

MALAYSIA

Ms Siti Zaharah Mat Akib
Deputy Director- General' Special Education Department, Ministry of Education

BACKGROUND

Four different ministries that provide services for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Malaysia, namely Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development {(MWFC, particularly Social Welfare Department (SWP))}, and the Ministry of Higher Learning (MHL). In addition to these, Non-governmental Agencies (NGOs) also play an important role in providing services for children with SEN. The MOH has the task of early identification and screening of children at risk of SEN. The ministry's personnels are responsible for the curative and preventive aspects such as providing early intervention programmes for children identified as having disability/ies due to impairments. Educational services for children/persons with SEN are mainly provided by MOE, SWP (MWFC), MHL as well as NGOs.

The MOE caters for the educational needs of children with hearing impairments; visual impairments; and learning disabilities (acknowledged as being mild or moderate mentally challenge). Categories of students with learning disabilities whose educational services are being provided by the MOE including those with, Down Syndrome; Autistic tendency (mild); Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); mild and moderate mental disabilities; and Specific learning difficulties (such as dyslexia).

Three departments are responsible for providing educational services for students with SEN under MOE, the Special Education Department (SED), State Education Department (StED), and Technical Education Department (TED). SED is responsible for coordinating all special education programmes within this ministry as well as administrating all special education schools (SpES). SpES are available for students with hearing and visual impairments. Even though MOE are responsible for providing educational services for children with mono disability there are children with multiple disabilities present within the formal education system MOE. Legislatively, these children should be under the responsibly of MOH, and MWFC.

Table 1 describes the type of schools/programmes for children with SEN in Malaysia under the MOE jurisdiction.

Table 1: Type of schools/programmes for children with SEN in Malaysia

Levels	Basic Categories of Children with SEN	Type of schools/programmes under the MOE	Types of sporadic MD cases in the programmes	Other Agencies involved in educational services for severe MD
Preschool	Visual impairments	-Special schools	-Double sensory disabilities;	MOH,
	Hearing impairments	-Special schools	-sensory + learning disabilities	MWFCD (SWD)
	Learning disabilities	-Special schools -Inclusive settings	--sensory + other disorders	NGOs
Primary schools	Visual impairments	-Integrated programmes -Special schools	-Double sensory disabilities; -sensory + learning disabilities	MOH,
	Hearing impairments	-Integrated programmes -Special schools	- sensory + learning disabilities + physical disability	MWFCD (SWD)
	Learning disabilities	-Integrated programmes		NGOs
Secondary schools	Visual impairments	-Integrated programmes -Special schools	-Dual-sensory disabilities; -sensory + learning disabilities	MOH,
	Hearing impairments	-Integrated programmes -Special schools	- sensory + learning disabilities	MWFCD (SWD)
	Learning disabilities	-Integrated programmes	+ physical disability	NGOs

The medical professionals are usually reluctant to certify a child with hearing or visual impairment, that suffer from cognitive disabilities as a child with multiple disabilities due to MOE mono disability policy. Thus the majority children with additional disabilities are officially being diagnosed as children with mono sensory disability. Based on teachers' perceptions the students with MD that are currently within MOE schooling system are as in table 2.

Table 2: The type of combination of disabilities in Children with MD in special schools

	Type of sensory disability	Additional impairments
1	Visual impairment	Hearing impairment
		Learning disabilities (including mental disabilities)
		Physical disability
		Other disabilities/disorders
2	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment
		Learning disabilities (including mental disabilities)
		Physical disability
		Other disabilities/disorders

It is estimated that the number of children with sensory disability and learning disabilities are greater compared to the number of students with other type of MD. As they are unable to access the national curriculum due to their MD (more than one impairment); as the result of their behavioural problems which contributed to their different learning patterns, most teachers modify the national curriculum to accommodate these learning diversity. Consequently they become an intangible responsibility to teachers and schools as these teachers are not trained to manage children with MD.

CHALLENGES

Legally providing appropriate educational provisions for those with MD is not the responsibility of MOE. As a result, MOE has yet to prepare teachers for this endeavors as well as providing educational facilities for children with MD. MOE is currently in the process of amending the 1997 education regulation (special education) to include children with dual disabilities in the definition of MOE children with SEN.

Contrary to the present policy, children perceived as having MD are being placed within MOE education system, thus the need to provide appropriate educational services for these group of children has to be considered. There are many challenges in providing for the educational needs of children with MD.

1. Teachers skills and knowledge on MD: the majority of special education teachers are educated to teach mono disability (deaf or blind or learning disability) and are not equipped to handle the students with MD. For example in deafblindness, sensory losses vary in severity from child to child, and there is a possibility that the child will retain some useful vision and hearing. However, in combination, these impairments of the senses cause serious developmental delay in the child. The delay will effect cognitive and social development, orientation and mobility, as well as the acquisition of communication and language. There is only limited number of teachers with knowledge and skills to teach these children with MD. In depth knowledge on the complexities of children with MD are required because the needs of these children vary greatly in terms of physical, learning, social and emotional development. For children with hearing and visual impairment plus learning disabilities, the bulk of training activities concentrated on imparting daily living skills, gross motor skills as well as basic academic skills. The area of communication, problem solving and developing leisure skills are equally important but due to MD condition, these areas are given less priority. MOE realized the importance of teachers' education and staff development as the prime issue towards providing quality services for children with MD and are moving into this direction.

2. Infrastructure: In terms of the infrastructures of the school, most schools are not disable friendly. Only new schools specially build for special children are equipped for specific type of disabilities. MOE is planning to upgrade all schools with special

education programme to ensure that it is disability friendly to accommodate children with MD (dual disability)

3. Policy: Special education programmes under the MOE are designed to manage children with mono disability and not those with dual disabilities. However, during the screening or diagnostic procedures, in many cases, only one type of disability was recorded. Consequently, the educational needs of individual child with more than one disability are not being provided accordingly.

4. Parents' involvement: Parents with child/children with disabilities are varied in terms of their involvement and attitude towards education activities for their children. Lack of information is one of the reasons that limit the parents' involvement in dealing with the education of MD in Malaysia. MOE Malaysia is currently initiating a smart partnership with other agencies involving in educating children with SEN to gain broader outreach effect.

5. Children with dual-sensory impairment: As children with Deafblindness have a combination of sight and hearing loss, only a few of them are getting educational accommodation under the MOE (Table 2). There are 7 children with visual impairment perceived as having hearing impairment by teachers in special schools for visual impairment; whereas there are about 20 children with hearing impairments perceived as having low vision in special schools for hearing impairment throughout Malaysia. Nevertheless, due to constraints, MOE are not able to provide educational provision for children with severe dual-sensory impairment, in particular deafblindness. These children with MD are normally educated in agencies such as Community based rehabilitation center and NGOs. St Nicholas Home (**SNH**) is currently the leading center for children with Deafblindness. There are 14 students with deafblindness in St Nicholas Home (NGO), which specialized in dealing with deafblindness. Some students with deafblindness in this center are also having other disabilities (such as physical disabilities) or disorders (such as autism).

Given the right services and support, the children with deafblindness could maximize their talents and learning potentials to enable them to carry on with their life after they graduated from the educational system. Two students with deafblindness have graduated from SNH and now working in a factory and a fast-food outlet.