

Exploring the Collaboration between Parents of Children with Learning Difficulties and Teachers in Inclusive Education.

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ABSTRACT

Collaboration between parents of children with learning difficulties and teachers is a fundamental principle to bring inclusive education into practice. Parents and teachers are the main stakeholders with whom children with learning difficulties interact on a daily basis. This research was conducted to explore the existing collaboration between parents of children with learning difficulties and teachers in inclusive education. It is a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with parents of children with learning difficulties and teachers selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis is used to construct themes from the collected data. The study found that informal meetings were more preferable than formal meetings. There are three types of collaboration between parents of children with learning difficulties and teachers: direct collaboration, indirect collaboration, and passive collaboration. Despite the importance of collaboration between parents and teachers, the decision to keep children with learning difficulties in mainstream classes still depends on their eligibility to be included.

Keywords: Collaboration, parents of children with learning difficulties, teachers, inclusive education, mainstream class

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MALAYSIAN PRACTICE

Inclusive education has been promoted since 1948 by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Save the Children, 2016). In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education (2013) conceptualized inclusive education as a program where children with special educational needs (SENs)^[1] attend the same classes as typical children in public mainstream schools. Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004) mentioned that “most children with mild disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, mild mental retardation, speech and language disabilities, and serious mental disabilities are currently served in general education classroom,” (p. 16). The term “children with learning difficulties”^[2] is used in the education policy by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Zalizan & Manisah, 2014). This paper is also using the term “learning difficulties” instead of “disabilities” connoted that the performed difficulties by individuals is social constructed, but not the individuals itself (Whittaker & Kenworthy, 2002).

The Malaysian Education Act(1998) introduced inclusive education and the requirement for schools to provide education for children with learning difficulties (Zalizan & Manisah, 2014). The Ministry of Education has published the Inclusive Education Programme Guideline Bulletin as a reference for mainstream schools to implement inclusive education (Special Education Division, 2013; 2018). However, schools are not obligated to follow the guideline for implementing inclusive education (Lee, 2010).

The Malaysian Education Act 1996 (1998) defined inclusive education as a concept originating from ‘special education’ and also required for children with learning difficulties (Zalizan & Manisah, 2014). In Malaysia, the government includes children with special educational needs in mainstream schools for