

Teaching Competence of Teachers in Inclusive Education Programs in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Special Education is a branch of education services provided for Students with Special Education Needs (SSEN). The Education Act 1996 allows SSEN to attend the same classes in government schools or government aided schools. In line with that, the Inclusive Education Program (IEP) has been implemented in certain schools across the country to meet the needs of students and parents' requests. The existing policy that has been adopted for a long time gives the right to formal education for SSEN and it is strengthened by two other policies, namely 'Compulsory Education' and 'Education for All' which is now the basis of planning for the implementation of special education in Malaysia. This concept paper aims to identify the teaching competence of mainstream teachers in the implementation of IEP. The results of this study found that teaching competence, which is measured by the knowledge and skills of mainstream teachers, is very important in the implementation of IEP. The success of IEP depends on the teaching competence of mainstream teachers and will be achieved if systematically planned by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MMoE) and implemented with the support and collaboration of all parties. It is recommended that a follow-up study be conducted to examine aspects of SSEN in IEP because many previous studies focus on the teacher aspect only.

Keywords: Competence, Education, Inclusive, Knowledge, Skill

Introduction

The Disabled Persons Act 2008 has clearly stated that children with special needs are entitled to equal educational opportunities without discrimination or exclusion. Therefore, educational institutions, especially schools, play an important role in providing an environment, a system, and activities that are compatible with the needs of SSEN so that they can develop to their maximum potential.

Accordingly, on the 3rd of December in 2018 through the Second Meeting of the First Term of the Fourteenth Parliament, the Honourable Malaysian Minister of Education has informed that the Zero Reject Policy (ZRP) for SSEN will be implemented in stages in 2019. The ZRP is an existing policy that is strengthened in terms of its implementation to ensure that SSEN receive education that is in line with their disability either in mainstream schools through IEP, Special Integration Programs (SIP) or Special Education Schools (SES) from pre-school to primary and secondary levels (Hasan et al., 2022).

Prior to that, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MMoE) has developed the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013 – 2025 (MEDP, 2013 – 2025) which was launched in October 2011 to review the country's education system comprehensively in order to improve the country's aspiration in preparing the young generation to face the needs of the 21st century (Rahim et al., 2021). Efforts to give chances and opportunities to SSEN in mainstream classes have experienced positive changes through IEP. This is in line with the concept of education for all by providing chances, opportunities, and educational services for all SSEN who have hearing problems, vision problems and learning problems. An action plan aimed at inclusive education is recorded in the MEDP which targets 30 percent of SSEN to be in the IEP by the end of 2015 and then 75 percent in 2025 which is in line with the ZRP. Through this action plan, MMoE is committed to encourage more SSEN to follow IEP through improving the quality of its implementation. This is in line with Shift 1 of MEDP which is to provide equal access to international level, high quality education.

In addition, IEP raises awareness in the community so as not to deny the potential of SSEN and believe that their disabilities can be minimized if they are given equal opportunities. SSEN who follow IEP are made up of those who can master the skills of reading, writing, and counting just like typical students in the mainstream schools. IEP was introduced in Malaysia in 1994 under MMoE. The implementation of IEP for 27 years in Malaysia is a responsibility to educate SSEN that is shouldered by teachers of mainstream subjects (Hasan et al., 2022). The results of previous studies found many issues that occur in IEP. According to Isnong and Badusah (2017), among the identified issues among teachers are regarding pedagogical knowledge, teaching methods, workload, attitude and so on. This concept paper will discuss the teaching competence of mainstream teachers in IEP. In addition, this concept paper focuses on two main aspects, namely teachers' knowledge and their skills in inclusive programs in schools.

Literature Review

Teachers' Knowledge

Past studies generally show that teachers have strong constraints on the implementation of IEP. The study was conducted in line with the evaluation of the IEP implementation in Wave 1 of MEDP to measure policy decisions made by MMoE by targeting 30% SSEN participation in the mainstream education system (Nirmala & Hanafi, 2021). Knowledge is a domain aspect in a teacher to implement Teaching and Facilitation (TaF), (Chian & Mohamed, 2021). According to Nurul and Mohamed (2016), knowledge is used to explain the understanding of a subject and to achieve a goal. Teachers' knowledge is also related to teachers' attitude towards IEP (Elizabeth & Seema, 2019). Previous studies have found that mainstream teachers who teach IEP do not have basic knowledge or experience related to special education and SSEN management methods (Rahim et al., 2021). In addition, mainstream teachers' knowledge about IEP is also still at a moderate level (Hasan et al., 2022). The teaching competence, which is measured by the knowledge and attitude of mainstream teachers, plays an important role in implementing IEP. According to Jalaluddin and Tahar (2022), the success of teaching in IEP is highly dependent on the ability, knowledge and skills of teachers to accommodate and provide suitable teaching pedagogy to meet the requirements of SSEN. Past studies prove that the level of preparedness of mainstream teachers in teaching SSEN, especially from the knowledge aspect, has not yet reached a high level.

Teachers' Skills

Effective TaF requires teachers to have good knowledge and skills. However, according to Faiza et al. (2016), the effectiveness of IEP is difficult to achieve because of the many obstacles that exist. A study conducted by Rahim et al (2021) found that there are still teachers of mainstream subjects who use the same TaF techniques and methods for all students without taking into account the level of SSEN ability and potential in IEP classes. The findings of a study conducted by Ling and Omar (2022) stated that many teachers who conduct IEP admit that they do not receive specific training, courses or workshops related to TaF techniques and methods that are compatible with SSEN. This is in line with the study by (Ab Hakim & Iksan, 2018). Mainstream teachers are also less prepared in implementing IEP due to lack of knowledge of the appropriate methods that should be used to teach SSEN (Tordin & Tahar, 2021). Based on the findings of previous studies, it was found that the skills of mainstream teachers in IEP are still at a moderate level.

Inclusive Education Program (IEP)

IEP is an education system where SSEN and regular students learn together with a teaching and learning system that is appropriate to meet the learning needs of SSEN with different types of disabilities (Elizabeth & Seema, 2019). In IEP, SSEN learn together with regular students in normal classes and will be educated by mainstream teachers (Mat & Mahamod, 2021). This is to ensure that SSEN have the opportunity to enjoy all learning facilities in a normal and conducive environment regardless of their status. In addition, SSEN should be given the opportunity to study in the premier class (Jalaluddin & Tahar, 2022). According to Nirmala and Hanafi (2021), IEP develops in a perspective that is less extensive, limited and not in accordance with the mainstream education system. Furthermore, not many schools implement IEP and not many SSEN are involved. However, IEP is considered a good method to deal with the issue of discrimination.

Discussion and Recommendation

Teachers are the main key in determining the success of IEP and it is important for teachers to always prepare to equip themselves from various aspects such as knowledge and skills. Past studies that have examined the educational policy of SSEN especially IEP found that the teaching competence of teachers is described as the agent of change to make IEP successful in schools (Ling & Omar, 2022). Among the issues of teaching competence in IEP classes is the pedagogical knowledge of mainstream teachers who teach in IEP. According to Biamba (2016), successful special education in a mainstream setting is highly dependent on the teachers' attitude, knowledge, skills, techniques and the teaching materials used which is also supported by the study of (Elizabeth & Seema, 2019). Also, in this case, the teachers' knowledge is related to their attitude towards IEP. In addition, in the aspect of knowledge, a study conducted by Mohd and Yunus (2016) found that mainstream teachers who had never attended training related to special education to teach SSEN found that their professional knowledge and skills were insufficient to teach SSEN in IEP. Past studies have also found that mainstream teachers who teach IEP do not have basic knowledge or experience related to special education and SSEN management methods and the mainstream teachers' knowledge about IEP is also still at a moderate level {Formatting Citation}.

Studies conducted abroad also show that teachers lack knowledge about IEP (Timo, 2020). Based on these studies, the lack of knowledge among mainstream teachers is a big issue in the implementation of IEP. The lack of mainstream teachers' knowledge of SSEN and

IEP will certainly cause problems. For example, mainstream teachers are surprised by the behaviour of SEN, they discriminate against SEN in mainstream classes and are disappointed with SEN to the point that SEN cannot gain knowledge effectively. This situation will make the TaF process difficult for SEN in the IEP class. This is because the lack of knowledge among mainstream teachers will cause them to be less skilled in educating SEN. In the end, SEN will be less motivated to follow IEP. As we all know, the success of SEN in IEP depends on the mainstream teachers who educate them in the classroom. Teachers play an important role in determining the effectiveness of IEP because SEN really needs the attention of teachers in the process of acquiring knowledge (Faiza et al., 2016). This is proven through a study by Mohd and Yunus (2016) who found that teachers' skills and knowledge of IEP are very important in improving the effectiveness of the teaching process for SEN. According to the findings of Chian and Mohamed (2021), a positive understanding of SEN can reduce mainstream teachers' discomfort during TaF in the classroom. It is clear that mainstream teachers need to be knowledgeable, ready, positive, and skilled to accept SEN in mainstream classes.

In addition, teaching competence measured by the knowledge and attitude of mainstream teachers play an important role in implementing IEP. This is supported by a study conducted by Jalaluddin and Tahar (2022) which states that the success of teaching in IEP is highly dependent on the ability, knowledge, and skills of teachers to accommodate and provide appropriate teaching pedagogy to meet the requirements of SEN. Most mainstream teachers have only heard about SEN, but their knowledge and understanding of SEN is still low (Jain et al., 2018). According to the findings of a study conducted by Tordin and Tahar (2021), this is due to mainstream teachers thinking that SEN is more suitable to be in a special education program and educating SEN is the responsibility of special education teachers. Studies report that mainstream teachers are not equipped with knowledge related to the concept of Special Education resulting in them not being prepared to implement IEP and they find it difficult to meet the requirements and teach according to the SEN level (Abdullah et al., 2021). This statement is also in line with Nirmala and Hanafi (2021) which reports that teachers are not prepared in terms of pedagogical knowledge, teaching methods, effective guidance, motivation and attitude. Based on the results of previous studies, it was found that many mainstream teachers involved in IEP feel lacking in terms of knowledge because they do not have training in the field of special education. This causes mainstream teachers to face difficulties in understanding the requirements of SEN during TaF in the classroom and will lower the quality of TaF. Therefore, mainstream teachers need to collaborate with special education teachers to ensure that IEP runs well.

Related to the coordination of teaching because there is no coordination between the content of the regular class curriculum and the IEP class, thus causing this situation to affect SEN learning. According to Khairuddin (2022), inclusive education is a comprehensive change to teacher teaching and curriculum. In relation to that, Nirmala and Hanafi (2021) found that there are still teachers of mainstream subjects who use the same TaF techniques and methods for all students without taking into account the level of SEN ability and potential in IEP classes. The findings of a study conducted by Norfarahin et al (2021) stated that many teachers who conduct IEP admit that they do not receive specific training, courses or workshops related to TaF techniques and methods that are compatible with SEN. This is in line with the study by (Chian and Mohamed, 2021). Meanwhile, studies by Jalaluddin and Tahar (2022) also stated that many mainstream teachers still lack training on IEP.

In addition, the findings of the study by Nirmala and Hanafi (2021) found that mainstream teachers should be exposed specifically to TaF techniques and methods that are suitable for SSEN. The justification is that specific training, courses, and workshops can certainly improve the quality of teachers in terms of teaching strategies, classroom management, and student assessment which is also supported by (Norfarahin et al., 2021). According to the study conducted by Tordin and Tahar (2021), it was found that mainstream teachers are less prepared in implementing IEP due to a lack of knowledge and not knowing the appropriate way to teach SSEN. Based on the findings of past studies, mainstream teachers implement TaF for SSEN using their own methods. This is due to the mainstream teachers who teach SSEN not being exposed to courses or knowledge regarding how to handle SSEN because training for mainstream teachers does not include it. For example, mainstream teachers face issues when teaching SSEN who have complex, diverse, critical, and severe disabilities. A study conducted by Hasan et al (2022) found that most of the special education teachers involved do not have the skills to manage SSEN because they are not from a special education background and do not have proper educational training experience. This situation requires knowledgeable, skilled, and professional teachers in the field of special education. Mainstream teachers who teach IEP need training on IEP so that they can teach SSEN with methods relevant to their needs. As a result, the findings of previous studies clearly show that mainstream teachers find it difficult to understand the requirements of SSEN. Furthermore, teachers also do not know how to handle SSEN to ensure they can learn optimally because there are no specific skills and training to teach and handle SSEN in IEP.

In relation to that, specific teaching strategies as well as accommodations and modifications are less practiced during TaF. According to Jalaluddin and Tahar (2022), there are no trained teachers and resources in the field of special education in Cambodia, causing the commitment in all matters related to IEP to be carried out by ordinary teachers. This point is also supported by Abdullah et al (2021) who stated that many teachers are still not aware of the need for SSEN in IEP. Based on the findings of a research on IEP conducted overseas, it was found that the scenario that occurs abroad is the same as that which occurs in Malaysia. Many teachers involved with IEP feel like they are lacking in terms of knowledge and skills because they do not have relevant training in the field of special education. This leads to the existence of SSEN who cannot follow the teacher's teaching and do not complete the assignments and training given by the teacher. The implication is the requirements of SSEN in IEP still cannot be met while mainstream teachers' level of knowledge and skills are still at a moderate level. So, mainstream teachers need to be prepared with knowledge and skills to ensure the success of this IEP implementation. It is hoped that the teacher problems that have been identified can be overcome with the involvement and placement of resource teachers in IEP classes. This statement coincides with the opinion of Jain et al (2018) who suggested that resource teachers be placed in IEP classes. The involvement of the resource teacher in the IEP class is to help subject teachers and SSEN during the TaF session. In order to successfully implement this IEP, special education teachers must play their full role by acting as very effective resource teachers.

The research results from this concept paper can raise awareness in schools, District Education Offices (DEO), State Education Departments (SED) and Ministry of Education to find alternatives to help improve the level of teaching competence of mainstream teachers, especially in terms of the knowledge and skills of teachers in the implementation of IEP. Teachers with knowledge and high level of education can adapt the curriculum and diversify inclusive teaching activities in the classroom. This is also supported by Leonila and Karen

(2019) who stated that teachers who constantly acquire and equip themselves with new knowledge are able to educate SEN efficiently and effectively. They can also plan a learning process that suits SEN students from various aspects such as cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The success of SEN in IEP certainly depends on mainstream teachers. This study can give implications to MMoE that mainstream teachers in Malaysia still lack knowledge and skills about IEP, such as how to implement IEP and manage SEN, and there is no specific course or training on special education. It is recommended that mainstream teachers attend specific training, courses, and workshops in order to improve the quality of their knowledge, skills, teaching strategies, classroom management and student assessment. In addition, mainstream teachers need to modify teaching practices according to SEN's abilities and skills. Mainstream teachers also need to provide the best service without discriminating against SEN and look for opportunities to follow courses in special education services. In relation to that, there is a need for resource teachers to be placed in IEP classes for the benefit of SEN. This can create collaboration between mainstream teachers and special education teachers. It is recommended that a follow-up study be conducted to examine aspects of SEN in IEP because many previous studies focus on the teachers' aspect only.

Conclusion

IEP is a means to provide access and educational opportunities to SEN to follow academic and non-academic fields together with mainstream students. This IEP concept is in line with the statement in the Education Regulations. The Malaysian Education Plan (MEP) will continue to support the National Philosophy of Education (NPoE) for a balanced education as the basis of every student's aspiration and as a high-performance education system to produce high quality and competitive human capital. Through the inclusive education policy in the MEDP and the ZRP policy, it is clear that the teaching competence of mainstream teachers is very important in determining the success of IEP implementation in Malaysia. In conclusion, mainstream teachers need to have good teaching competence, meaning that they must be knowledgeable and skilled to ensure that IEP targets in MEDP are achieved. The implementation of IEP for SEN will be effective and successful if it is systematically planned by MMoE and implemented with the support and collaboration of all parties.

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