

MALAYSIA

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Theme: Developing Special Education In Each Country and Enhancing International Mutual Cooperation among Countries in the Asia-Pacific Region

1. Historical Development

The government's formal involvement in special education began in 1948 with the opening of Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind. Previously education for children with special educational needs (SEN) was undertaken by community groups and religious-based institutions. Education for these children was further enhanced by the establishment of the Federated School for the Deaf in 1954, which offers both academic as well as vocational training.

During the early years of Independence, the government's main educational priority was to provide educational services and facilities for mainstream children without neglecting the educational needs of children with SEN. The Education Act of 1961 acknowledged that these children should receive free but not compulsory education.

Educational services for children with SEN were given the prominence it deserved in 1979, with the publication of the Cabinet Committee Report. The Report gave great emphasis towards providing the nation's children with SEN with quality education. As the result of the Cabinet Committee recommendations, an Inter-Ministerial Committee was formed to cater to the needs of children with SEN. It was agreed that educational services for these children should be shared between the Social Welfare and Education Ministries. The Health Ministry would be responsible for identifying, screening as well as conducting early intervention programs for these children. An important outcome of the Cabinet Committee recommendations was the recognition accorded by the Ministry of Education that children with cognitive disabilities (mentally retarded) require educational services that are different from those who are either in the mainstream or in remedial programs.

The Ministry of Education took international declarations and existing national educational policies into account during the formulation of the 1996 Education Act. To elaborate further on the special education components of the 1996 Act, the 1997 Education (Special Education) Regulations were developed. Thus the Education Act and Education (Special Education) Regulations are now

the guiding principles in the planning of special education programs for the nation's children with special needs.

2. Educational Services For Children With Special Needs

The practice of "Education For All" and "Democratization Of Education" for children with SEN are the responsibilities of two Ministries, (i) National Unity and Social development (via the Social Welfare Department) and (ii) Ministry of Education (via the Special Education Department). True to the spirit of the Cabinet Committee (1979) recommendations, the government is currently assuming the responsibilities of providing educational services for children with SEN but at the same time encouraging the involvement of non-governmental organizations in this endeavor. Thus, the education of these children is being undertaken by government agencies as well as private institutions. As agreed during the Inter-Ministerial Committee meeting in 1981, the Social Welfare Department is given the responsibility for the education of children with;

- a. physical handicaps;
- b. severe and profound mental retardation;
- c. multiple handicaps, and
- d. handicaps that would make it impossible to enroll these children in schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

The Social Welfare Department has established 203 community-based rehabilitation centers for their children with SEN. Each center would accept children of various categories of impairment. Besides these community-based centers, the Department has also initiated the development of shelter homes to cater to the needs of young adults with special needs. These shelter homes act as transition centers for young adults preparing for employment. Once they have gained full employment and have the confidence to live on their own, they would move from these centers.

Realizing its limitations, the Social Welfare Department encouraged the involvement of private institutions in providing educational services for its children with SEN. As an inducement to these private institutions, the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, contributed about 20% to these institutions' running cost.

The Ministry of Education complements further services provided by the government to children with SEN. The Special Education Department is responsible for the administration of all special education schools as well as the coordination of all special education programs within the Ministry. As agreed, the Ministry is responsible for the education of children who are;

- a. hearing and visually impaired; and
- b. "educable" mentally retarded.

The term 'educable' is being defined as,

"(children who) are able to manage themselves without help."

The term 'educable' was inserted because the Ministry does not have the provisions of classroom assistants or child minders to assist special education teachers in managing the personal hygiene of children with disabilities. But these 'trainable' children are eligible to enter special education programs administered by the Social Welfare Department.

3. Special Education Programs

There are three types of special education programs available for children with SEN under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. These programs are being managed by three departments in the Ministry of Education.

3.1. *Special education schools*

As mentioned before, the Special Education Department is responsible for the administration of all special education schools. Matters such as funding for the development of schools, teachers' placement and transfer, teachers' salaries, appointment and promotion of school heads and monitoring of school management and accounts are placed under the responsibility of the Department. These educational facilities are only available to children with hearing and visual impairment at the primary and secondary school levels (Table 1).

Table 1: Number and types of special education schools in Malaysia

Types of Schools	Categories of Children with SEN	Number of schools
Primary school	i. visual impairment	4
	ii. hearing impairment	24
Secondary schools	i. visual impairment	1
	ii. hearing impairment	2

Of the 28 special education primary schools, 9 are located within mainstream school premises (location integration). Administratively, these schools are totally independent from their neighboring mainstream schools. Thus, the process of social integration between mainstream children and children with SEN within these schools is rather limited.

There are 20 special education primary schools with residential facilities. Children with hearing and visual impairment who experience difficulty commuting to and from schools are being provided these facilities, thus ensuring them the formal education they richly deserve.

The Department is currently developing special education centres within the premises of special education primary schools. It is hoped that these centres will be able to provide advisory services to parents as well as clinical services to children with special needs. Six

centres have been established in 2001, and efforts are being made to equip these centres with specialists in audiology, early education and autism as well as physiotherapists and mobility orientators. Besides providing services, these centres are also furnished with a toy library, counseling and meeting rooms and other relevant materials pertaining to the categories of children with SEN that the centre serves.

The Department is also responsible for the administration of three special education secondary schools. Two are for pupils who are hearing-impaired and one for children who are visually-impaired. Of the two secondary schools for children who are hearing-impaired, one caters to the needs of those who are inclined towards vocational education. The other serves both academic as well as vocational education. All three schools have residential facilities.

3.2. *Integration programs in mainstream schools.*

In 1981, the Ministry of Education adopted the 'least restrictive environment' policy in providing educational facilities for its children with SEN and halted the development of new special education schools. This has resulted in the emergence of special education classes in mainstream schools. This particular educational provision for children with SEN is known as Integrated Programs. Unlike special education schools, these special programs are part of the mainstream school system. Special education classes were initiated so as to maximize social integration between children with SEN and their mainstream peers. An increase in the demand for formal education opportunities by parents of children with visual and hearing impairment, and also logistical difficulties resulted in the development of Integrated Programs for these categories of children. Educational provisions for children with learning disabilities are only available in the form of an Integrated Program (Table 2). The process of educating special children in integrated programs is either (i) segregation or (ii) partial inclusion with mainstream children.

Table 2: Number and types of Integrated Programs in Malaysia as in the Year 2001 under the State Education Department

Types of Schools	Categories of Children with SEN	Number of schools
Primary school	i. visual impairment	9
	ii. hearing impairment	28
	iii. learning disabilities	429
Secondary schools	i. visual impairment	16
	ii. hearing impairment	36
	iii. learning disabilities	155

Integrated programs located in mainstream schools are directly under the administrative control of the State Education Departments. The Technical Education Department administers

all such programs in technical/vocational secondary schools. These programs are also subjected to the same policies and practices advocated in the 1996 Education Act and 1997 Education (Special Education) Regulations.

Children with SEN in primary Integrated Programs are usually excluded from mainstream learning. Educational priorities for these children at this level of education are the acquisition of basic skills needed to access the National Curriculum (for children with hearing and visual impairment) or the modified National Curriculum for children with learning disabilities. Thus, the main educational focus of primary children with severe visual impairment are competencies in braille reading and typing plus mobility orientation. For primary school children with hearing impairment, the emphasis would be the ability to communicate using Malaysian sign language or other other means of communication in line with the principle of "total communication" advocated for them. As for children with disabilities, the main focus would be the inculcation of self-help skills, basic communication skills and social skills.

Limited places in secondary special education schools has resulted in the majority of children with visual and hearing impairment from primary schools (be it special or mainstream) proceeding with their lower secondary education in Integrated Programs. As for children with learning disabilities, their secondary school education would also be in Integrated Programs. Almost all children with visual impairment in Integrated Programs will be partially included in mainstream classes, but the majority of children with hearing impairment and learning disabilities will be excluded.

Several options are available for pupils with hearing impairment and learning disabilities at the intermediate stage of secondary school education. For pupils with hearing impairment, they may continue their education in special education secondary schools (for academic and vocational training) or proceed with integrated programs in technical/vocational secondary schools. Those who opt to study in these integrated programs will be included in mainstream classes for technical and vocational subjects only.

3.3. *Inclusive education programs*

Inclusive education in Malaysia evolved from the practice of integration and the term "inclusion" was introduced in Malaysia in 1994, in agreement with the Salamanca Statement. Inclusive education in Malaysia is defined as,

"...the placement of children with special needs in mainstream classes to be educated alongside their mainstream peers either of the same age-group or otherwise."

Presently, two types of inclusion are being practiced: (i) partial inclusion, which is being implemented in mainstream schools with Integrated Programs, and (ii) total inclusion, i.e,

children are placed fully in mainstream classes. Only a limited number of children with hearing impairment with residual hearing or who are able to learn independently without sign language interpreters are included totally in mainstream classes in primary and secondary mainstream schools. Besides children with hearing impairment, 67 children with learning disabilities are totally included in technical/vocational schools. Total inclusion is rarely practiced in Malaysia. The most common practice is partial inclusion.

4. Teachers And Special Education

International studies indicate that training in special education is significant in garnering teacher support and understanding of this form of education. Without training, teachers would experience fear and anxiety about teaching children with SEN. Teachers need to be convinced that teaching children with SEN is all about good teaching, and that they already have the required skills to teach these children, irregardless of the nature and range of learning difficulties. Teachers should be made to view special education positively and not as specialized teaching for children with SEN (even though specialized teaching skills in Braille for children with visual impairment and sign language for children with hearing impairment are necessary) and 'normal' teaching for mainstream children. But how can teachers be convinced of this? One solution would be pre- and in-service training in special education. The Ministry of Education, through teacher training colleges, universities and other training schemes, provides professional training for teachers involved in special education.

Prior to 1995, no component was available on special education for pre-service teachers' training schemes. Therefore it is not surprising that the majority of teachers were ignorant of the need to provide quality education to children with SEN. As of 1995, components of special education were incorporated into the pre-service teacher training curriculum for semester 4 of the Diploma graduate courses. Thus all diploma graduate teachers trained after 1995, would have some background knowledge on special education.

The Ministry's Teacher Training Division, besides making special education as part of teachers' training curriculum, has also initiated three different courses in special education namely: (i) Pre-service Diploma Course; (ii) Graduate programs for non-graduate teachers; (iii) In-service training in special education.

4.1. *Pre-service Diploma Course.*

These courses offer three areas of specialization in special education: education for the hearing impaired; the visually impaired and the learning disabled. Trainees opting for special education could choose one of these areas of specialization. The training is conducted over a period of three years, and at the end of the course the graduates are accorded a Malaysian

Diploma in Teaching (Special Education). An important feature of this particular training scheme is that a number of trainees for the visual and hearing impairment option are hearing and visually impaired themselves.

4.2. Graduate programs for non-graduate teachers

This program was introduced for non-graduate teachers teaching children with SEN in secondary schools. Under this training scheme, non-graduate teachers involved in special education, began their first year graduate studies at the Specialist Teachers' Training College. Once completed, they proceed with their studies at the National University of Malaysia. Upon completion, they would be awarded a degree in special education.

4.3. In-service training in special education

In-service training in special education is organized by both the Teacher Training Division and the Special Education Department. In-service training organized by the Teacher Training Division is the 14-week in-service training course. Courses offered are: (i) remedial education; (ii) education for children with dyslexia; (iii) education for children with learning disabilities; and (iv) education for children with hearing and visual impairment.

The Special Education Department as well as the State Education Department is also organizing in-service training in special education. The Special Education Department's main focus would be upgrading professional skills of special education teachers. As of September 2001, the Department has conducted 25 in-service training courses for these teachers.

The State Education Department is mainly responsible for organizing short in-service courses for new teachers joining the special education programs. Recruiting trained but non-specialist teachers to teach children with SEN is inevitable because of the increase in demands from parents of these children for educational opportunities. These short courses are necessary to convince teachers that they have the skills to teach children with SEN.

The State Education Department is also responsible for encouraging in-house training in special education in mainstream schools with Integrated Programs. In-house training would help to facilitate the practice of partial inclusion in these schools. Without knowledge and understanding of the educational needs of these children, mainstream teachers would be reluctant to accept them in their classes, thus hindering the progress of inclusive practices.

Progress has been made to increase the quantity of teachers involved in special education. The inclusion of special education components in the diploma teacher training curriculum would at least ensure that future teachers are aware of the existence of children with SEN within the school community. In-service training managed by the Teacher Training Division,

the Special Education Department, and the State Education Department will help to increase awareness among teachers that children with SEN like their normal counterparts also require quality educational services so as to maximize their potential. Through education, these children would achieve independent living, thus reducing the burden of their existence on family members.

The Special Education Department is aware that it must develop its human resource sector in line with current practices, needs and development. The Department is therefore determined to forge closer working relationships with all agencies involved in the training of personnel in special education. The Department will continue to plan pre- and in-service training with these agencies to fulfill the demand for special education teachers as well as sustain the enthusiasm and motivation of all teachers involved directly in special education.

5. Advancement In Special Education

5.1. Computerization of Special Education Programs

Globalization and the rapid development of technology require every person to be computer literate. In the near future it would be difficult, if not impossible, to survive if one is devoid of computer literacy skills. In view of this, the Ministry of Education is embarking on programs to ensure that future Malaysian generations are not only skilled operators of modern technology but are also able to optimize the use of this technology for the benefit and advancement of the nation. As a step towards achieving these aims, the Ministry is in the process of equipping all schools with computers.

Children with SEN would definitely benefit from the use of computers in the classroom just like normal children. In fact what is true about using computers in normal school programs is also valid for children with SEN. In view of this, the Special Education Department is making sure that special education programs are not excluded from the Ministry computerization schemes.

The development of computers has introduced new approaches towards teaching children with SEN. Computers are now considered important tools for teachers to design innovative, creative and effective teaching materials. The development of interactive software has created a new dimension in the teaching and learning of children with SEN. Most of the time, software and teaching approaches adopted for normal children will be relevant for children with SEN, even though the pedagogical means utilized when using these software could be different. Providing computers would be meaningless, if special education teachers are unable to capitalize on their existence. To optimize the use of computers in schools, the Department is making every attempt to ensure all special education teachers are computer literate. To achieve this,

the Ministry is organizing in-service training in computer literacy for its teachers, via the Special Education Department as well as other agencies involved in teacher training.

5.2. Networking in special education

As mentioned earlier, three Ministries are involved in providing services to children with disabilities. Presently, each Ministry has developed its own data system on children with special needs and would share this data with each other when required. Due to administrative constraints and the reluctance of parents to register their children with special needs, it is difficult to ascertain the actual number of children with disabilities and the types of disabilities nation wide. The difficulty of compiling accurate data is compounded by the non-compulsory registration of children with special needs. Without accurate data, the Special Education Department encounters problems in planning educational services for these children. To arrest this problem, this Department has proposed as well as initiated the development of a "Life Time Database" (LTDB) for the nation's people with disabilities. The LTDB would be linked to the three Ministries as well as the Ministry of Labor. Information on services provided by the four Ministries to individuals with special needs would be updated regularly. The realization of this common database would ensure that all individuals with disabilities are accounted for, thus increasing the effectiveness of services provided to them by the relevant authorities. This would hopefully, upgrade the quality of life for people with disabilities in Malaysia.

Besides establishing information networking between Ministries, the Department is also building its networking capabilities with all special education schools as well as mainstream schools with Integrated or Inclusion Programs. This would enable the schools to disseminate to the Department information regarding current conditions in the special education programs and if necessary prompt action can be taken to overcome any difficulties encountered. This networking system would boost the effectiveness of the Department's administration and the management of its special education programs.

5.3. Optimizing the potential of children with special educational needs

5.3.1. Multiple intelligence stations

Aiming for academic excellence is an important endeavor for all school-going children, but in many instances for children with SEN, this could be a very difficult goal to strive for, especially for children with learning disabilities. Not all children are academically inclined, but they have strengths that could be harnessed and developed to their advantage.

This is very true for children with SEN. Realizing the importance of developing strengths in children with SEN, the Department is experimenting with Gardner's concept of 'multiple intelligence' in the teaching of these children. Thus, attempts are being made to develop learning stations in special education classes based on six of Gardner's 'multiple intelligence' concept: interpersonal; intra-personal; musical/rhythmical; visual/spatial ; verbal/linguistic

and logical/mathematical. These stations are equipped with teaching and learning materials related to each stations' theme. Teaching and learning approaches would be based on each station's "intellectual" concept.

5.3.2. Vocational training for children with special educational needs

Pupils with hearing impairment and learning disabilities who are not academically inclined could proceed with their secondary education in vocational training after completing secondary three. Hearing impaired pupils could pursue training either in special education vocational secondary schools or secondary technical/vocational schools. As for children with learning disabilities, they could only access this type of training at technical/vocational secondary schools. Pupils who opt for vocational training usually follow the Malaysian National Occupational Skill Standard (NOSS) Curriculum and they are not required to sit for a public examination at the end of secondary five.

There is no option currently available for vocational training for children with visual impairment. As expected, not all children with SEN are able to follow the NOSS Curriculum, especially children with learning disabilities. Thus, the Department has initiated the building of four special education vocational secondary schools. These vocational schools would provide vocational training in fields not available in the NOSS Curriculum and would have training facilities suitable for the three categories of pupils with SEN under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

5.3.3. Basic industrial skills

The Ministry of Education would be introducing a new curriculum, Basic Industrial Skills, to mainstream children who want to excel in industrial skills rather than academic achievement. The Department, after studying the new curriculum, felt it would also be suitable for children with SEN. Thus, the Department has made a request to the relevant authorities which has been accepted, that the new curriculum be made available to children with SEN in Integrated Programs. This new curriculum would be launched in 2002 and Integrated Programs in 14 mainstream schools have been identified to participate in this project.

5.4. Strengthening the educational practices of inclusive education

As mentioned, partial inclusion is one of the educational processes adopted in mainstream schools with Integrated Programs. The practice of total inclusion is restricted to pupils with disabilities in technical/vocational secondary schools. Information received, indicate that inclusion is not widely practiced in Malaysian mainstream schools with Integrated Programs for children with hearing impairment and learning disabilities because mainstream teachers are reluctant to accept these children in their classes. Making inclusion practices widespread will not be easy. The real world of mainstream education is

complicated and there are limitations and constraints that cannot be ignored. However, the Department will continue to refine the current implementation of inclusive education, thus limiting the exclusion of individual children with SEN from mainstream learning.

The Department has and will continue its 'outreach' programs to inform teachers on the rationale, aims and objectives of inclusive practices. Realizing the danger of imposing the Ministry's vision of inclusion on unreceptive implementers, the Department will encourage and assist schools to develop their own vision, policies and objectives of special education.

Besides disseminating information on inclusive education, through documentation and discussions, the Department is also making efforts, through in-house training, to convince teachers they are capable of teaching children with SEN. To alleviate the anxieties of mainstream teachers during the initial stage of having these children in their classes, the school's special education teachers, aside from teaching children with SEN in segregated classes, would also play the role of special education resource teachers.

The Department also realize that mainstream teachers have limited understanding of the practicality and educational success of having children with SEN in their classes. The Department is therefore attempting to identify as well as develop mainstream schools with good inclusive practices. These schools would act as examples to other schools. The Department is also encouraging the 'whole school approach' with mainstream schools with Integrated Programs. Everyone associated with the schools should play their part in the education of children with SEN, and teachers' willingness to accept inclusive practice should be supported by all concerned.

The Department understands that changes are not simple and immediate. Changes are sometimes awkward and slow but with all the efforts mentioned, inclusive education would eventually gain widespread acceptance.

6. Awareness On The Importance Of Education For Children With Special Educational Needs

The plight of the disabled person was given the attention it deserved in 1981 with the United Nations declaring it to be the Year Of The Disabled Persons. Efforts were made by the relevant authorities to inform the general public about the need to provide disabled persons with quality education. Education would hopefully act as a 'stepping stone' for a person with disabilities to master suitable job skills, thus helping him or her to seek employment, and be independent. The general public was made aware that with appropriate education, persons with disabilities have

potential that could be developed and its application optimized.

These awareness campaigns are still being undertaken by government and non-governmental organizations. Presently, there is no compulsion for parents of children with disabilities to send their children to the relevant institutions for formal education. Therefore, the Department feels it should continue with its 'outreach' programs to parents of these children to inform them of the importance of education for their children. The Department will also continue to support any awareness campaigns by other agencies including non-governmental organizations. Besides the importance of education, the Department's 'outreach' programs includes providing information on the type of educational services available for these children within the Ministry, so as to encourage parents of these children to seek formal education for their children. 'Outreach' programs organized and managed by the Department are as follows:

6.1. Special education bulletin

This bulletin contains the latest information on educational services that is made available by the Ministry of Education for children with SEN. The bulletins are distributed free of charge to all departments of the Ministry, the Ministry of Health, the Social Welfare Department, institutions of learning, non-governmental organizations, and the general public.

6.2. Special education seminars

The Department organizes seminars on special education annually. The main purpose of organizing these seminars is to inform the educational fraternity on the latest development in special education, and the need to provide the best possible educational services for children with SEN.

6.3. Special education week

This event is held annually. During this week, forums, cultural shows, sports and exhibition of products produced by children with SEN would be among the activities held during the week. This event is open to the general public.

As part of its awareness campaign, the Department is also actively involved in seminars organized at national and international level. The Department would accept as far as possible, invitations to present papers at these seminars, and would also actively support, directly or indirectly, activities for children with SEN organized by non-governmental organizations. The Department has also participated in talk shows produced by national television networks, national and local radio stations, and forums conducted by non-governmental organizations.

It is important to reach the parents of children with SEN nation-wide, and the Department is hopeful that by organizing its own 'outreach' programs and by being actively involved in '

outreach' programs organized by other agencies, an awareness of the importance of education for children with SEN would be communicated to the general public. Increasing the level of understanding of the general public would help support attempts to provide children with SEN with the best education available.

7. International Mutual Cooperation In Special Education

Outside organizations have also contributed towards the development of special education in Malaysia, especially in the training of teachers and administrative personnel. Every year, the Special Education Department is given the responsibility of selecting suitable candidates to attend international courses, seminars and workshops. Malaysia has been an active participant in APEID conferences. Malaysia has also sent representatives to attend courses organized by JICA, Japan, and Innotech, Philippines. The Department officers have also visited special education programs in the United Kingdom. Besides these, the Department is also involved in attachment programs in the Teaching of Children With Learning Disabilities with Christchurch College of Education, New Zealand.

The Department feels it would be unfair to measure children with SEN abilities based on mainstream children standardized assessment tests. Alternative assessment instruments should be administered to children with SEN in order to better measure their true potential. Even though the responsibility of developing standardized assessment is the prerogative of the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate, the Department, with the cooperation of the Department of Education Training and Employment in Australia, is attempting to identify suitable alternative assessment instruments for the nation's children with SEN.

The Department is also aware that it would be costly to send teachers and administrative personnel in large numbers to attend special education courses or attachment programs overseas. To overcome these limitations, the Department extends invitations to organizations from other countries to conduct courses in special education locally. In the year 2000, two such training courses were initiated: (i) Education for children with disabilities by lecturers in special education from Massey University College of Education, New Zealand and (ii) Education for children with dyslexia by the principal of Frewen College (For children with dyslexia), United Kingdom. The Department will continue to identify experts in special education from overseas and if their areas of expertise are relevant to the Malaysian special education needs, invitations would be extended to these specialists to conduct courses in Malaysia.

The Department is hopeful that participants attending special education courses overseas and locally (conducted by specialists from overseas) would acquire the knowledge or skills to serve children with SEN. Besides serving these children, these personnel would also be in the position

to provide similar courses to a new batch of personnel, thus increasing the number of experts in these fields of special education.

8. Conclusion

The Ministry of Education has undertaken extensive efforts to provide the best facilities available to cater to the needs of children with SEN under its responsibilities. The Ministry is aware that all these efforts would be in vain if teachers and the community as a whole have a negative perception towards the education of these children. Thus, the Special Education Department was given the task to organize in-service training to teachers, to convince them that teaching children with SEN is just a matter of good teaching. Besides local experts, assistance from overseas specialists was also enlisted to reinforce this conviction. The Department has also organized as well as participated in 'outreach' programs to harness community support in favor of providing these children with the educational services that the nation can be proud of. Providing education for children with SEN is expensive, but as a 'caring' society, monetary considerations should not be an obstacle to providing these children with the best facilities possible. "Education for All" and "Democratization of Education" could only be achieved if everyone associated directly or indirectly continues his or her efforts to provide the best educational programs, facilities and services for children with SEN.