part of the man power and human resource of a country, and need to be developed as much as possible.

In line with the United Nations World Declaration on Education for All held in a conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 (UNDP et al., 1990) and the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000), the Ministry of Education of Malaysia has adopted the concept 'Education for All' in the context of providing the same educational opportunity for all children. This concept ensures that provision and equalization of opportunity in education services is accorded to all citizens regardless of their religion, race, gender and individual differences. This means every child with special needs will also have the right to receive the same opportunity in education with their peers who are not disabled.

It must be stressed that there are two systems of schooling implemented in many countries today based on the physical and mental characteristics of pupils. One is the mainstream schools for children with normal physical and mental characteristics, while the other one is the special schools for children with disabilities or special needs. As a result of these two systems of schooling, there is a process of segregation happening between children without disabilities and children with disabilities. It is believed today that all children with and without disabilities would learn better in the same school (Stainback, & Stainback, 1984). Today the two systems of schooling are merging to become one (inclusion).

'Inclusion' is an international concept. Where previously marginalized and disadvantaged children with disabilities were excluded from mainstream education, the recent past had seen a major shift in inclusive practice internationally. These changes have been rapid and have generated a debate regarding the nature of

inclusive practice and what changes to the education system are necessary to accommodate a greater range of children within mainstream schools. The process of bringing children with special needs into greater educational opportunities is new and present challenges to existing educational practices.

In accordance with the principles of 'Vision 2020,' the Ministry of Education of Malaysia has given much publicity to its special education programmes as part of its new 'caring' policy. To ensure the effectiveness of these programmes, the Ministry of Education upgraded its Special Education Unit of the School Division to a departmental status in 1996, currently known as 'Special Education Department.' The department is now fully responsible for the development of the nation's special education programme.

To realize the concept of inclusion, the Special Education Department planned and implemented various programmes to help the pupils with special needs in the field of education and vocational training. One of the programmes introduced is the integrated programme or the inclusive programme. This programme is considered a reform in the special education system in Malaysia. It emphasizes the abilities, functionality, skills, development, and achievement of pupils with disabilities (*Jabatan Pendidikan Khas, 1997*).

The Special Education Department follows the type of inclusion called functional inclusion where children with disabilities are placed in regular classes with regular children at a certain time for a certain lesson. Placement of these children is based on the recommendation and support of special education teachers. And only children who can follow the academic learning process are placed in this programme.

This programme started in 1994 by the Special Education Unit as a pilot project in 14 regular schools in Malaysia (*Unit Pendidikan Khas*, 1992). The children with disabilities were fully included or partially included in this project. In this pilot project, only two or three children were involved in each school. In 1998 the project was extended to 53 primary schools and 10 secondary schools with the involvement of 141 pupils.

It is reported in a study by Syed Abu Bakar (cited in Aminah et al., 2003) that integrated or inclusive class in Malaysia is similar to a special class where children with disabilities who are not able to follow the regular curriculum are separated in a different class even though they are in the mainstream. This action is not in line with the actual aspiration of the integration or inclusion. This “special class” within the mainstream will indirectly undermine the function of integration and inclusion, and in the end a different stream of special education in the regular school will develop. According to Syed Abu Bakar, with this “special class,” children with disabilities who are unable to follow the regular curriculum will be left out from the mainstream (cited in Aminah et al., 2003).

This chapter present the background of the study, state the purposes of the study, point out the significant of the study, consider the limitation and delimitation of the study, and present the definitions of the terms used.

## **1.2 Background of Study**

Education is viewed as the vehicle to national development. According to the Education Act 1961, Malaysia looks toward education as the key to “satisfy the needs of the nation and promote its cultural, social, economic and political development.” This view remains unchanged, but the means toward this end have

changed as the needs and the aspirations of the nation and the individual change with the progress of time.

Awareness in the education of children with disabilities in Malaysia began only in the seventies. At the Fourth Asian Conference on Mental Retardation held in November 1979 in Kuala Lumpur, the then Minister of Education Datuk Musa Hitam announced that the Ministry of Education was responsible for the education of children with intellectual disability (which includes learning disability). However, up until then the Ministry had no special programmes but supported the social and educational programmes run by Non-Profit Organizations (NGO). Such being the case, the education of children with intellectual disability depended on the NGOs which functioned on their own curriculums and programmes.

In 1995, children with disabilities were served in 204 schools in the integrated programme. The number of children enrolled in special schools was 3,000, while another 4,002 children were attending regular schools. There were 1,279 teachers serving in these educational centers (*Jabatan Pendidikan Khas, 1995*).

There had been a significant increase in the number of children with disabilities in schools between 1992 and 1996 (*Jabatan Pendidikan Khas, 1999*). This was partly due to the efforts of the Social Welfare Department (under the Ministry of National Unity), the Health Ministry and the Ministry of Education, and the support of the media in encouraging parents of these children to register their children early so that health, schooling and other benefits can be provided for. Between 1992 and 1996, the enrolment of children with special needs had more than doubled. A decrease, however, was shown in the number of children with visual impairment. But a large increase of children with learning difficulties had been

recorded. The total increase of children with disabilities between 1992 and 1996 was 41.9 per cent. And the increase in the number of children with learning difficulties was 198.5 per cent (Malaysia Ministry of Education, 1999).

Between 1996 and 1997, there is an increase of about 91.1 per cent in the number of children with learning difficulties (*Jabatan Pendidikan Khas, 1997*). This increase could have resulted from provision of educational services being made available to children with disabilities and learning difficulties. This provision was otherwise not available, or simply, children were not attending schools before that as there was no compulsory education. The disturbing phenomena is not the increase in the number of children with learning difficulties, but the readiness of teachers to serve a wide range of diversity in learning abilities among children.

UNESCO (1993c) has estimated that the percentage of people with disabilities in a population is about 5 per cent and this would mean that with a total population of 5 million students in school today, there are 250,000 students having some kind of disabilities. This estimate is based on the concept of normal distribution, and is similar to the estimate given by United Kingdom from the Warnock Report of 1975 where 5 percent of the total number of children attending school is reported to have some kind of disabilities, and the estimate is still being used today in the United Kingdom (Audit Commission, 2002).

The number of children attending school in Malaysia is about 5 million (age 6 to age 17, 2007), and the number of students with disabilities receiving services through the Special Class under the Integrated Special Education Programme, Special Education Department from year 2005 to year 2007 is presented in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1 Enrolments at Special Class under the Integrated Special Education Programme, Year 2005 to Year 2007

<b>Year</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Primary Schools	12,780	14,262	15,219
Lower Secondary Schools	7,064	7,987	9,281
Upper Secondary Schools	Not available	Not available	Not available
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,844</b>	<b>22,249</b>	<b>24,500</b>

*Source: Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2007 (p.8 -11).*

This means that the percentage of students of age 6 to 17 receiving services is a mere 0.49 per cent, a figure indicating there are still many children not receiving education services, or have not been detected, or have missed the screening process, despite the effort to democratize education.

Finding from feasibility study by Aminah et al., (2003, not published) on the taking over of education for children with disabilities by the Ministry of Education Malaysia indicates almost 1.1 million children with disabilities, aged 6 to 18 years old, require special education services. The finding indicates that only 0.05 per cent of children with disabilities is registered and receives services in government schools, NGOs and Community Rehabilitation Centres.

In the same feasibility study conducted by Aminah et al., (2003, not published), there are 142 NGOs and 274 Community Based Rehabilitation centres run by the Department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs, and Social development. The NGOs receive funding from the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs, and Social development. In the year 2002, the NGOs serve over 6,000 children with disabilities while the Department of Social Welfare serves a total of 5,768 children of various disabilities.



The increase in the number of children with learning difficulties each year as mentioned earlier is now a phenomenon, and, if the Ministry of Education Malaysia is called to take over the educational services from the NGOs and the Department of Social Welfare as suggested by the feasibility study carried out by Aminah et al., (2003, not published), there is a need now to evaluate the effectiveness of the present special education programme for students with learning disabilities. This study, to evaluate the effectiveness of the special education programme for students with learning disability, will be among the first few studies conducted in Malaysia, and is timely and relevant before the Ministry of Education Malaysia considers the full responsibility to provide education for all on an equitable basis. From the study to evaluate the programme for students with learning disabilities, elements/factors that lead to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the programme can be analyzed and studied for the improvement of the programme. It is important that the programme is effective so that students with learning disabilities benefit from it.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

The main objective of the Special Education Department in a mission statement is stated as “to provide quality education for the pupils with special educational needs so that they become independent human beings, successful in life and able to contribute to society and country.” Together with that, the Special Education Department also adopts the democratization policy for the education for children with special education needs in line with the declarations made in Karachi, 1960, Jomtien, 1990 and Dakar, 2000 by United Nations in “Education for All,” and “The United Nation’s Standard Rules on the Equalization Opportunities for Person with Disabilities (1993),” Education Act 1996 and Education (Special Education) Regulations 1997.

Furthermore, the Education Policy of the Ministry of Education states: “to provide education opportunity for special students to realize the democratization of education and to safeguard their opportunity and participation in the development of the country”. To achieve the policy statement above, the implementation strategy is stated as follows:

- to provide an appropriate curriculum for special education
- to provide special education in special schools for special students
- to provide teachers trained in special education.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia has made great effort to develop special education programme. A joint committee of ministries (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Welfare) is formed in 1984 to carry out the tasks of identifying, diagnosing and providing follow-up treatment for children with disabilities. A circular letter from the School Department of the Ministry of Education KP (BS) 8533/4/PK/ (50) dated 21 December 1984 that a committee is to be formed to look into the placement of children with disabilities in the state. This circular ensures that physically handicapped children and children with mild mental retardation must be given the opportunity to study in regular schools. A circular letter from School Department, Ministry of Education KP(BS-PK)8501/PPK-KBP/Jld.11 (8) dated 10 October 1990 stated the implementation of Special Education Programme for children with learning problem/disabilities under the authority of State Education Department. This circular also emphasizes on the integration programme to encourage normalization under the Sixth Malaysia Plan. Among the programmes implemented are providing special class for children with disabilities, resource rooms for children with visual disability, special rooms for children with hearing disability and special room for autistic children. A circular letter from the Special Education Department, Ministry of Education KP/JPK (BBP)/2P/117 (63) dated 26

November 1998 clarify the procedures for transfer and admission of special students to technical and vocational secondary schools.

Right before 2003, the various types of special education programme as mentioned above have all been following the New Curriculum for Primary Schools (KBSR) and the New Curriculum for Secondary Schools (KBSM). Modification in content and intensity could be carried out by the special or non-special teachers teaching the children with disabilities. In short, the curriculum and syllabus used by the various special education programmes before 2003 is the same as the curriculum used by the regular schools for children without learning disabilities.

In line with the effort to realize the Philosophy of National Education, the Special Education Department under the Ministry of Education has succeeded in preparing the Curriculum and Syllabus for Learning Disabilities for Primary and Secondary Schools in Malaysia (*Jabatan Pendidikan Khas*, 2003). This, indeed, is a milestone for the development of special education for children with learning disabilities in Malaysia. And it calls for the implementation of the Curriculum and Syllabus for Learning Disabilities for Primary and Secondary Schools by the special and regular teachers in primary and secondary schools.

Despite great effort being made to assist special education, many schools are still facing difficulties and challenges. Findings carried out in studies on education services for students with visual disability by Noraini (1996), Khadijah (2000) and Haniz (2000) are schools have a shortage of special teachers; lack of support from school administrators and negative attitudes of school administrators and regular teachers toward students with visual disability; special schools and classes lack special tools, text books and reference books; insufficient space for

carrying out activities; students are lazy, not motivated and slow; and lack of cooperation and aids from parents and community.

Mohd Salleh (2000) identifies the existence of a conflict in value system and differentiated perception toward people with special needs. School curriculum and examination are modified and made easy to the extent of losing the core values underlining the curriculum. This is due to the negative attitudes of educators and parents of children with disabilities. The same negative attitudes are also shown by those who implement and those with the power to implement and empower.

According to Hallahan (1998), many children with disabilities still do not receive effective teaching and the number of special teachers willing to serve together with regular teachers is still small. Many teachers consider teaching children with disabilities as a “death sentence” (Hallahan, 1998).

Maher and Benet (1984) argued that implementing special education services to children with special needs is a complex effort and that it should be carried out carefully and systematically. Special education is an important system of teaching and learning, thus, requires careful coordination of people, materials and activities. They further added that educating special children requires the joint involvement of administrators, teachers and parents, and this group of people must have the ability to carry out their responsibilities or tasks.

Cook and Schirmer (2003:139) claim that “we believed that the field of special education has had a primary positive impact and served an important role in providing an appropriate education for millions of children with disabilities – although we clearly saw the need for change and improvement in some areas.” They

concluded that, at its essence, special education should fulfill three criteria to be considered efficacious and truly special:

1. a range of teaching practices that have been shown to work for students with disabilities must have been developed;
2. those effective practices must have been implemented with fidelity; and
3. the effective practices must in some way be unique to special education, that is, they could not be used as well or as frequently in the absence of special education.

A common element in the success of a program is the teacher. The teacher is the one who will ultimately bring about the success of a programme/innovation.

Vaughan, Wang and Dytman (1987) put it aptly:

*“Though factors such as the school’s organization climate and district- and school-level support are vital, the key ingredient in successful program implementation is the classroom teacher. Instructional innovations can only succeed to the degree to which they are accepted by teachers and actually put in place in classrooms.”*

(p.45)

To promote successful implementation of a programme, it is clearly necessary to focus the attention on teachers in the implementation process. Teachers can successfully implement programmes without altering them if given the right kind of support and assistance (Wang, 1995; Vaughan, et al., 1987). It is not surprising that many researchers have placed appropriate staff development as the most important factors influencing the level of implementation of an innovative programme (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2005; Vaughan, Wang & Dytman, 1987; McLaughlin & March, 1978-79). Their findings also indicate that training should address the specific development needs of the individual teacher.

The problem for this study is that since the Penang State Education Department has implemented the special education programme for students with learning disabilities in 1997, but no proper study has been carried out to evaluate the programme implemented on a systematic, comprehensive and in-depth basis. After so many years of implementation, the question of whether the programme is effective and has succeeded in fulfilling the needs of students with disabilities in Penang is still unanswered. To get a clear and comprehensive picture of the implementation of special education programme for students with learning disabilities in Penang, a comprehensive evaluation programme must be carried out. That is the factor that motivates the researcher to evaluate the special education programme for students with learning disabilities in Penang. The three main areas chosen for the evaluation are (a) school administrative policy in planning and implementation, teachers' training and support, and resources available to support the programme (b) special education delivery system in planning and collaboration for teaching, instructional strategies and learning activities, application of teaching and learning resources, student evaluation system or process and classroom management, and (c) programme outcome in term of students' participation, progress or improvement and achievement.

The model of evaluation called the CIPP (Context, Input, Process and Product) Model introduced by Stufflebeam (1971) is used as a framework for inquiry in the study. Using CIPP Model as a framework of evaluation in this research will also reveal if this model is suitable to be used as a programme evaluation for special education in Malaysia.

It is hoped that the result from this study will provide an insight into the problems faced by special education teachers which may be of help to the Special Education Department in taking steps to strengthen and improve the programme. An

evaluation on the special education programme for students with learning disabilities in Penang would be beneficial in the following ways:

1. for determining the effectiveness of the special education programme for students with learning disabilities in the state of Penang; and
2. for improving special educational needs programme for students with learning disabilities.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

Based on the research problem above, this study evaluates the special education programme for students with learning disabilities from only the perspectives of the school administrators/programme coordinators and special education teachers with the following objectives:

1. to determine (in terms of context) if the special education programme for the students with learning disabilities in Penang is planned, organized and implemented by schools in accordance with the requirement of Special Education Act (1996); objectives, strategies, visions and missions of Special Education; and the visions and missions of the schools (including inclusion).
2. to determine (in terms of input) if the special education programme for students with learning disabilities in Penang considers the requirements of the programme/curriculum in meeting students' needs: teachers' training and support, planning and collaboration for teaching (including planning for IEPs), and resources available for teaching/learning including the availability of infrastructures and other teaching aids like ICT.
3. to determine (in terms of the process) whether special teachers and regular teachers are able to meet the curriculum/programme delivery

system requirements in the classroom using research based instructional strategies, interactive learning activities, teaching/learning resources, formative evaluation system/process and classroom management. The delivery system includes implementing the planned IEPs, individualizing instructional methods, use of teaching resources to the maximum, and encouraging students' participation and interaction in the teaching-learning process of students with learning disabilities.

4. to determine (in terms of the product) whether the special education programme has benefited students with learning disabilities through their participations, progress/improvements and achievements. This includes the mastery of basic cognitive skills, academic performance, attitude, social and communication skills, self-management skills, motivation in learning, and the acquisition of basic living skills.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. has the programme for LD been effectively implemented according to the objectives, visions, missions and goals of the programme (in terms of context)?
2. have the human and non-human resources been effective in meeting the needs of the students with learning disabilities (in terms of input)?
3. to what extent are the programme components implemented as planned and how well does the infrastructure support the programme (in terms of the process of the delivery system)?



4. what outcomes have resulted from the programme? What unanticipated outcome does the programme produce? And, what is the success of the programme (in terms of product)?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are very few complete evaluations or systematic inquiries into the quality of special education programme for students with LD in Penang since the integrated special programme has been implemented in 1997. A complete written evaluation has never been carried out, even though study on certain aspects of the programme has been carried out by university students to meet their academic requirement. Therefore findings from this study will provide a systematic evaluation and empirical data on the special programme for students with learning disabilities in Penang. Thus, this study can contribute and add to existing knowledge on carrying out a programme evaluation and the findings of the study can contribute to the improvement of special education for learning disabilities.

Secondly, this study is probably the first study to evaluate the special education programme for students with learning disabilities in Penang from the perspectives of special education teachers and the programme coordinators using both the quantitative and qualitative methods of collecting data. The findings from the study can be used by teachers, administrators and officers from schools and State Education Department of Penang, Special Education Department, Ministry of Education Malaysia as a resource of reference for decision making to improve the special education programme for students with learning disabilities in Penang and for making reforms in educational practices in future.

Thirdly, the findings from this study can provide school administrators and decision makers an overall picture on the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and learning processes carried out by special education teachers in the classroom. School administrators and decision makers can act as advisors and consultants to special teachers and regular teachers based on the findings of the study while carrying out supervision/monitoring work on classroom delivery system.

Fourthly, the findings from this study can be utilized by special education teachers to identify the quality of instruction and the process of delivering services (teaching and learning) employed by them in the classroom with students with learning disabilities, and to continue to seek knowledge and methods to improve the delivery of service.

And, finally, it is imperative that an evaluation on the program objectives and the teaching instruction is carried out so that an improvement can be made in providing education services to children with special needs. The information obtained may enhance strategies and instruction for improving special educational services. The Ministry of Education Malaysia, the Penang State Department of Education, school heads/principals, special education teachers and society in general can use these findings to know and understand some of the issues, problems and challenges special education teachers face in providing education to students with learning disabilities in the special education programme for LD.

### **1.7 Limitation and Delimitation of the Study**

There are several limitations in this study. One limitation of educational evaluation is that educational evaluations do not produce generalizable results. The evaluation of a particular program in a given location can provide useful information

about that program in that place, but such information may not apply to any other locale. Besides, data and information for the study is based primarily on the responses from 120 special education teachers on questionnaire survey, 75 samples of evaluation on teaching competencies by programme coordinators, 5 school administrators/programme coordinators using interviews, and 10 special teachers using interviews and observations. The small sample is imperative to develop a detailed description of the programme evaluation. Thus, it would be difficult to generalise results to the whole system of special educational provision arising from the use of small sample. Therefore, separate studies would have to be conducted in different sites to find out the effects of the same programmes in those sites. However, this study would provide valuable information and insight regarding the effectiveness of special education programme for students with learning disabilities and, possibly bring about changes and decision making to improve this special provision.

A second limitation of educational evaluation stems from the fact that educational programmes are rarely, if ever, static. Programmes are continuously changing. Thus, any evaluation study is at least partially out of date by the time data is gathered and analyzed. The information that would be obtained from this study is directed at determining the nature of the situation as it exists at the time the study is conducted. Hence, any changes in the educational settings, instruction practices and technologies after the data is collected may bring about different generalisations and conclusions.

A third limitation of evaluation studies centres on the distinction between diagnosis and prescription. An evaluation study may be diagnostic in indicating that students are not responding to the instructional strategies used by a special education teacher or the lack of success of special educational curricula, but it may

not provide a prescription as to how to remedy identified deficiencies, that is, to provide decisions on what to do to improve the programme. In short, an evaluation study does not provide recommendations on how to improve a programme that is found to be deficient.

A fourth limitation is the researcher's subjectivity bias as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This is due to the possibility of the interviewer bias in using qualitative research techniques. The bias might have occurred while developing the interview guide, when presenting the interview questions to the respondents, while responding to the respondents' answers using verbal and non-verbal reactions, and when interpreting the information obtained.

A final limitation in this study is the method of observation used. Observations in the classroom activities and instruction strategies used in the case studies are limited by time constraints (three to four months). A thorough observation which may provide an in-depth account of the effectiveness of the programme would require a more lengthy observation running to several months, if not years of observation. Straus and Corbin (1990:42) have pointed out the theoretical sensitivity a researcher with personal experience can bring to the inquiry:

*“Through years of practice in a field, one can acquire an understanding of how things work in the field, and why, and what will happen there under certain conditions. This knowledge, even if implicit, is taken into the research situation and helps you to understand events and actions seen and heard, and to do so more quickly than if you did not bring this background into the research.”*

Having practised as a special education teacher and a lecturer in a teachers' education institute and completed a master's degree on special education, the researcher was quite familiar with the subject of special education. With that, she

believed that she had a vast experience, knowledge and understanding of special education and its development. Without that knowledge, understanding and experience, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to conduct an evaluation study on special education programme for LD in the state of Penang in Malaysia.

This study is confined to the state of Penang. As a result, no generalization can be made as regard to special education for LD in other states in Malaysia.

## **1.8 Definition of Terms**

### **1.8.1 Definition of Special Education**

According to U.S. federal regulations, special education means “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings, and instruction in physical education” (34 Code of Federal 17 [a],[1]). It also includes all related services (for example, speech pathology, physical therapy) required to meet the unique learning needs of the youngster. Special education also arranges the learning opportunities necessary for each youngster. According to Chua (1982), special education is education for exceptional children whose growth and development is not at the normal rate from intellectual, physical, social or emotional aspects. This causes them not to be able to benefit fully from the regular school programme. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) consider special education as teaching that is specially designed to meet the unusual needs of special children. Ysseldyke and Algozzine (1995) define special education as teaching designed for children with disabilities or gifted and with abilities that requires special learning programme. These children have difficulties in learning in the regular class. They need special education to function effectively in school. Smith and Luckasson (1995) define special education

as individualized education for children with special needs and special education monitors progress so that no student with special needs is overlooked or neglected.

### **1.8.2 Special Education Programme for Students with Learning Disabilities in Malaysia**

The Department of Special Education under the Malaysian Ministry of Education administers and manages the programme for students with learning disabilities as a component of the Special Education Programme. This programme is conducted at regular primary and secondary schools as an integrated programme. This programme is under the supervision of the Special Education Unit of the State Education Department.

### **1.8.3 Definition of Students with Learning Disabilities in Malaysia**

According to Laws of Malaysia (2005:87), students with learning disabilities are categorized as students who have been identified and certified by a qualified medical officer as having disabilities that can affect their learning processes in a normal classroom. These students include students with the following categories of disabilities:

- i. Down Syndrome
- ii. Mild Autism
- iii. Intellectual Problems
- iv. Emotional Problems
- v. Health Problems, and
- vi. Languages and Communication Disorders.

The students of these different categories of learning disabilities are all grouped under one category called “Learning Disabilities” and are placed in integrated programme for learning disabilities or are sent to remedial class or regular class Laws of Malaysia (2005:87).

#### **1.8.4 Evaluation**

Stufflebeam et al., (1971:40) define evaluation as “the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing useful information for judging decision alternatives.” Rossi et al., (1998) claim that educational evaluation is clearly decision-oriented. It is intended to lead to better policies and practices in education. Modifications on content, organization, and time allocation could occur, as well as decisions about additions, deletions, and revisions in instructional materials, learning activities, and criteria for staff selection and development – such decisions will lead to programme improvement (Cronbach & Suppes, 1969; Cronbach, 1963).

#### **1.8.5 The CIPP Model**

In this study, the CIPP Model, developed by Stufflebeam (1971) (also the chairman of *Phi Kappa Delta National Study Committee on Evaluation*), is used as a basic principle for action taken for this research, and as a tool for structuring and categorizing research questions. It is important that proper structuring and categorizing the research questions is carried out as that will help the researcher to find a focus, and will help ease the collection of data and then the analysis and interpretation of data.

#### **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the introduction and background of the study, stated the research problem and the objectives of the study and put forward the research questions. It also has pointed out the significance of the study and considered the limitation and delimitations of the study. Definitions of the key terms used in this study are also included.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a historical and development perspectives of special education, as well as the researcher's critical review drawn from legal and research documents and literature of past and current practices of special education. The literature review in this chapter is needed to develop an appropriate educational context and an argument for the purpose of this study, as well as to link with the current issues drawn from the implementation, management and the delivery services of special education programme for LD.

This chapter is divided into headings and sub-headings deemed crucial for the understanding of the implementation and delivery of special education programme for LD in Malaysia. Its covers areas including the history and development of special education and its impact on special education today, definition of special educational needs, definition of children with learning disabilities (LD), theoretical perspectives of special education and learning disabilities, historical background and development of special education in Malaysia especially on the legal provisions such as the Special Education Act 1996, challenge of special education today and research on best practices in special education.

As the purpose of this study is to evaluate the special education programme for LD in Penang, literature reviews on evaluation are also drawn upon and its highlights include definitions and role of evaluations, models of evaluations and the



rational for using CIPP Model. A figure to illustrate the theoretical framework is included in this chapter.

## **2.2 History and Development of Special Education and Its Impact on Special Education Today**

According to Smith and Luckasson (1995), special education grew from an initial awareness that some children require a type or intensity of education different from typical education in order to achieve their potential. This awareness evolved over many years, and the roots of this awareness can be traced to Europe in the 1700s, when certain innovators began to make isolated attempts to provide education to children with disabilities.

One innovator was Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, a French physician considered to be the father of special education. Itard worked with children with hearing impairment, but his most important work came out of his effort to help the so-called boy of Aveyron. In 1799, a young boy, later named Victor, was discovered in the woods of France. He was thought to be a “wild child,” untouched by civilization. It is likely that he had mental retardation as well as environmental deprivation. Most people thought the case was hopeless. Victor was declared an “idiot” by Phillippe Pinel but Itard, believing in the power of education, took on the task of teaching Victor all the things typical children learn from their families and in school. He used carefully designed techniques to teach Victor to speak a few words, to walk upright, to eat with utensils, and to interact with other people. Itard wrote detailed reports of his techniques and his philosophy, as well as the progress of Victor. Many of these techniques are still used in modern special education. Itard’s five aims for Victor’s “mental and moral education” were:

*First aim: To interest him in social life .....*  
*Second aim: To awaken his nervous sensibility .....*  
*Third aim: To extend the range of his ideas .....*  
*Fourth aim: To lead him to the use of speech .....*  
*Fifth aim: To make him exercise the simplest mental operations ...*  
*(Itard, 1962:10-11)*

Another major early figure in the field of special education was Edouard Seguin, a student of Itard. In 1846 he published "The Moral Treatment, Hygiene, and Education of Idiots and Other Backward Children," the first special education treatise addressing the needs of children with disabilities. After he moved to the United States, he helped found the Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiots and Feeble-minded Persons in 1876. This organization later became the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) and yet later the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR). Seguin believed that sensorimotor exercises could help stimulate learning for children with disabilities. His ideas were integrated into many schools in the United States in the late 1800s. The legacy of Seguin's work can be found today in many aspects of special education. For example, the use of motor exercises as an aid to learning was reintroduced in the 1960s in the United States and is often part of the curriculum in special education (Barsh, 1965; Frostig & Horne, 1964; Kephart, 1960).

Seguin in turn influenced Maria Montessori. Montessori, the first female physician in Italy, worked first with children with mental disabilities before she began the study of children. She showed that children could learn at young ages and that concrete experiences and an environment rich in manipulative materials facilitated their learning. Her educational methods were published in 1912, helping to spread special education strategies (Smith & Luckasson, 1995). Today, Montessori is probably most familiar as a leader in early childhood education and the founder of the Montessori preschool movement.