

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AMONG MAINSTREAM TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Inclusive Education Program for pupils with Special Needs is the current national agenda that is being solidified in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and supported by Zero Reject Policy beginning January 2019. Adhering to the current development, Inclusive Education Program for pupils with Special Needs has been restructured and implemented with improvement in training for all teachers so that the acceptance of Special Needs pupils in mainstream classes could be realised through meaningful teaching and learning practice and to increase competencies the abilities of all pupils. Addressing this need, a qualitative study in the form of case study has been conducted to analyse the teaching strategies implemented by mainstream teachers teaching in the Inclusive Education Program focussing on the process of teaching phase evaluated in Le Francois model of teaching. The participants consisted of three mainstream teachers teaching in a primary school in Melaka whom were evaluated through interview as the instrument for this study. Themes and sub-themes were analysed qualitatively. The study shown that to a certain extent respondents implemented the pedagogical strategies that aligned with inclusive pedagogy in their teaching phase and made necessary efforts to provide conducive teaching context for special needs and mainstream pupils who were involved in the Inclusive Education Programme.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education Program, Pupils with Special Needs, teaching process, mainstream teachers*

INTRODUCTION

The core of providing effective inclusive education lies in the implementation of inclusive pedagogy that are conducted in inclusive classrooms. To combat discriminatory attitude towards pupils of special abilities teachers need to equip themselves with skills to adapt pedagogy to mixed abilities group of pupils and often with under-resourced classrooms (Unesco IIEP Learning Portal, 2018). Pedagogical approach for inclusive classrooms positions the learner as the centre of learning process and thus required pupils to play on active role in the process. However, more current approaches are now trending towards placing teacher-centred and pupil-centred learning approaches as dynamic and benefitting both teacher and pupils. In this contention, teachers should be flexible in considering the classroom environment, pupils' abilities, teaching materials and be able to adapt pedagogical approaches (Unesco IIEP Learning Portal, 2018).

Adapting teaching strategies to meet a class of mixed abilities, large and under-resourced classrooms often poses quite a challenge to mainstream teachers. Pedagogical effectiveness is context dependent and more than often involved strategies such as: 1) strong grasp of pedagogical approaches specific to the subject matter; 2) appropriate use of whole class, small group and pair work; 3)

meaningful incorporation of teaching and learning materials in addition of textbooks; 4) frequent opportunities for pupils to answer and expand upon responses to questions; 5) helpful use of local terms and languages; 6) varied lesson activities; 7) a positive attitude towards pupils and their capacities to learn (Unesco IIEP Learning Portal, 2018). These are inherent and arresting concerns that propagate teachers and thus a concern that needs to be researched to analyse its impact on teacher teaching skills and pupils in inclusive classrooms.

In a research conducted to analyse the implementation of Inclusive education in Malaysia by Norlia Mohd Amin and Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yassin (2016), pointed out that the respondents in their research were in need of knowledge and skills to teach and to manage Special Needs pupils in their classroom. Lacking of the essentials skills posed a daunting challenge for these teachers to understand and cater responsively to these pupils. A research conducted in similar vein by Noor Aini Ahmad in 2014 to study the management of Inclusive Education Program in Malaysia for pupils with learning difficulties found that, mainstream teachers needed the support of Special education Teachers in their inclusive classroom for the benefit of the special needs pupils. The presence of Special Education teachers were a necessity to guide and assist special needs pupils in their learning process. These studies indicated that apart from implementing teaching strategies, the importance of co-teaching strategies were also needed in inclusive classrooms.

The success of teaching in inclusive classroom is very much relied upon the teacher's ability, knowledge and skills to accommodate and adapt teaching pedagogy that are tailored to meet the needs of. Their primary concern would be how to "respond to human differences in ways that include learners in, rather than exclude them from, what is ordinarily available in the daily of the classroom" (Florian in Florian & Hawkins, 2011). According to Ryan, in Johari and Aslinda (2010), effective teachers are teachers who have knowledge and are skilful of their subject matter and are highly imaginative to support their pupils' learning in grasping a concept and are able to use teaching aids and tools in teaching and learning session to ensure pupils are supported to attain the concept taught dexterously.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mainstream teachers teaching inclusive classrooms are responsible to support pupils with special needs in the classroom settings through aiding them to settle and by creating the ambiance of acceptance by other pupils in the class. These include efforts such as adapting to curriculum content, class time table and planning activities that attract and encourage participation of all pupils (Ang & Lee, 2018).

They have to be innovative in planning teaching and learning so as to encourage participation and positive reception by all pupils regardless of abilities. Teaching strategies should involve increased use of multi-sensory approaches, activities that induce the participation and interest of all pupils particularly pupils with special needs, meaningful learning and support all pupils to understand the content taught. Group work and group based activities by means to foment cooperative interaction and mind fullness of others to complete the assigned tasks (Ang & Lee, 2018). In a qualitative study conducted by Abdul Rahim and Muhamad Khairul (2013) to investigate the perception of mainstream teachers on the Inclusive Education program on 97 teachers using online survey application in Facebook, found that 27 teachers agreed and 21 of the respondents extremely agreed that pupils with special needs were more confident in inclusive setting. 48.5% teachers were also extremely agreeable to modify physical arrangement in the classroom in order to accommodate their special needs pupils. This study showed that the mainstream teachers are supportive and readily to accept pupils with special needs in their classrooms.

In another qualitative and quantitative study conducted to evaluate the implementation of Inclusive Education Program by Norlia and Mohammad Hanafi (2016) it is found that few of the respondents were still practicing a generalised pedagogy instructions to teach in inclusive classroom that disregarded the pupils' level of abilities and the potentials of pupils with special needs in inclusive classroom. Thus this had directly impacted on the pupils' performances and they were unable to complete the assigned task given. The research, on the other hand, highlighted that 40% of

the teachers were able to teach effectively and were able to prepare a comprehensive report on the performances of pupils with special needs who were placed in the Inclusive Education Programme. A study conducted by Tawanda Majoko (2019) to investigate the pedagogy practices by 24 Physical Education teachers who taught in Zimbabwean public primary schools which included pupils with special needs in inclusive settings, reported that the respondents struggled to attend fully to an individual child during lesson and struggled to manage children with behavioural disorders, autism and intellectual disabilities in regular classrooms. The root of these exertions were founded on large classrooms sizes, inadequate specialist staff such as therapists and resource persons.

These studies in general reflected that mainstream teachers' perspectives and practices towards Inclusive Education Program are currently placed in the tension between providing education services that accommodate the needs of an individual child and catering to all children in the teaching and learning process. This reality of inclusive education can be encapsulated as being in "a deep uncertainty about how to create an inclusive environments in schools and how to teach inclusively as there seems to be a gap between realizations and formulations of inclusive education" (Allan in Haug, 2017). Thus this presented an open boundaries for all educational practitioners to explore of what actually takes place in the process of teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms.

Inclusive education programme is one of the main agenda in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. The current researches in Inclusive Education particularly focusing on the practice of pedagogy practice are still very limited and research in this area needs to be aplenty so as to determine the success of inclusive education program in Malaysia. Most studies in Malaysia context pertaining to inclusive education were centralised on teachers' attitude and perspectives about the concept of inclusive education, attitudes and perspectives towards the benefit of inclusive education and the challenges that came with the practice (Abdul Rahim Hamdan & Muhamad Khairul Anuar Hussin (2013), Mohd. Rizal Mohd. Said & Muallimah Arshad (2008), Murnie Hassan (2013), Mustafa Che Omar & Siti Fatimah Salleh (2018), Norliah Mohd. Amin & Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yasin (2016) and Sharul Arba'iah & Nurfarrazilah Mohd Yusak (2018)). Therefore to furtherance the investigation of the effectiveness and the reality of implementation of inclusive education practice this study is conducted at a micro-scale level to investigate the teaching and learning practices of mainstream teachers in inclusive classroom with pupils of special needs.

The research question for this study specifically addressed the following question (1) What pedagogical practices do teachers use in the teaching process in inclusive classrooms with pupils with special needs who are involved in the Inclusive Education Programme in a school in Melaka Tengah district?

METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative research that is realised through a case study that enabled the researchers to work closely with the respondents. The exploration of contemporary phenomenon in this research is focussed on the respondents' strategies they undertook in the teaching phase were investigated.

Research Respondents

Three mainstream teachers teaching in inclusive education programme were selected in this research. Three female teachers (teacher 1, teacher 2 and teacher 3) were involved in the programme and were selected as respondents in this study. All respondents obtained a bachelor degree in various fields; a degree in Accounting, a degree in Mathematics and a degree in Education Islam Usuluddin. None of the respondents have been formally exposed to inclusive pedagogy during their degree study. All respondents have been teaching between 5 to 20 years and been involved in the Inclusive Education Programme between 2 to 5 year.

Research Design

The research design utilised an adapted teaching model developed by Le Francois as the lens by which to analyse the pedagogy strategies undertaken by respondents. In this research, the case study is

considered as most suited method to gain perspectives of the teachers as they were the ones who worked in the inclusive settings to deliver education services in inclusive classroom. Case study design is considered as aptly fitting the research questions as it presented a method of “empirical study to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.... [and] in which multiple sources of evidence are used’ (Yin in Zaidah Zainal, 2007).

Qualitative research methodology allows the researchers to examine the respondents’ personal data on the targeted experience and deciphering the experience by using “textual descriptions that are analysed for themes and inducing transferrable interpretations” (Denzin & Lincoln, Grbich, Silverman in Tawanda Moloko, 2017). The teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol that were prepared beforehand and were given additional structured questions if the necessity arisen. The focus of the questions were deliberated on the strategies used by the respondents in the process of teaching and learning in the inclusive classroom during the teaching phase.

Utilising the adapted Le Francois teaching model (Normazidah, 2012), the researchers developed the interview questions to explore the pedagogy practices undertaken by the respondents in the teaching and learning process in the inclusive classroom during the teaching phase. This model interprets teaching as a three phase process that includes pre-teaching phase, teaching phase and post-teaching phase. The specified stage addressed in this study is predicated during the teaching phase.

Data Collection and Analysis

The respondents’ response gain from the interviews were transcribed and analysed to form emerging themes. Multiple design case study method such as this research has allowed the researchers to utilise data from the responses of the respondents by analysing the data using elements that stem from the research’s guiding theoretical framework. By carefully detailing pattern matching of similar sub-themes, main themes were gathered and bridged in the analysis.

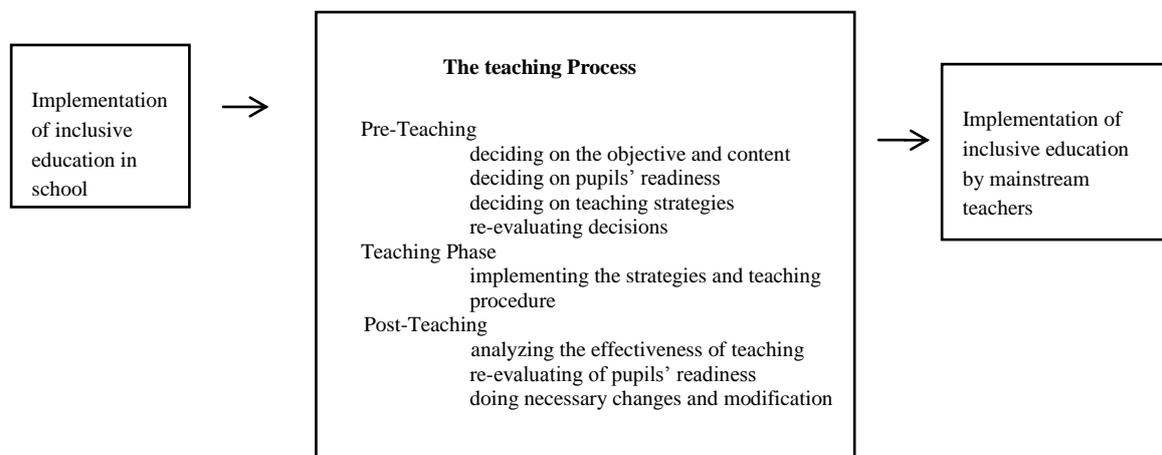


Diagram 1: Adapted Le Francois Teaching Model

Research setting

This study was conducted in one primary school in Melaka Tengah that implemented the Inclusive Education Program for pupils with learning difficulties.

RESULTS

Through the data analysis focusing on the respondents’ teaching strategies adopted during the teaching phase, three themes emerged. These were; the importance of co-teaching with Special Education teacher, the dynamics of teaching approaches and group work activity.

The importance of co-teaching strategies with Special Education teachers

All three respondents were highly appreciative of the support and presence of Special Education Teachers in the teaching process. The mainstream teachers believed that Special Education Teachers are the specialists and the best persons to work with pupils with special needs in an inclusive setting.

“...need help and guidance from the specialist teacher as she is the only person who knows the pupils’ cognitive level and the physical needs of the child” (Teacher 1)

Adopting the co-teaching approach of one teaching, one assist, the Special Education teacher played an integral role in the teaching phase. The mainstream teachers sought the expertise of the Special Education teachers to explain and to teach the content of the subject taught with additional instruction or activities to pupils with special needs in the class.

“...the pupils have no problem to learn during my teaching phase as the specialist teacher would constantly guide and help them during the teaching process” (Teacher 2).

Apart from assisting pupils in the learning process, the Special Education teacher played an important role to set up classroom routine and to be aware of individual pupils' behavior plans and provide discipline accordingly. In this way, the Special Education teacher helped to maintain a conducive learning atmosphere for all pupils in the classroom.

“...these special needs pupils have the specialist teachers who would provide them with support and guidance in terms of learning and also regulating desired behaviour in the class” (Teacher 3).

The dynamics of teaching methods.

In the teaching phase all respondents implemented mainly teacher-centered approach in the initial teaching phase and further on in the later stage of the teaching phase they would transition into pupil-centered approach especially when teaching pupils with special needs. These teachers were concerned with pupils’ abilities to communicate and response in classroom activities and therefore imperatively teacher-centered approach were more suited for teaching them. Nonetheless, at times pupil-centered approach were adapted to encourage communication skills for pupils with special needs. The teachers also were in unison and stated that it was very important to use concrete teaching aids to teach all pupils regardless of their abilities in the teaching phase.

“ I use teacher-centered approach in the first part of my teaching and then later on focusing on pupil-centered and teaching aid- centered approaches in the teaching process” (Teacher 2).

“I usually emphasized on pupil-centered approach” (Teacher 3)

“At this point of my teaching method, I usually use the teacher-centered approach and the use of concrete teaching aids. This is mainly due to the lack of communication skills of the pupils with special needs and it is quite problematic to use pupil-centered approach for these pupils.” (Teacher 1)

Group activity

Group work activity is one of the strategies that the respondents constantly used during the teaching phase. The respondents usually created mixed-abilities pupils in group settings for example, in a group of five, two would be pupils with special needs and the other three are mainstream pupils. The number of pupils with special needs in group activities usually differs from time to time according to the number of special needs who attended the class. The respondents believed that by intermingling pupils of mixed abilities in groups, it will reduce the communication gap and increase social communication among the pupils.

“...I will divide the class into groups and including all special needs pupils into smaller groups with other mainstream pupils” (Teacher 1)

The respondents also informed that in smaller group settings, mainstream pupils could support their special needs friends during the teaching phase. Although the presence of Special Education teacher in the class is significantly supportive for the special needs pupils, the assistance of their mainstream friends facilitated the special needs pupils to acquire the lesson of the day.

“...one more thing, [the mainstream pupils] did help to assist their special needs friends” (Teacher 2)

The respondents also remarked that, group work activity was not only formed for the purpose of discussion activity but also created to complete task assigned to the pupils. As an example, at times, the group members were tasked to perform role-playing in simulation context such as at the school canteen or at the teachers’ common room and other contexts. These special needs pupils could perform very well especially in role-playing activities or performing tasks regardless of their low cognitive level in comparison with their mainstream peers.

“ Usually we will involve the special needs pupils in group based task that did not involve academic skills and more [focused] on group role-playing or group performances in class” (Teacher 3).

The group activity theme that emerged from the respondents’ experience evidently reflected the efforts made by these teacher to adapt the strategies and techniques to include pupils with special needs during their teaching phase. The transition from individual to group work activities were made in the effort to propagate acceptance for all pupils in inclusive classroom.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with the contemporary movement in the global education setting, Malaysia is enhancing its efforts to step up inclusive education for all children. With the formulation of the “The Guideline to Implement Inclusive Education Program for Pupils with Special Needs” (2013) by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, the Ministry is committed to deliver a quality education services that caters to all pupils and especially those with special needs. The implementation of Zero Reject Policy beginning 2019 (Ministry of Education of Malaysia, 2018) requires the application of practical teaching strategies and therefore teachers are in the dire need to delve deeper into practices that meet the uniqueness of each child. With this contention in mind, this research is conducted to investigate what actually took place in the teaching phase during the teaching and learning process carried out by mainstream teachers teaching inclusive classroom with special needs pupils.

The first theme that emerged is the importance of co-teaching approaches with Special Education teachers. The respondents cited that they appreciated the presence of the Special Education teachers during the teaching phase as their teaching partner and they were the best person to work with special needs pupils because they were the ones who really understand these pupils’ needs and performances (Teacher 1); the Specialist teachers are the experts in delivering additional instructions to assist special needs pupils to acquire the content taught in the teaching phase (Teacher 2) and the Special Education teachers are effective partners to monitor and create a cohesive environment for all pupils to learn together (Teacher 3).

The advantageous of having a co-teacher working alongside in inclusive settings have been documented in researches conducted by Mustafa and Siti Fatimah (2018) that augmented the role of Special Education teachers in inclusive classroom as reducing the burden of mainstream teachers during the teaching phase. They also performed roles as consultants and specialists that the mainstream teachers referred to for advice and inevitably helped to achieve the objective of the lesson during the teaching phase. Special needs pupils required specialised assistance to adjust themselves in an inclusive classroom. They need to adapt into new environment, required individualised instructions and accommodated teaching strategies based on their abilities. Therefore the mainstream teachers would find that teaching special needs pupils posed a challenging task due to the lack of knowledge

and skills to handle these pupils (Charles & Malian in Mustafa & Siti Fatimah, 2018). Having a teaching partner who could manage behaviour issues of special needs pupils would contribute immensely to a conducive teaching context. The effective collaboration between teaching partners eased communication directives in managing a class (Abdul Rahim & Muhammad Khairul, 2018) thus enabling the teaching phase to be conducted smoothly.

The second theme that surfaced was the dynamics of teaching approaches that were implemented by the respondents in the teaching phase. The respondents clarified that they made use of all the teaching approaches that were implemented according to the necessity of the teaching phase. All teachers agreed that they modified and accommodated teaching approaches to suit the needs of pupils and the context of teaching. Teacher 1 believed that teacher-centered approach was much suited to assist learning process for special needs pupils as the pupils have difficulty to express themselves in the communication process. Teacher 2 employed a teacher-centered approach and relied on concrete teaching aid in her teaching phase and Teacher 3 used pupil-centered approach later on in her teaching phase. These findings concurred with the strategies of inclusive pedagogy in which the teachers appropriated pedagogical approaches specified to the subject matter and incorporated teaching materials in meaningful way in the teaching process (Unesco IIEP Learning Portal, 2018).

The third and final theme that materialised in the findings was using group work as strategy in the teaching phase. First and foremost, group activity is used to reduce communication gap and to increase social communication among pupils (Teacher 1). Secondly, group activity increased the opportunities for peer coaching (Teacher 2) and thirdly it presented a platform for special needs pupils and their mainstream friends to showcase their talents in group performances (Teacher 3). Positive relationship and peer socialization fostered cohesion and inclusion among pupils with special needs and their mainstream peers by presenting a space for them to consult and to form partnership (Tawanda Majoko, 2019). This aligned with the principles of inclusive pedagogy that expect teachers to manage appropriate use of whole class and small group work (Unesco IIEP Learning Portal, 2018) and one that required teachers to “reject deterministic beliefs about ability is being fixed and the associated premise that the presence of some will interfere with the progress of others” (Pantic & Florian in Tawanda Majoko, 2019).

These findings concurred well with the elements of inclusive pedagogy that requires teachers to nurture conducive teaching and learning opportunities for pupils regardless of their abilities. The findings to a certain extent explored the spectrum of how mainstream teachers would teach inclusively in inclusive classroom. It presented a minute scope to look into the practice of Inclusive Education Program in Malaysia and a microscopic view of the efforts that were being made by teachers to support inclusive education for special needs pupils in the mainstream system.

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to answer the research question of what pedagogical practices do teachers use in the teaching and learning process in inclusive classrooms with pupils with special needs who are involved in the Inclusive Education Programme. The respondents involved were three mainstream teachers who were responsible to teach inclusive classroom with special needs pupils. The research design is a case study that is viewed through an adapted version of Le Francois teaching model process. With emphasis on the teaching phase process, findings were generated and emerging themes from the responses of the respondents that were obtained by interview protocol were formed as research findings. The findings, to a certain extent revealed the pedagogical practices that they were used by mainstream teachers to teach inclusively. The implications from this research are synthesized as follows; firstly is the implication on the role of the Ministry of Education Malaysia in its endeavor to step up its effort to ensure the agenda of inclusive education achieved its purpose through capacity training for in-service teachers. Secondly is the role of mainstream teachers as the implementers of inclusive education and thirdly the role of Special Education teachers in the Inclusive Education Program.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia has set its goal to achieve a 75% enrollment of special needs pupils in the Inclusive Education Program by the year 2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013) and this requires intensive efforts by all divisions and sectors in the Ministry to provide the necessary training programmes focussing on pedagogical strategies and teaching approaches that

would upgrade the capacity of teachers who are directly involved in the teaching and learning process in inclusive classrooms Ang & Lee (2018). Inclusive Education training should be intensified and conducted for all teachers so as to prepare them with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage classroom teaching with diverse abilities and needs. Inclusive Education requires transformation of school context, teachers, administrators and community to readily accept special needs pupils in classroom and ensuring the pupils received all the education support they needed to learn with the mainstream peers. In the effort to create a conducive teaching context, teachers must be given a formal training in inclusive education. This would produce teachers who have strong grasp of teaching strategies and approaches when teaching special needs pupils with their mainstream peers.

Secondly, with the enforcement of Zero Reject Policy (Ministry of Education of Malaysia, 2018), mainstream teachers have to be prepared to readily accept the presence of special needs pupils into their classroom. Being directly the implementer of the teaching process, the mainstream teacher are required to change their mind set be prepared to nurture a conducive teaching context for all pupils in the teaching phase.

The role of Special Education teachers are specialised teachers who are qualified to teach and share their expertise to mainstream teachers in inclusive classrooms. They function as teaching partners and are responsible to assist and guide special needs pupils to receive differentiated instructions and modification of content of the taught content in the lesson conducted (Ang & Lee, 2018). The respondents have acknowledged and appreciated the presence of Special Education teachers in the teaching process and it is utmost importance for both mainstream and Special Education teachers to foment effective communications in the teaching process. The Special Education teachers' role is to consult and assist mainstream teachers by monitoring and managing behavioural issues during classroom interaction (Siti Fatimah & Mustafa, 2018). Therefore, that Special Education Teachers should be able to work with mainstream teachers and are able to give consultations and guidance to mainstream teachers in terms of strategies and approaches that fits the needs of special needs pupils in inclusive classroom.

CONCLUSION

As reiterated, this research presented a micro-scale observation to delve into the practice of inclusive education in one primary school in Melaka. Focussing on the pedagogical strategies employed by respondents during the teaching phase, the pattern of teaching strategies had emerged and gave a comprehensive analysis on how the mainstream teachers had put in their efforts to teach inclusively in an inclusive classrooms. Teachers working in inclusive classroom need to understand that the “differences between learners are a matter of degree and not a matter of category” (Florian in Haug, 2017). Therefore teachers should bear in mind that when teaching inclusively, some pupils would need more time, more practice and more instructions during the teaching phase and undoubtedly the dynamics of teaching strategies would have to be adapted to the pupils' abilities (Florian in Haug, 2017). These realizations had surfaced in the research findings as analysed in the respondents' responses and provided answers to the research question for this study.

Nevertheless, there are still many issues and dimensions of the practice of inclusive education in Malaysia that needed to be probed, researched and explored. The struggle to deliver quality teaching in inclusive classroom is real and demand support and development of teachers' competencies in this form of education through systematic training and empirical document. It is crucial to develop supporting means so that teachers can keep up with the challenge posed by inclusive education and definitely it would need time, effort and practical implementation actions by the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the stake holders involved.

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