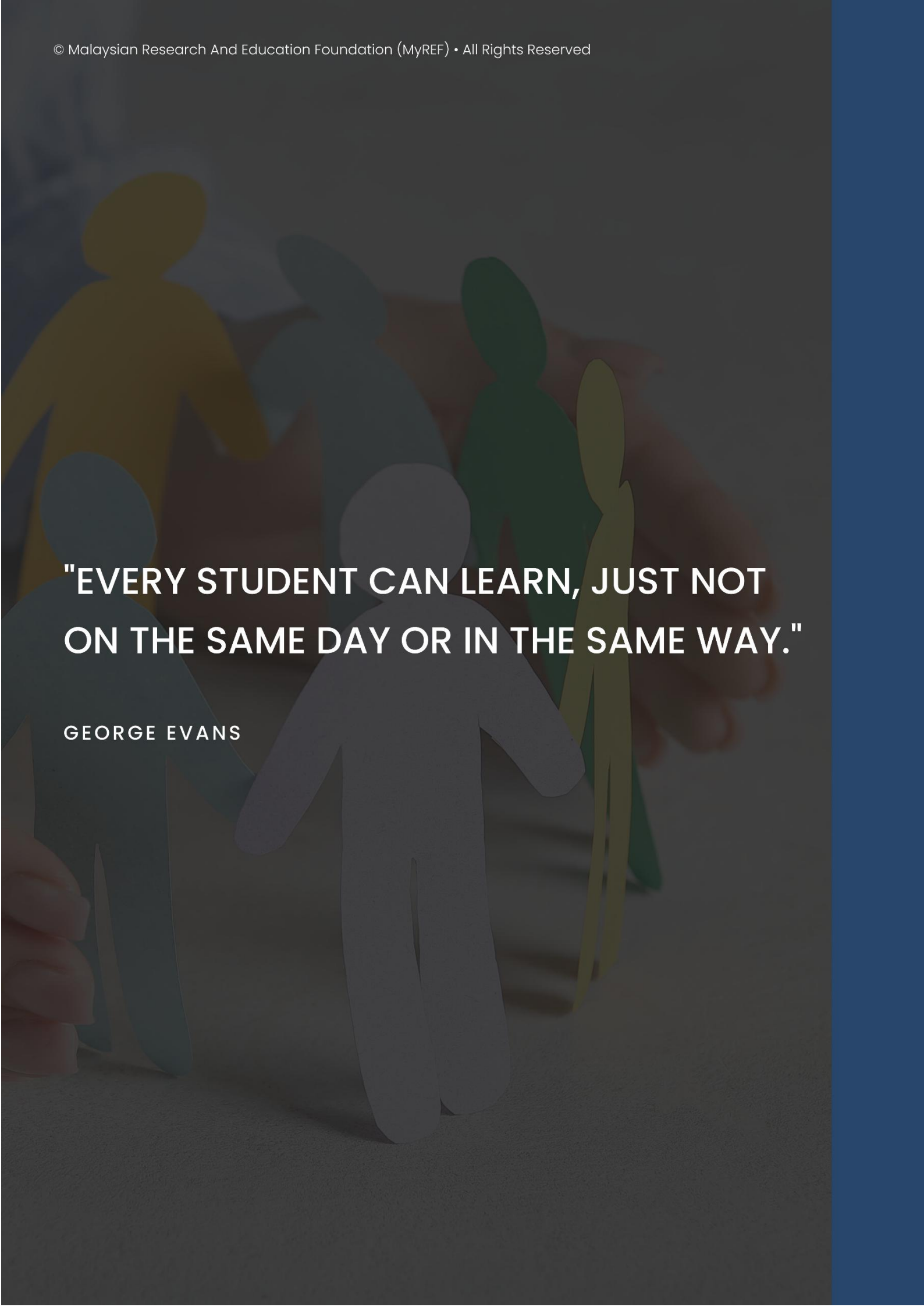




COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA: LESSONS LEARNED FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

A group of hands holding colorful paper cutouts of people in a circle. The cutouts are in various colors including yellow, blue, green, and red. The hands are visible at the edges of the cutouts, suggesting a group of people holding them together. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

**"EVERY STUDENT CAN LEARN, JUST NOT
ON THE SAME DAY OR IN THE SAME WAY."**

GEORGE EVANS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines Malaysia's progress, challenges, and readiness in implementing inclusive education for students with special educational needs (SEN), drawing lessons from developed countries (Finland and Australia) and developing nations (China and Egypt). Aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), the analysis highlights Malaysia's policy commitment through initiatives such as the *Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013*, and the *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025*. While enrolment of SEN students has increased, implementation remains uneven due to gaps in teacher training, insufficient infrastructure, limited resources, and persistent social stigma. A qualitative, comparative case study design was employed, combining document analysis and expert peer reviews. The analysis reveals that developed countries achieve stronger inclusion outcomes through comprehensive teacher training, equitable resource distribution, individualized learning plans, and supportive societal attitudes. Conversely, developing nations continue to face financial and structural limitations, although recent policy and digital innovations indicate meaningful progress. The study concludes that Malaysia's framework is conceptually sound but requires stronger implementation. Key priorities include enhancing teacher capacity, expanding assistive technology access, strengthening community engagement, and ensuring sustainable funding to achieve a fully inclusive and equitable education system.



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Study Background

Inclusive education has become a cornerstone of global efforts to ensure equitable access to quality education for all, as highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): *"Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."* This goal underscores the importance of addressing educational disparities and promoting accessibility for marginalized groups, particularly students with disabilities (PwD). Globally, reports such as those from UNESCO and the United Nations demonstrate the challenges and progress in achieving this ambitious goal. Despite advances in some regions, significant gaps remain in ensuring inclusive education systems, particularly in developing countries.

Global Context and SDG 4

The commitment to inclusive education aligns with broader international initiatives to address inequality, as outlined in reports on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These reports emphasize the need to create inclusive, learner-centred environments that cater to diverse needs. In developed nations like Finland and Australia, inclusive education has achieved significant strides through robust policies, teacher training, and infrastructure investments. However, in developing countries, limited resources, socio-cultural attitudes, and inadequate policies have often hindered progress.

Malaysia's Efforts Toward Inclusive Education

In Malaysia, inclusive education has gained momentum over the past decade, supported by national policy frameworks and alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Enrolment data from the Ministry of Education's Annual Report 2023 shows consistent progress in mainstreaming students with disabilities. As of 2023, a total of 96,722 students with special educational needs (SEN) were enrolled in government schools, with 84,636 (87.5%) placed under the Special Education Integration Program (SEIP). Notably, the proportion of MBPK participating in the Inclusive Education Program (IEP) has increased from 50.49% in 2018 to 86.36% in 2023, indicating improved efforts to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms.

Despite positive trends in the enrolment of students with disabilities, their presence in mainstream schools remains small relative to the total student population underscoring the need for stronger policy enforcement and systemic reform. Persistent challenges include a severe shortage of specialist-trained teachers, insufficient physical infrastructure, and outdated curricula that cannot cater to diverse learning

needs. Based on newspaper article The Sun, a recent survey of parents revealed overcrowded classrooms where educators often lack the training to manage challenging behaviours, likening the setting to "babysitting" rather than delivering meaningful instruction. Parents also highlighted the government's failure to provide updated learning resources, such as computers and assistive gadgets, which hampers learning effectiveness.

Moreover, the one-size-fits-all approach is exacerbated by the absence of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) tailored to each student's requirements, especially critical for low-functioning students who need early interventions. Moreover, only a fraction of Malaysia's estimated 2.1 million persons with disabilities (4–6% of the population) are enrolled in publicly funded schools, leaving many particularly in rural areas without any formal education (The Sun, 2025). These systemic shortcomings continue to impede the effectiveness of inclusive education, despite the upward trend in enrolment figures.

Defining Inclusive Education

Inclusive education, as defined by UNESCO, refers to the practice of ensuring all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, are educated within mainstream schools in a supportive and accommodating environment. This approach aims to break down barriers to learning, foster equitable participation, and promote societal acceptance of diversity.

In addition, UNICEF reinforces this perspective by asserting that *every child has the right to quality education*, including the estimated 240 million children with disabilities worldwide. However, many of these children continue to be excluded from education due to stigma, discrimination, and the lack of proper policy inclusion. This exclusion not only violates their right to education but also denies them the chance to develop their potential, participate in society, and determine their future.

Similarly, the World Bank defines inclusive education as building learning systems and environments where every student, particularly those with disabilities, can access and benefit equally from education. It stresses that in low- and middle-income countries, children with intersecting vulnerabilities such as poverty, gender inequality, and disability face compounded challenges in accessing quality education.

For the purpose of this study, the **operational definition of inclusive education** focuses specifically on the inclusion of *persons with disabilities (PWD)* or those with *Special Education Needs (SEN)* within mainstream education systems. This report emphasizes the need to assess Malaysia's commitment, progress, and challenges in delivering inclusive education for these groups, aligning with both international frameworks and national aspirations.

Problem Statement

While inclusive education is a global goal, its implementation and effectiveness vary significantly between developed and developing nations. In developed countries, well-established systems supported by extensive resources ensure that students with disabilities receive equitable learning opportunities. On the other hand, developing countries like Malaysia face multifaceted challenges. These include:

1. **Policy Gaps and Implementation Issues:** While national policies promote inclusion, their execution is often inconsistent due to limited funding and monitoring mechanisms.
2. **Teacher Preparedness:** Many teachers lack the specialized training needed to accommodate diverse learning needs effectively.
3. **Infrastructure and Resource Constraints:** Schools often lack the physical and technological resources required to support students with disabilities.
4. **Parental Attitudes and Stigma:** Some parents are hesitant to enroll their children in mainstream schools, fearing inadequate support or societal judgment.

These challenges form the basis for this comparative analysis, which examines Malaysia's inclusive education practices in relation to those of developed countries like Finland and Australia and developing nations like China and Egypt. The analysis aims to identify actionable lessons and recommendations to strengthen Malaysia's approach to inclusive education.

By addressing these issues, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on ensuring equitable access to education for all, particularly within the context of developing countries.

Objectives of the Study

The first objective is **to examine Malaysia's inclusive education policy by analysing key frameworks** such as the Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013 and the National Education Blueprint 2013–2025 and assessing their alignment with international standards like Sustainable Development Goal 4. This includes evaluating Malaysia's readiness for policy implementation which focusing on teacher training, infrastructure, and resource allocation and identifying persistent challenges such as inadequate facilities, limited professional development, and socio-cultural stigma that may hinder effective inclusion of students with disabilities.

The second objective is **to analyse inclusive education practices in selected developed countries (such as Finland and Australia) and developing countries (such as China and Egypt)** in order to identify comparative strengths and gaps. This includes

reviewing how inclusive education is implemented in each country, as well as examining the successes and challenges observed across the studied countries. Drawing lessons from these international contexts will provide valuable insights into effective strategies that could be adapted to enhance Malaysia's inclusive education system.

The third objective is **to propose a practical and scalable framework for inclusive education tailored to Malaysia's current capacity and long-term educational goals.**

The model will be grounded in evidence from local policy analysis and international best practices, offering recommendations in areas such as teacher training, individualized education planning, inclusive curricula, and stakeholder engagement. Ultimately, the goal is to support a more equitable and sustainable education system for all learners, especially those with special needs.



Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method, to gain a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education in Malaysia and insights from international practices. The methodology is designed to address the research objectives and ensure reliable, relevant findings. The research follows a comparative case study design, focusing on Malaysia and selected developed and developing countries. This approach allows for in-depth analysis and comparison, identifying Malaysia's current state, challenges, and lessons that can inform a model tailored to its specific needs.

Data was collected through document analysis and secondary sources. The document analysis involved reviewing key materials such as Malaysian policy reports, government publications, and international guidelines on inclusive education. This process provided a foundational understanding of Malaysia's policy framework, current practices, and overall readiness for implementing inclusive education.

In addition, a comparative analysis was conducted using data from both developed and developing countries that have established inclusive education practices. Reports, academic articles, and policy documents from selected countries were reviewed to identify best practices, challenges, and successful strategies. The countries selected for comparison were chosen based on their education systems' maturity and their socioeconomic conditions.

The data gathered was analysed thematically. For qualitative data from document analysis, common themes were identified, including challenges, readiness indicators, and resources required for effective policy implementation.

The methodology outlined enables a comprehensive examination of Malaysia's readiness for inclusive education, the challenges it faces, and lessons from other countries' experiences. Findings from this analysis will contribute to a framework proposal that aligns with Malaysia's unique needs and resources for inclusive education.

CHAPTER 2: POLICIES AND STRATEGIES OF MALAYSIA IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Persons With Disabilities Act 2008 (Act 685)

In order to safeguard the rights and enhance the welfare of people with disabilities (PWDs), Malaysia passed the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (Act 685). Equal rights, non-discrimination, and a more inclusive society for individuals with disabilities were the goals of the Act's implementation.

Section 28, part IV, Chapter 1 state about the access to education for person with disabilities (PWD).

- i. Persons with disabilities shall not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disabilities, and children with disabilities shall not be excluded from pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education, on equal basis with persons or children without disabilities, including vocational training and lifelong learning.
- ii. The Government and private educational providers shall, in order to enable persons and children with disabilities to pursue education, provide reasonable accommodation suitable with the requirements of persons and children with disabilities in terms of, among others, infrastructure, equipment and teaching materials, teaching methods, curricula and other forms of support that meet the diverse needs of persons or children with disabilities.
- iii. The Government and private educational providers shall take appropriate steps and measures to enable persons and children with disabilities to learn life and social development skills in order to facilitate their full and equal participation in education including the following:
 - (a) to facilitate the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;
 - (b) to facilitate the learning of Malaysia Sign Language and the promotion of the linguistics identity of the deaf community; and
 - (c) to ensure that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deaf-blind is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.

National Philosophy of Education, NPE (*Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan*)

A principle known as Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan describes the aims and purposes of education in Malaysia. The goal of NPE is to develop academically, emotionally, spiritually, and physically balanced people. It also places a strong emphasis on helping people reach their full potential so they can contribute positively to society and the nation. The idea of inclusive education is intimately associated with NPE. Regardless of a student's background, aptitude, or special needs, inclusive education places a strong emphasis on giving them an equal and thorough education. The Malaysian NPE has the following connections to inclusive education:

i. Equality in Education

Regardless of a person's race, religion, or social standing, the Malaysian NPE places a strong emphasis on the value of equality in ensuring that all Malaysian residents have access to education. Every student, including those with special needs or disabilities, has the right to receive a high-quality education in an atmosphere similar to that of their peers, according to the inclusive education concept.

ii. Developing Individual Potential Comprehensively

Development of the full potential of each individual (physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual) is one of the fundamental tenets of NPE. Additionally, inclusive education encourages a personalized approach in which every student is valued for who they are and receives the help they need to grow. As a result, children with unique needs or varied backgrounds can realize their full potential in a supportive atmosphere.

iii. Valuing Diversity

There are numerous different races, civilizations, and ethnic groups in Malaysia. In order to provide high-quality education for everyone, NPE also takes this variety into consideration. One initiative to honor this variety by concentrating on students with special needs is inclusive education. Noble ideals like tolerance, acceptance, and harmony among the many social groups are also emphasized by this endeavor.

iv. Education for National Development

In Malaysia's efforts to produce individuals who are knowledgeable, talented and capable of contributing to national development, the potential of all groups must be taken into account. In the context of inclusive education, all students must be given equal opportunities to develop regardless of the shortcomings

and constraints they face. Inclusive education can provide opportunities for every individual to grow and progress, thereby contributing to national development professionally and intellectually.

v. Lifelong Education

Additionally, lifelong learning is mentioned in the NPE. This implies that education happens throughout a person's life and is not restricted to a specific age. This is consistent with the NPE, which is founded on the idea that everyone should have access to educational opportunities, regardless of their age, limitations, or skill level. Everybody has equal access to education and equal opportunity. Lifelong learning gives special education students the chance to develop and gain the skills they will need throughout their lives, even if they require extra support.

Therefore, the National Philosophy of Education, which aims to give all Malaysians a fair, egalitarian, and comprehensive education, is very much in line with inclusive education. Every person, regardless of background or special needs, has the right to high-quality educational opportunities and the capacity to fully grow in a welcoming and encouraging environment.

National Education Policy (*Dasar Pendidikan Kebangsaan, 2017*)

The latest National Education Policy in Malaysia is based on the National Philosophy of Education (NPE) contained in the Education Act 1996. In the National Education Policy, there are three sections that explain about programs for students with special needs (SEN), namely:

- i. Chapter 2: School programs
- ii. Chapter 4: Education Programs (Inclusive Education Programs, IEP)
- iii. Chapter 4: Special Education Integration Programs (*Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi, PPKI*)

School programs

Establishment of Special Education Schools (SES) is a school that provides special education for students with special needs (SEN) at all levels of schooling, namely preschool, primary, secondary and post-secondary.

Table 2.1: Overview of Special Education Schools (SES) under the National Education Policy

1	Teacher Training and Support	i. Ensure the number of teachers is sufficient, trained and skilled in the field of special education. ii. Improve instructional leadership competencies among teachers and school leaders.
2	Resource Allocation	i. Provide access to quality, relevant and appropriate education for SEN. ii. Plan and implement the construction of new or full replacement SES. iii. Provide support services and augmentative and assistive equipment to meet the needs of SEN.
3	Opportunities for SEN	i. Implement early intervention for children with special needs at the preschool level or services at the Special Education Service Center (3PK). ii. Provide equal opportunities to SEN who have the potential to excel in academics. iii. Provide more opportunities to SEN who are inclined in the skilled and vocational fields.
4	Teaching and learning programs	i. Plan programs to improve teaching and learning (PdP) effectiveness. ii. Provide adequate, up-to-date PdP materials that are appropriate to the capabilities and needs of SEN. iii. Evaluate the implementation of PdP including Individual Education Plans (RPI) for SEN. iv. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of special education programs at SPK on an ongoing basis. v. Coordinate the implementation of SEN assessments.

Educational programs (Inclusive Education Programs)

Students with special educational needs (SEN) who attend government or government-aided schools at the preschool, primary, secondary, or post-secondary levels alongside other students in the same class are enrolled in the Inclusive Education Program (IEP). SEN students are enrolled in both fully and partially inclusive classes under the Inclusive Education Program. All government and government-aided schools are capable of implementing full inclusion. In fully inclusive classrooms, students with special education needs (SEN) study with mainstream students full-time in all subjects

according to the national curriculum or its modified version, with or without support services. Only schools with PPKI are able to adopt partial inclusion.

In courses that are only partially inclusive, SEN students take one or more topics with regular students. SEN children who regularly participate in co-curricular activities with normal students are also regarded as somewhat inclusive. With little to no help from support services, SEN adheres to partial inclusion for academic topics based on the national curriculum or the adapted national curriculum.

Statement of policy: The goal of the inclusive education program is to guarantee that students with special education needs (SEN) have equal access to education in a barrier-free setting, can adjust to mainstream students to enhance their everyday life skills, develop self-confidence to reach their full potential, and ultimately raise school and community members' awareness and acceptance of the diverse abilities of SEN.

Table 2.2: Overview of Special Education Needs (SEN) under the Inclusive Education Program (IEP)

1	Teacher Training and Support	i. Ensure that the willingness of administrators and mainstream teachers to accept SEN to IEP is increased through relevant training and exposure.
2	Resource Allocation	i. Ensure that schools provide disabilities-friendly facilities and a conducive environment to support SEN learning in inclusive classes.
3	Opportunities for SEN	ii. Identify, conduct early SEN interventions and provide appropriate support to SENs who are in IEP. iii. Ensure that the number of PPKI SENs enrolled in full and partial IEP increases. iv. Ensure that IEP SENs are given appropriate support according to need.
4	Teaching and learning programs	i. Ensure that IEP is implemented based on the established guidelines.
5	Cultural and Societal Attitudes	i. Implement an integrated program to increase awareness about SEN involving school staff and the local community.

Special Education Integration Program (*Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi, PPKI*)

Students with special educational needs (SEN) who attend government or government-aided schools in special courses can benefit from the Special Education Integration Program.

Policy statement: The goal of the Special Education Integration Program is to give SEN students access to high-quality, pertinent, and appropriate education so they can grow in their abilities, interests, and potential. It also aims to enhance their social skills so they can lead fulfilling lives.

2.3: Overview of the Special Education Integration Program (PPKI)

1	Teacher Training and Support	i. Improve instructional leadership competencies among PPKI teachers and school leaders. ii. Ensure that there are sufficient, trained and skilled Special Education teachers and Student Management Assistants (PPM) in the field of special education.
2	Resource Allocation	i. Ensure implementation standards by taking into account leadership, management, curriculum, co-curricular, student affairs, teaching and learning and student development holistically through the PPKI star rating instrument assessment. ii. Provide support services for the needs of students with special needs.
3	Opportunities for SEN	i. Implement early intervention for children with special needs at the preschool level through services at the Special Education Service Center (3PK) or the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH).
4	Teaching and learning programs	i. Ensure implementation based on the PPKI operational guidelines. ii. Ensure implementation of a flexible, relevant and high-quality curriculum. iii. plan, manage, monitor, supervise and control the implementation of PPKI on an ongoing basis.
5	Cultural and Societal Attitudes	i. Increase community awareness about special education and SEN.

Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025

The public's involvement and contribution to the advancement of special education shall be encouraged. Through the 2013–2025 Education Blueprint, the Ministry of Education pledges to incorporate more students with special needs into the inclusive education program, in accordance with international best practices and the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. This change in schooling will occur in three waves over a period of 13 years. Enhancing programs for groups with particular needs, such as indigenous and other minority groups, gifted people, and people with special needs, is one of the items that is prioritized in wave 2 (2016–2020).

According to shift 9 of the strategy, the ministry intends to work at scale with the community, parents, and business sector to extend the Trust School model to 500 schools by 2025. Potential sponsors include alumni associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There will be more opportunities for business and social sector organizations to participate in the process of school reform. This will be accomplished through the Trust Schools program's extension, which allows a private sponsor to collaborate with school administration to run a school.

A pilot program that began in 2010 has shown encouraging first results, and the Ministry plans to increase both the number and kind of participating schools. Expanding the initiative to include schools that serve additional communities with distinct needs, such as indigenous and minority groups, students with special needs, and remote schools, holds exceptional promise, according to the Ministry.

The Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 outlines that the special education system in Malaysia can be divided into five dimensions:

- i. early detection, intervention and healthcare support;
- ii. curriculum flexibility, relevance and quality;
- iii. teachers and experts;
- iv. infrastructure and finance; and
- v. public awareness and engagement.

1) Inclusive Education Program Guidelines for Pupils with Special Needs (*Garis Panduan Program Pendidikan Inklusif Murid Berkeperluan Khas*)

In order to guarantee that students with special needs are provided equal opportunities to learn alongside other students in an inclusive setting, the Ministry of Education Malaysia issued a set of rules and guidelines known as the Guidelines for the Inclusive Education Programme for Students with Special Needs (Special Education) in 2013. Inclusive Education Program Guidelines for Pupils with Special Needs) was first introduced as a trial or initial edition in 2013, as part of Malaysia's broader inclusive education initiative under the MEB 2013–2025. Regardless of a student's background or unique needs, the program seeks to promote a more inclusive learning environment and offer equitable opportunities to all. The Guidelines for the Inclusive Education Program for Special Needs Pupils contain procedures and guidance for all parties involved in the implementation of the Inclusive Education Program at school. The objectives of the Inclusive Education Program Guidelines for Pupils with Special Needs are to implement IEP (inclusive education program) in a systematic and coordinated manner throughout the country and also as reference to individuals who implement *Program Pendidikan Inklusif*, IEP.

The main aspects of these guidelines include:

- i. Inclusive education principles: which state that all students have the opportunity to receive an equal education, without discrimination. In addition, the principles of inclusive education also value diversity and acknowledge and respect the diversity of students and utilize the strengths of each individual. In addition, the provision of different teaching and learning approaches must be implemented based on the special needs of students.
- ii. Role of Schools and Teachers: Schools are responsible for providing appropriate facilities and providing training for teachers and staff to assist students with special needs. Meanwhile, teachers must receive training and guidance in handling the needs of students with special needs, including appropriate teaching techniques and ways to communicate with them effectively.
- iii. Inclusive Curriculum: Students' needs and skill levels must be taken into account when designing the curriculum. This indicates that certain curricular components have been altered to give every student access to learning opportunities. Every student has different demands, and the curriculum must take into account these differences and offer a flexible approach that prioritizes the needs of the individual student.

- iv. **Assessment and Needs Confirmation:** To determine the kind of special needs a student has, an initial assessment must be conducted. An evaluation by a psychologist, special education professional, or other expert may be required for this. Continuous monitoring of students in inclusive education programs is necessary to track their progress and determine whether the teaching methodology needs to be modified. The parties concerned must maintain records and keep an eye on things constantly.
- v. **Support & Support Services:** To aid in their development, students with special needs may require the assistance of therapists in the form of speech, physical, or psychological therapy. Support and psychosocial therapy are crucial for promoting their growth. Additionally, individuals with specific learning challenges can benefit from the usage of educational technology. For instance, making use of assistive technology like computers, educational software, or screen readers.
- vi. **Accessible Environments:** Schools must have the infrastructure necessary to enable students with special needs to enter the building in a secure and comfortable manner. This covers the use of assistive technology, access to important amenities and other modified facilities, and the provision of suitable and cozy classrooms.
- vii. **Collaboration with Parents and the Community:** To guarantee that kids' needs are consistently met, inclusive education necessitates strong partnerships between educators, parents, and the community. Opportunities for parental involvement in their children's social and academic growth must be provided.
- viii. **Training and Professional Development for Teachers:** To guarantee that they possess the information and abilities required to instruct students with special needs, teachers must receive continual professional training. Curriculum adaption, classroom management, and inclusive teaching strategies are all covered in this course.

2) Guidelines for Special Education Learning Support Equipment and Materials (*Garis Panduan Peralatan Dan Bahan Sokongan Pembelajaran Pendidikan Khas, GP PBSPPK*)

Under the MEB (infrastructure and finance, dimension 4), the Ministry of Education Malaysia has issued The Guidelines for Special Education Learning Support Equipment and Materials (GP PBSPPK) which aims to provide guidance in identifying and determining appropriate equipment and support materials for students with special educational needs (SEN). The goal of the GP PBSPPK is to provide quality education in line with the MEB. In addition, it also aims to increase

the potential of students with special needs and the effectiveness of teaching and learning (T&L) through the use of appropriate technology, equipment, and support materials.

The GP PBSPPK is used as a reference by educators and relevant parties to ensure that the equipment and support materials provided are in line with the individual needs of SEN. It can also help teachers achieve the planned PdP objectives more effectively and systematically. GP PBSPPK also aims to enhance the students' developmental capabilities in the areas of cognition, language, speech, social interaction, emotional regulation, and motor skills.

The guideline also outlines the provision of special education learning support equipment and materials according to specific disability categories. It provides detailed information on the types of equipment, their intended purpose and justification, technical specifications, as well as recommended ratios between students and equipment, and spatial requirements for their effective use.

Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013 (*Peraturan-Peraturan Pendidikan (Pendidikan Khas) 2013*)

The Ministry of Education Malaysia established the Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013 to establish criteria for the country's special education implementation. It is a legal document enforced under the Education Act 1996. The goal is to guarantee that kids who need extra help such as those with physical, intellectual, or other special learning needs to get a suitable and high-quality education. Some of the key elements of the 2013 Education (Special Education) Regulations are as follows:

- i. Definition of Special Education: Special Education refers to education provided for students who have special needs, whether due to physical, intellectual, or other learning needs that require a different approach, curriculum, or instruction than that received by regular students.
- ii. Special Education Students: This rule lays forth the standards and prerequisites for students who qualify for special education. Students with autism, learning challenges, vision issues, hearing issues, and other disabilities are included in this.
- iii. Special Education Curriculum: In accordance with this rule, special education must be customized to meet each student's unique needs. Different curricula are employed, some of which may not be the same as the national curriculum followed in conventional schools. Making sure special needs kids can follow their learning according to their capacities is the goal.
- iv. Provision of Facilities: In order to support kids with special needs, special education schools need to have the right facilities. This includes instructional aids, a cozy classroom, and other amenities required to guarantee equal access to education.

- v. **Teacher Training:** To effectively work with pupils who have a range of special needs, teachers in special education classrooms need to receive the necessary training. This training gives them the ability to plan and implement effective teaching.
- vi. **Psychosocial Support:** In addition to academic support, special education considers students' psychosocial requirements, such as social development, therapy, and emotional support to help them adjust to the classroom setting.
- vii. **Assessment and Needs Verification:** To make sure that the student's needs are appropriately identified, the process of confirming special education needs involves assessment and verification by trained experts including psychologists, therapists, and others.
- viii. **Implementation in Schools:** By creating a friendly and inclusive atmosphere and adhering to the ministry's instructions, special education schools are required to put these regulations into practice.

In keeping with Malaysia's inclusive education policy, this rule seeks to guarantee that special needs kids receive an equitable and excellent education. This indicates that they have an equal chance to flourish and achieve success in the nation's educational system.



Issues Regarding Inclusive Education

- **Insufficient Teacher Training**

Despite efforts to provide professional development, there is still a shortage of adequately trained special education teachers in Malaysia. This is partly due to the high demand for specialized educators and the complexities involved in teaching students with diverse disabilities. Insufficiently trained educators could lack the specialized knowledge or comprehension of many disorders, including autism, dyslexia, and ADHD. It becomes difficult to identify students' needs and put into practice efficient learning support solutions without this knowledge.

The incapacity of educators to employ specialized teaching techniques is another problem. Students with special disabilities may need specialized instructional methods. Differentiated education, assistive technology, and behaviour management techniques that teachers may not be equipped to implement are a few examples of these approaches. These students might not get the specialized care they need without such training.

Another issue is related to the government's efforts to assist these disabled people through vocational learning. The Curriculum Development Division of the Ministry of Education of Malaysia has prepared vocational education plans, especially in the Specific Vocational Skills (KVS) subjects for the Integrated Curriculum for Special Education Secondary Schools which has been established since 2017 (Ministry of Education of Malaysia, Special Education Circular Letter No. 9, 2016). Various vocational fields have been introduced and selected by the Special Education Integration Program (PPKI) for students with moderate functioning to meet the requirements for the implementation of the Standard Curriculum for Special Education Secondary Schools (KSSMPK).

This effort could not be carried out completely and smoothly because special education teachers engaging in vocational education lack the necessary specialist knowledge because they have not received technical and vocational education training (Noraini, 2013). Most special education teachers for learning disabilities do not have the skills or do not have the relevant certificates to teach. There are constraints in providing trained teachers to teach MBPK in technical subjects (Faridah et al., 2014). The problem faced by PPKI teachers is that they do not have the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM) qualification to qualify them to conduct MBPK skills assessment before the students concerned receive the SKM certificate. The objectives, concepts, elements, criteria, and learning outcomes of the Malaysian Skills Certificate must be taught by instructors who possess the necessary knowledge and abilities (Samiran et al., 2024).

- **Resource Allocation**

Resource allocation for special needs schools in Malaysia is a critical aspect of providing quality education for students with disabilities. The allocation process involves financial, human, and material resources, ensuring that students with special needs have access to appropriate support and facilities.

- i. Inadequate funding for inclusive education.
Despite efforts to promote diversity, financing for inclusive education is typically insufficient. Schools require additional resources to accommodate diverse learners, yet many struggle due to financial constraints. The main funding challenges are:
 - a) Limited government budget: The Malaysian government provides financing for inclusive education. However, a large percentage is devoted to general education rather than addressing SEN requirements.
 - b) High cost of assistive technology: The expense of assistive technology is high. Braille machines, screen readers, hearing aids, and speech-to-text devices are expensive tools that poor schools struggle to supply.
 - c) Inadequate special education grants: Special education programs in regular schools frequently receive insufficient funding to fulfil the unique needs of kids with disabilities.
- ii. Inadequate infrastructure and educational materials
Schools require enough infrastructure to accommodate pupils with various requirements, yet many Malaysian schools lack key facilities, including:
 - a) Accessible school buildings: Many schools lack ramps, elevators, and accessible facilities, making it difficult for students with physical disabilities to move around freely.
 - b) Specialized classrooms and resource centers: Sensory rooms, therapy areas, and dedicated resource centers are not available in all schools for students with learning difficulties.
 - c) Limited availability of learning materials: Braille textbooks, large-print books, and digital learning tools for students with visual and hearing impairments are frequently unavailable.

- **Cultural and Societal Attitudes**

Attitudes toward disabilities differ across cultures. Negative perceptions can lead to bullying, social exclusion, and isolation for individuals with disabilities. Conversely, positive societal attitudes promote inclusion and enhance the well-being of these individuals. The perception of disability as an 'out-group' issue often exacerbates social divides, making it essential to address these biases through education and exposure.

A variety of variables can contribute to the development and persistence of unfavourable attitudes toward disability. These include:

- i. A lack of understanding and awareness of disability.
- ii. Misconceptions or societal constructions about the causes of impairments.
- iii. Negative media coverage spreads misinformation and lacks sensitivity.
- iv. Law and policy can reinforce prejudice and anxieties about disability, perpetuating harmful views.

Stigma

Negative attitudes and incorrect views regarding disability can lead to stigma, which is defined as a quality possessed by a person or group that is considered undesirable or discreditable. Stigma frequently reduces the status of people with disabilities and their families in the community. For students with disabilities, this societal stigma will affect them in the school environment. This will cause them to lack self-confidence in mixing with other students at school. This will affect their social life.

Discrimination

Stigma can lead to discrimination against a person with a disability, a family member, or someone who knows a person with a disability. Discrimination on the basis of disability is defined by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on disability that has the purpose or effect of impeding or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of all human rights on an equal basis with others. It encompasses all forms of disability discrimination and is defined broadly to include not only discrimination faced by people with disabilities, but also by others linked with them, such as family members and other caregivers.

As a result of stigma and discrimination, people with disabilities may encounter exclusion and demeaning treatment in all aspects of their lives, including the workplace, health-care facilities, and educational institutions. Negative opinions in society can also cause feelings of shame in families who may hide their disabled child from public view. Therefore, these children will not receive the education they deserve. They cannot continue their studies even though they have potential.

Despite the clear advantages of inclusive education and social inclusion, children with impairments are not always embraced by their typically developing classmates. Across cultures, children with disabilities face unfavorable attitudes, bullying, social rejection, and isolation. Socially excluded children may have unsatisfying peer relationships, low self-esteem, and a lack of accomplishment drive, which affects their social and academic areas of life, mental health, and overall well-being.

- **Successes and Challenges**

Approximately 6,404 primary and secondary schools are reported to implement the Inclusive Education Program; however, the extent of implementation varies significantly across schools, often depending on local leadership and resources. The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025 emphasizes the importance of inclusive education, targeting a 75% enrolment of special needs students in inclusive programs by 2025. As of recent reports, only about 6% of special needs students are currently placed in inclusive settings.

Based on Annual Report of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, in 2023, a total of 113,186 students with special educational needs (MBPK) were registered under Special Education Schools (SPK), Special Education Integrated Programmes (PPKI), and Inclusive Education Programmes (PPI) across Malaysia. Of this number, 101,741 SEN (89.89%) were enrolled in PPI, compared to 53,818 SEN (60.87%) in 2019, reflecting a significant increase of 29.02 percentage points. This initiative supports the objectives of the Inclusive Education Policy, which aims to ensure greater participation of SEN in PPI through meaningful engagement with their peers in mainstream classrooms.

The development of specialized training modules for teachers in special education is a crucial step toward enhancing the quality of education delivered, serving as additional pedagogical resources for special education teachers. These four training modules are designed to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to support more effective teaching and learning (PdP) for students with special educational needs. The development of these modules has been carried out continuously by the Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia (IPGM) to meet this objective. The four training modules are as follows:

- i. Orientation and Mobility Training Module
- ii. Braille Literacy and Braille Reading Skills Training Module
- iii. Tactile Graphics Construction Training Module

- iv. Maximum Support Intervention Training Module for Students with Special Educational Needs.

In terms of the employability of students with SEN, reports indicate an increase of 1.87 percent in 2023, with 71.14 percent compared to 69.27 percent in 2022.

Challenges In Implementing Inclusive Education

Malaysia has made significant strides in promoting inclusive education for students with special needs, driven by national policies and frameworks aimed at integrating these students into mainstream classrooms. In implementing policies and guidelines planned by the government, various challenges are faced, especially in establishing the best learning system, trained and skilled teachers, teaching and learning facilities and equipment. In addition to problems related to learning centers, problems regarding public perception and attitudes also need to be faced.

Table 2.4: Overview of the Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education in Malaysia

No	Theme/Aspect	Challenges
1	Teachers	i. Lack of knowledge and training ii. Same teaching methods and techniques (less efficient) iii. Lack of staff members iv. Teachers lack of knowledge and skills about special education and pupils with special educational needs (SEN).
2	Students with Special Educational Need (SEN)	i. Uncontrollable and predictable behavior such as bullying classmates ii. student's behavioral problem iii. student's cognitive problem
3	Parents	i. Lack of confidence that teachers can teach
4	System	i. A large number of students to be taught at one time ii. Difficulties of integration and program implementation iii. Miscommunication between departments (basically between administrators and practitioners (teachers)) iv. Educational system (referring to the blueprint itself, there is no clear basic direction) v. early intervention program and accredited examination vi. lacking in provision of appropriate teaching materials

5	Facilities and equipment	i. Unconducive classroom or school facilities ii. Insufficient and incomplete teaching equipment (SEN require different teaching aids and materials to support their learning needs) iii. Lack of financial support iv. Insufficient teaching resources
6	Perception and Attitudes	i. Teacher's negative attitude ii. Sociocultural attitudes to disabilities iii. incorrect conceptualization or understanding on the terms of disability,

Government Efforts to Handle Issues Regarding Inclusive Education

In addressing problems related to teaching staff, the government has conducted training, set standards and competencies that special education teachers must possess. In addition, there are also initiatives and programs launched by the government to assist in the teaching and learning of special education.

Trainings

Therefore, a variety of trainings have been held to address issue with teacher's performance. These include:

i. In-Service Professional Development

Workshops and Seminars: The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with universities and non-governmental organizations, conducts workshops and seminars for teachers in special education. These often focus on new methodologies, teaching tools, and strategies to assist students with various disabilities. Collaboration with hospitals and higher learning institutions. For example, occupational therapy training and various other techniques to handle students with special needs. This program aims to guide and train special education teachers in implementing structured occupational therapy activities to help students with physical and cognitive problems in addition to increasing students' self-confidence through activities.

On-the-Job Training: Under the guidance of senior educators, special education instructors gain practical experience in specialized classrooms. Additionally, they receive training on how to facilitate students' learning through the use of resources and assistive technologies.

Inclusive Education Training: Teachers are trained in inclusive education practices to help them manage classrooms with both special needs and general

education students. This includes differentiation strategies, classroom management techniques, and peer-to-peer support systems.

ii. Collaboration with Parents and Other Professionals

Parent Involvement: To maintain consistency across the home and classroom settings, training frequently covers methods for collaborating with parents and other caregivers.

Multidisciplinary Teams: To build a comprehensive approach to a child's development, teachers are taught to collaborate with various experts, including occupational therapists, psychologists, and speech therapists.

iii. Specialized Skills Development

In overcoming the problem of lack of teacher expertise in specialized knowledge or comprehension of many disorders, teachers also need to learn how to identify and manage different types of disabilities, including:

- a. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- b. Down syndrome
- c. Hearing and visual impairments
- d. Learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia)
- e. Intellectual disabilities
- f. Physical disabilities

Training in various teaching strategies is provided, such as applied behaviour analysis (ABA), sensory integration techniques, and the use of assistive devices and technology.

iv. Certification and Accreditation

The Ministry of Education has set standards for special education teachers, including certification and periodic assessments. Teachers need to meet specific qualifications to teach in special education settings, and professional certification is often required for higher teaching positions. This is including the certification from higher learning institutions whether degree or diploma programs.

- a. Bachelor's Degree in Special Education: Institutions like Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and Universiti Malaya (UM) offer undergraduate programs that specialize in training special education teachers. These programs typically include courses on child development, psychology, teaching strategies, and behavior management for students with various disabilities.
- b. Diploma in Special Education: Some colleges offer diploma-level programs, which provide specialized training for teachers in handling

students with autism, intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and physical disabilities.

Digital Initiatives for Inclusive Education in Malaysia

The digital initiatives in inclusive education are part of the Malaysian government's attempts to ensure that students with special educational needs (SEN) have access to high-quality education via technology. These projects aim to improve learning outcomes for students with dyslexia, autism, hearing impairments, visual impairments, and physical disabilities by creating a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

There are four key components of Digital Initiatives for Inclusive Education

- i. Development of Digital Learning Materials
 - a) Digital textbooks for special education. It includes interactive, audio, and braille digital textbooks.
 - b) Educational apps and software. For example, reading and writing application for dyslexic students.
 - c) Educational videos with sign language that supporting hearing-impaired students.
- ii. Use of Assistive Technology in Learning
 - a) Smart devices and tablets provided to SEN students through specific programs.
 - b) Screen reader software that can help visually impaired students read digital texts.
 - c) Hearing aids and audio descriptive tools. It can be used in lessons for students with hearing impairments.
 - d) Braille e-book and digital braille display that supports blind students in digital learning.
 - e) Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). Both AR and VR can be used for interactive learning among autistic and cognitively impaired students.
- iii. Online Learning Platforms
 - a) DELIMa (Digital Educational Learning Initiative Malaysia) implemented starting in 2020 until now. Provides digital learning resources for special education.
 - b) e-Guru and massive open online course (MOOC) for special education. Online training for teachers teaching SEN students.
 - c) Educational TV Programs (DidikTV). Special segments for students with disabilities.

- iv. Training for Teachers and Parents on Digital Technology
 - a. Special education teacher training courses to enhance digital teaching skills for SEN students.
 - b. Parental support programs to help parents assist their children in using digital learning tools at home.

Collaboration with NGOs & International Organizations

The Malaysian government has collaborated extensively with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foreign organizations to improve inclusive education for children with special needs. These collaborations support policy development, teacher training, resource allocation, and awareness initiatives.

- i. UNICEF Malaysia (United Nations Children's Fund)

UNICEF plays a crucial role in advocating for inclusive education by working with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and NGOs to improve policies, school environments, and public awareness. UNICEF organizes workshops for teachers on how to handle students with disabilities in mainstream schools. Besides that, they also provide training materials on inclusive teaching strategies and assistive technology use. For public awareness campaigns, they conduct advocacy programs to reduce stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities. UNICEF also launched the "Education for Every Child" campaign, highlighting the importance of equal learning opportunities.
- ii. NASOM (National Autism Society of Malaysia)

NASOM is one of Malaysia's leading NGOs focused on autism education and support. NASOM provides early intervention programs (EIP) and therapy for children with autism to prepare them for mainstream education and also works with schools to develop Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for autistic students. They also conduct workshop and provide training for teacher and parents of autistic children on how to support children with autism in regular classrooms.
- iii. MAB (Malaysian Association for the Blind)

MAB focuses on educational accessibility for visually impaired students. MAB creates and distributes Braille textbooks and audio learning materials for pupils, and works with the government to equip schools with assistive technology such as screen readers. They also conduct teacher training courses in Braille literacy and instructional methodologies for blind students. Aside from that, MAB offers mobility training to help pupils navigate educational environments independently. They collaborate with vocational training schools to prepare visually impaired pupils for future jobs.
- iv. Dyslexia Association of Malaysia (Persatuan Dyslexia Malaysia, PDM)

PDM aims to assist students with dyslexia in overcoming learning challenges. PDM collaborates with public schools to offer dyslexia screening and early diagnosis. PDM also assists in providing multi-sensory teaching methods, such as phonics-based learning, to children with dyslexia. They also help to modify exam formats to accommodate students with dyslexia.

International partnership

- i. UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization)
UNESCO collaborates with Malaysia's Ministry of Education to create inclusive education policies that line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 - Quality Education). They encourage study on best practices in inclusive education and how to incorporate students with disabilities into normal classrooms.
- ii. WORLD BANK
Provides money and expertise to strengthen special education teacher training programs, as well as research on how Malaysia may increase access to inclusive education in rural areas.
- iii. ASEAN NETWORK FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
Malaysia engages in regional discussions regarding the best practices for inclusive education in Southeast Asia. This network also aspires to share information and receive technical support from countries with advanced inclusive education approaches, such as Singapore and Thailand.

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY– LESSONS LEARNED FROM DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Developed Countries (Finland and Australia)

Introduction

Inclusive education in developed countries emphasizes the integration of all students, regardless of their abilities, into mainstream education systems to promote equal opportunities and a sense of belonging. Finland and Australia, as representatives of developed nations, have implemented distinct approaches to inclusive education, reflecting their cultural, social, and policy frameworks.

In Finland, the term "child with special educational needs (SEN)" has been replaced with "child with a need for special support," reflecting a more inclusive approach. Children requiring special support are identified through a pedagogical process, with decisions typically made by school principals (Act on Basic Education, 1998). In many cases, this designation involves official transfer to "special support," allowing students to receive

instruction from special education teachers (Saloviita, 2020). Similarly, in Australia, approximately 4.5% of children have intellectual disabilities, with other prevalent disabilities including sensory and speech (3.1%), psychosocial (2.7%), and physical disabilities (1.8%) (ABS, 2019). Among school-aged children with disabilities, 86% attend mainstream schools, with 19% placed in special classes within these schools (AIHW, 2019).

In both contexts, special education often entails placement in specialized classrooms within mainstream schools. For example, during the 2015–2016 academic year, 7.3% of Finnish students received special support (Statistics Finland, 2016). While Finland employs a structured process for determining support needs, Australia has adopted a 10-year Inclusive Education Plan developed collaboratively with people with disabilities, experts, and advocates (Cologon, 2019). This plan underscores the principle that every child, regardless of ability, has the right to be fully included as a valued learner in general education.

Despite these initiatives, significant challenges remain. Finnish students designated for special support are integrated into mainstream environments, but the system's effectiveness varies. In Australia, students with disabilities face markedly poorer educational outcomes compared to their peers. Only one-third of individuals with disabilities aged 20 or older have completed Year 12, compared to 62% of those without disabilities. These disparities highlight the ongoing need for improvement in inclusive education across both countries.

Therefore, this discussion will center on four fundamental aspects of inclusive education in Finland and Australia includes teacher training and support, resource allocation, cultural and societal attitudes, and the successes and challenges faced by both countries.

Comparative Analysis of Inclusive Education in Finland and Australia

- **Teacher and Training Support**

Finland places a strong emphasis on comprehensive teacher education, mandating that all teachers obtain a master's degree, which encompasses training in special education and inclusive teaching methodologies. In Finland, a master's degree is a prerequisite for teacher qualification across all educational levels. This means that 100% of teachers in Finland hold at least a master's degree.

This high standard of education for teachers reflects Finland's commitment to maintaining a well-qualified teaching workforce. The rigorous training ensures that teachers are well-prepared to provide quality education to students. It's worth noting that the teaching profession in Finland is highly selective and respected. Gaining

admission to teacher education programs is competitive, often more so than fields like medicine or law (Muhonen, 2017).

In Finland, continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers is a fundamental aspect of maintaining high educational standards. While there is no specific legislation governing CPD, teachers are obligated to participate in training for one to five days annually, as stipulated by relevant statutes and collective agreements.

This training is conducted with full salary benefits, and employers have the authority to assign training to full-time teachers and determine acceptable programs. The primary responsibility for organizing and funding CPD lies with education providers, such as municipalities. Employers typically organize and fund their staff's professional development, including in-service training. Regional authorities and the National Board of Education also provide in-service training.

Moreover, the continuous professional development (CPD) programs for teachers, including those focusing on inclusive education and teaching students with special needs, are designed to align with Finland's commitment to equity in education. While general CPD programs focus on pedagogical skills and curriculum development, specific programs and policies cater to the unique requirements of inclusive education. Programs and Policies for Inclusive Education:

i. Teacher Education for Special Needs (SEN) Teachers:

Teachers specializing in special education receive additional training to address the needs of students with learning difficulties, disabilities, or other challenges. Master's degree programs in special education are common, preparing educators for the inclusive classroom environment.

ii. Learning Support and Special Needs Teacher Programs

Finland offers targeted training for learning support and resource teachers who assist general teachers in managing inclusive classrooms. Programs focus on understanding diverse learning abilities, inclusive teaching methods, and individualized education planning (IEP).

iii. National Core Curriculum

Inclusive education is embedded in the national core curriculum, which requires teachers to adapt their teaching methods to cater to all students, including those with special needs. CPD programs often provide updates on changes to the curriculum and training on implementing inclusive practices.

iv. *Projects and Initiatives*

KiVa Program: A research-based program designed to prevent bullying and promote inclusion, ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, feel safe and valued in schools. Accessible Learning Environments Initiative: A government-funded program to train teachers on creating physically and emotionally accessible classrooms for students with special needs.

v. *Collaborative Learning and School-Based Training*

Teachers participate in collaborative CPD activities, such as peer learning and workshops, focused on inclusive education strategies. In-service training often includes case studies and practical solutions for handling diverse classroom dynamics.

vi. *Multi-Disciplinary Support Teams*

Training programs include modules on working with psychologists, counselors, and social workers to create holistic support plans for students with special needs.



Overall, some general CPD programs overlap with inclusive education themes, Finland ensures that teachers receive specialized training to meet the unique needs of special education students, aligning with the nation's inclusive education policies.

Meanwhile in Australia, there is a significant focus on professional development aimed at inclusive education. Various training programs are designed to equip teachers with the necessary skills to effectively manage diverse classrooms.

The Australian Curriculum is inherently inclusive, ensuring that students with disabilities have access to rigorous and engaging learning opportunities equivalent to their peers. Tools like the ABLES assessment and reporting suite are utilized in regions south Australia to help educators align student capabilities with learning progressions and the curriculum, particularly in areas like English and personal and social capabilities.

The following guiding principles, based on the Australian Disability Standards for Education (2005), underpin the Australian government's guidance on planning personalised learning and support in schools. The priority of inclusion for all children is also explicit in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers across a number of focus areas, in particular: Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities, strategies to support full participation of students with disability and support student participation (AITSL 2011). All teachers are adequately prepared to support inclusive education.

According to the NCCD nearly one in five (19.9 percent) school students across Australia received an adjustment due to disability in 2019 (DESE 2020). As such, it is clear that inclusive education and supporting students with disability in schools and classrooms is a priority for all educators in Australia. Students with disability are taught in a variety of contexts depending on the best interests of the student to ensure they can participate in a range of educational opportunities includes specialist schools, specialist classes/units in mainstream schools and within mainstream classes in mainstream schools (Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability 2020).

Despite these initiatives, challenges persist in Australia. There are reports on teacher preparedness across different states, and some regions face shortages of special education teachers, which can hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices. These disparities highlight the need for a more cohesive national strategy to ensure that all teachers are adequately prepared to support inclusive education.

The responsibility for educating a student with disability is one shared by the student's teachers, school and support systems. As part of implementing agreed plans and adjustments teachers are involved in the granular, day-to-day cycle of planning, teaching and monitoring their student's progress. Since students come to the

classroom with a diverse range of learning needs, teachers need a rich set of strategies to draw upon to meet these needs. The following set of strategies can be used to support delivery and instruction for students with disability.

Teaching strategies that prove effective for students with intellectual restrictions or learning difficulties are in fact strategies that are effective for all students. For example, teachers may work with smaller groups or even one-on-one to enable specific targets to be set for each student, to deliver explicit instruction, and provide plenty of drill and practice for foundational concepts. The government also provides various of supporting materials and guidelines for the teacher:

- The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education commissioned an online inclusion toolkit for educators on topics including: creating an inclusive class culture, supporting peer connection, including ALL students in the same curriculum, and behaviour support in the inclusive classroom.
- A package of e-learning lessons on the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, with a focus on the Disability Standards for Education 2005. The modules were funded by Australian governments and are delivered on the NCCD site. Teachers register using their school email address.
- Many Australian jurisdictions subscribe to this library of online supported learning modules for their teachers who can register for courses including Personalised learning, Understanding hearing loss, Speech, language and communication needs, and Dyspraxia. There are several free short e-learning courses for parents.

In summary, while both Finland and Australia prioritize teacher training and support for inclusive education, Finland's centralized and comprehensive approach contrasts with Australia's varied regional strategies, leading to differences in the effectiveness of inclusive educational practices between the two countries.

- **Resource Allocation**

Finland known for its equitable resource allocation, Finland ensures that schools have the necessary tools, staff, and funding to support inclusive practices. Resources are decentralized, allowing schools autonomy to allocate resources based on specific needs. This model provides flexibility for schools to design individualized learning plans, support services, and adapt curriculum materials.

Finland's education system is primarily publicly funded, with municipalities responsible for providing resources to schools, including those for special needs education. The Finnish National Agency for Education offers additional funding to support inclusive practices, such as special needs grants for higher education exchange programmes. Furthermore, students with special educational needs (SEN) are entitled to various

support services, including part-time and full-time special education, learning instruments, and assistant services, all tailored through personal education plans (Lempinen, 2017).

Next, Australia's funding model for inclusive education varies by state, and there are challenges in ensuring equitable distribution. While some schools are well-resourced, others face funding gaps that impact the quality of support. The Australian government has committed significant funds towards supporting individuals with disabilities. Notably, a \$42 million investment was announced for a national autism strategy aimed at improving life outcomes for autistic individuals, including \$20 million for peer support programs and \$12.2 million for research on neurodiversity. Despite these investments, there are ongoing challenges related to funding allocations. Disagreements between federal and state governments have led to delays in implementing school reforms and funding agreements, affecting the timely provision of resources for inclusive education.

Additionally, an Individual Education Plans (IEP) is a written statement that describes the adjustments, goals and strategies to meet a student's individual educational needs so they can reach their full potential. An IEP is required for students receiving funding through the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD). IEPs are also recommended for students with additional needs who require extra support with their education.

At the national level, the annual Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD 2020a) collects information about Australian school students who receive an adjustment to address disability. This data collection takes a strengths-based approach to supporting resource allocation for students with disability.

The NCCD asks schools to consider the needs of their students and to collect evidence of the level of adjustments they make to provide for their students' needs, as well as providing information about the broad categories of students' disabilities (physical, cognitive, sensory or social/emotional). This allows schools to better plan for and support teachers across the school to personalise learning for their students. Since 2018 the NCCD has helped the Australian Government distribute funding by using these data to inform the disability loading provided to schools. There are ongoing discussions to reform the national funding model to ensure resources better reach students with disabilities.

- **Cultural and Societal Attitudes**

According to a recent UNICEF report, there are nearly 240 million children around the world with disabilities, and children with special needs are subject to more discrimination because of their differences. Compared to their counterparts without disabilities, they are 41% more likely to be discriminated against and 51% more likely to

feel unhappy. They are also 25% less likely to attend early childhood education and 49% more likely to have never attended school. (UNICEF, 2024).

In Finland, the education system is geared toward inclusion and only children with the most severe special needs have separate classrooms or schools. While a fully inclusive classroom is not a possibility for educators everywhere, approaching special needs with an open mind leads to better outcomes. Indeed, research shows that teachers with a positive attitude toward inclusion have greater success at adapting to the needs of all students in their classroom. Finnish society generally embraces an inclusive approach, with a strong focus on equality and social cohesion, which is embedded in its education policies. Inclusive education is widely accepted as a societal value. The community and families typically support inclusion, and stigma around disabilities is relatively low.

Finnish parents generally support inclusive education, recognizing its benefits for both children with and without special needs. They value the social interactions and learning opportunities that inclusive settings provide. Despite overall support, some parents express concerns about the adequacy of resources and teacher preparedness to meet diverse needs in inclusive classrooms. Ensuring individualized attention remains a priority for these parents.

Meanwhile for Australia, attitudes toward inclusion in Australia vary, with a commitment to inclusion recognized in law but implementation sometimes hindered by community attitudes or misconceptions about disability. There is a growing recognition of the need for inclusive education in Australia. The national autism strategy includes \$915,000 allocated for increasing community awareness, indicating efforts to shift societal perceptions and reduce stigma associated with disabilities.

Australian parents of children with disabilities often view inclusive education favorably, believing it promotes social and academic development. They emphasize the right of their children to participate in mainstream education. Attitudes vary depending on the nature of the child's disability. Parents of children with physical disabilities tend to have more positive views towards inclusion compared to those whose children have behavioral or mental disabilities.

Australian society is increasingly recognizing the importance of inclusive education. Government initiatives, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), reflect a commitment to supporting individuals with disabilities. Despite progress, challenges remain, including instances of bullying and inadequate support in schools. Some parents have resorted to homeschooling due to dissatisfaction with the support provided in mainstream schools.

Moreover, a Student Support Group (SSG) is 'the team around the student', which may consist of the students' parents/caregivers, their teacher and the teacher's aide/s, a

school leader or coordinator responsible for students with additional needs across the school. In addition, The Victorian Department of Education has developed guidelines to support students with disabilities and additional learning. Ensure that those with the most knowledge of, and responsibility for the student, work together to establish shared goals for their education needs. There is increasing awareness and advocacy for inclusive education, though certain areas may face stigma or resistance in integrating students with disabilities fully into mainstream classrooms.

Both Finland and Australia demonstrate a commitment to inclusive education, with generally positive parental and societal attitudes. However, concerns about resource allocation, teacher preparedness, and consistent support highlight areas needing attention to fully realize inclusive education goals.



- **Successes and Challenges**

Finland's inclusive education system is recognized globally for its robust teacher training, equitable resource allocation, and societal support. One of the cornerstones of Finland's success is its mandatory teacher qualification, which requires educators to hold a master's degree. This comprehensive training encompasses special education and inclusive teaching methodologies, ensuring that all teachers are well-prepared to cater to diverse learning needs. Moreover, Finland places a strong emphasis on continuous professional development (CPD), with in-service training programs tailored to inclusive education. These programs include modules on pedagogical skills, individualized education plans (IEPs), and collaborative support strategies, reflecting the nation's commitment to equity in education.

In terms of resource allocation, Finland's decentralized funding model empowers schools to design tailored solutions for students with special needs. Municipalities provide significant support, ensuring that inclusive education is well-funded and accessible. Programs such as the KiVa anti-bullying initiative and the Accessible Learning Environments Initiative further enhance the inclusivity of Finnish schools by promoting safe and supportive learning environments. Additionally, societal values in Finland strongly align with inclusive education. Equality and inclusion are embedded in national policies, and families and communities widely embrace these principles, minimizing stigma and fostering social cohesion.

Despite these successes, Finland faces notable challenges in implementing inclusive education uniformly across the nation. Regional disparities in the allocation of resources and support services create inconsistencies in the quality of inclusive education. Additionally, the rising demand for individualized support has increased the workload for educators, leading to concerns about staff burnout and the sustainability of inclusive practices. As educational needs continue to evolve, maintaining high standards of inclusion while addressing these challenges remains a priority for Finnish policymakers.

Whereas Australia has made significant progress in inclusive education through the development of progressive policy frameworks and targeted teacher training programs. The 10-year Inclusive Education Plan, alongside the Disability Standards for Education (2005), emphasizes the rights of students with disabilities to fully participate in mainstream education. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) supports this effort by providing evidence-based insights into resource allocation and adjustments. Additionally, tools such as ABLES (Abilities Based Learning and Education Support) enable educators to align teaching strategies with individual student needs, ensuring inclusivity within the national curriculum.

Teacher training is a key focus in Australia, with professional development programs equipping educators to handle diverse classroom dynamics. Initiatives such as e-learning modules on the Disability Discrimination Act and personalized learning strategies enhance teachers' ability to support students with disabilities. Advocacy efforts by organizations like the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) and government investments in programs like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) further highlight Australia's commitment to fostering inclusive environments.

On the other hand, Australia has made strides through progressive policy frameworks, targeted teacher training programs, and advocacy efforts led by organizations like the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE), which actively promotes inclusion across both government and non-government schools (Cologon, 2019). These initiatives have fostered improvements in student engagement and participation in some schools, showcasing the potential of inclusive education when implemented effectively.

Nevertheless, systemic inconsistencies present significant challenges to inclusive education in Australia. Variations in funding models across states and territories lead to unequal resource distribution, with some schools facing critical shortages that hinder effective implementation. Societal attitudes toward inclusion, while improving, remain mixed. Stigma and misconceptions about disabilities persist in some communities, impacting the integration of students with disabilities.

Conclusion

In general, both Finland and Australia have demonstrated a commitment to inclusive education through their policy frameworks, teacher training initiatives, and societal engagement. Finland excels in its centralized resource allocation and strong cultural support for inclusion, while Australia's advocacy efforts and policy advancements showcase its potential for inclusive education. However, both nations face common challenges, including regional disparities, resource gaps, and the increasing strain on educators. Addressing these barriers requires innovative solutions, sustained collaboration, and a focus on equity to ensure that inclusive education systems meet the needs of all students effectively.

Developing Countries (China and Egypt)

Introduction

Inclusive education (IE) has emerged as a global imperative to ensure that all children, irrespective of ability, background, or socioeconomic status, are provided with equitable opportunities to learn in mainstream environments. The 1994 Salamanca Statement served as a critical turning point in formalising inclusive education as a universal right, pushing countries to move beyond segregated special education models and toward integration within national systems.

Although the term “inclusive education” became globally standardized in the 1990s, both China and Egypt had initiated forms of education for children with disabilities earlier. In the case of China, the concept evolved into what is locally known as “Learning in Regular Classrooms” (LRC), which was officially introduced during the mid-1980s following a national survey in 1987 that highlighted the exclusion of many children with disabilities from schooling (Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2016). The LRC model in China gained significant traction through the support of two landmark legal frameworks. The 1982 *Law on the Protection of Disabled Persons* laid the foundation by formally recognizing the rights of individuals with disabilities, including equal access to education and protection from discrimination. This recognition was strengthened by the 1986 *Compulsory Education Law*, which mandated nine years of education for all children, regardless of ability. Together, these laws provided both the legal and institutional mandate for integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools, shifting the national approach from segregation in special schools to inclusive participation in regular classrooms (Qu, 2024). These legislative frameworks laid the foundation for inclusive education to be practiced more formally and systematically across various provinces in China, ensuring that children with disabilities were not excluded from the broader education system but instead supported to learn alongside their peers (Zhang & Miao, 2022).

Meanwhile in Egypt, the foundations for inclusive education were established through a series of legal and policy milestones. The country demonstrated early commitment by ratifying the *Convention Against Discrimination in Education* in 1962, signaling an obligation to provide equal educational opportunities for all children. This was followed by the enactment of *Law No. 139 of 1981*, which authorized the Ministry of Education to establish special schools designed to accommodate children with disabilities according to their abilities and readiness (Egypt INCLUSION Education Profiles, n.d.). While these measures marked important progress, they reflected a segregated approach rather than a fully inclusive model. More comprehensive reforms began to take shape after Egypt ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons*

with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008, which placed greater emphasis on integration and equality within the mainstream education system. The momentum was further reinforced when inclusive education principles were enshrined in the *2014 Constitution*, providing a constitutional mandate to ensure equal access and participation for children with disabilities in regular schools (Yehia, 2021; UNICEF & MoETE, 2022). Together, these developments represent Egypt's gradual transition from segregated provision toward a more inclusive educational framework aligned with international standards.

Both nations continue to expand inclusive education amidst systemic challenges, including limitations in teacher preparation, inequitable distribution of resources, and entrenched cultural stigma. However, the institutional strategies and societal foundations guiding these efforts differ substantially. The analysis below explores these dynamics in four interrelated dimensions: teacher training and support, resource allocation, societal attitudes, and the successes and challenges.



- **Teacher Training and Support**

Teacher preparation for inclusive education in China continues to be one of the most pressing challenges. Many teachers, particularly those working in rural regions, enter the classroom without sufficient pre-service or in-service training on how to accommodate students with disabilities (Zhang & Miao, 2022). This gap is compounded by the deep cultural influence of Confucian educational traditions, which emphasize discipline, uniformity, and academic excellence. As a result, teachers are often less open to adopting differentiated instruction or flexible teaching approaches that are central to inclusion (Zhou & Deng, 2021).

Despite these barriers, policy reforms have signaled gradual progress. The 2010 Outline of the National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development was the first major national policy to explicitly highlight the need for inclusive pedagogy. Recognising that special education required more targeted interventions, the Ministry of Education introduced the Special Education Promotion Plans to strengthen inclusion, particularly in mainstream schools. The 2017–2021 Plan (issued jointly by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, and China Disabled Persons' Federation) expanded compulsory education opportunities for children with disabilities and encouraged universities to embed special education elements into teacher training curricula. Building on this, the 2021–2025 Plan sought to align with China's broader education modernization agenda, with one of its key targets being the enhancement of technology and online platforms to support inclusive teaching. In practice, this has included the development of the Smart Education of China (SEC) platform, which provides free, high-quality digital resources accessible nationwide and is explicitly designed to support "personalised learning for all." By using digital formats, SEC enables students with disabilities to learn at their own pace; for instance, captioned video lectures support learners with hearing impairments, while visually impaired students can access materials through screen-reading tools and audio-assisted modules. In parallel, the Remote Synchronous Classroom (RSC) model has been deployed to connect expert urban teachers with rural classrooms, giving students with disabilities access to high-quality live instruction while simultaneously exposing local teachers to inclusive pedagogy in practice (Wu, 2025). Together, SEC and RSC illustrate how China is leveraging technology not only to reduce barriers for students with disabilities but also to build teacher capacity and foster greater openness to flexible and differentiated teaching approaches.

In Egypt, the challenge of underprepared teaching personnel remains a central barrier to inclusive education. Inclusive pedagogy is not systematically embedded in most faculties of education, leaving many teachers without the necessary pre-service training to support students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Instead,

professional development is often delivered through donor-supported, short-term initiatives, the most notable being the Learning Improvement for Everyone (LIFE) programme led by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MoETE). Implemented between 2016 and 2020, LIFE trained over 1,765 school personnel across seven governorates, including school heads, teachers, psychologists, and social workers, in order to foster a more supportive and inclusive school environment (UNICEF & MoETE, 2022). While this initiative marked a significant step forward, its coverage remained narrow compared to national needs, and follow-up supervision after training was inconsistent, limiting its long-term effectiveness. Policy recommendations highlighted in Policy Brief 9 (2022) stress the importance of embedding inclusive pedagogy into pre-service teacher education and decentralising MoETE's capacity to sustain reforms nationwide, ensuring that inclusive education is not dependent on external projects but institutionalised within Egypt's educational system.

While both countries are addressing gaps in teacher preparedness, China's efforts appear more integrated into national strategies, whereas Egypt remains reliant on externally funded projects without a sustained nationwide mechanism.

- **Resource Allocation**

China's resource allocation for inclusive education is strongly influenced by its large size and the clear gap between urban and rural areas. Urban schools are usually better equipped, often providing resource rooms, assistive technologies, and trained staff to support students with disabilities. In contrast, many rural schools still lack even basic facilities, putting children in these areas at greater risk of being excluded. To reduce these gaps, the 2017–2021 and 2021–2025 Special Education Promotion Plans directed national funding to less-developed regions, including the creation of 2,000 pilot resource centres designed to act as hubs for inclusive teaching and support (Zhang & Miao, 2022). These centres were meant to supply assistive technologies, specialised learning materials, and training spaces for teachers, while also serving as shared support networks for nearby schools. By focusing resources in key locations, the government aimed to narrow urban–rural differences and make inclusive services more available to children with disabilities. However, many of these centres cannot be used effectively because there are not enough trained staff to manage and deliver specialised services (Zhou & Deng, 2021). In addition, a family's economic background plays an important role in access, as children from low-income households are less likely to receive the support they need compared to those from wealthier families who can afford extra services (Liu & Zheng, 2021). These issues show that while resource allocation has grown, it still risks repeating inequalities within China's inclusive education system.

In Egypt, disparities in resource allocation for inclusive education are particularly evident in infrastructure and teaching materials. A 2018 study by Handicap International reported that many schools lacked essential accessibility features such as toilets adapted for students with disabilities, ramps for mobility access, and adequate visual or auditory aids. While the Learning Improvement for Everyone (LIFE) programme provided inclusive equipment to 181 schools, this represented only a small fraction of the country's total public schools, limiting its overall impact. The Inclusive Education for Exceptional Children (IEEC) initiative also introduced whole-school approaches, including the use of learning assessments and student tracking mechanisms to better monitor the progress of children with disabilities (UNICEF & MoETE, 2022). However, the implementation of these efforts has been fragmented, largely due to restricted ministry budgets and the absence of strong coordination mechanisms across regional education authorities. These constraints highlight the systemic barriers that continue to limit equitable access to inclusive education services in Egypt.

In sum, both China and Egypt illustrate that while targeted funding and initiatives can improve facilities and provide critical resources, the absence of trained personnel, sustainable financing, and consistent coordination continues to hinder the equitable delivery of inclusive education.



- **Cultural and Societal Attitudes**

In China, cultural perceptions continue to play a decisive role in shaping the experience of students with disabilities. Rooted in Confucian traditions, the strong emphasis on uniform academic excellence means that students who require differentiated learning approaches are often sidelined, as their learning needs are seen as diverging from the norm (Zhou & Deng, 2021). This challenge is compounded in rural areas, where disability is still stigmatised and frequently regarded as a source of family shame, discouraging many parents from enrolling their children or leading to early withdrawal from school (Qu, 2024). In response, the government has introduced a range of initiatives, including public awareness campaigns to shift societal perceptions, family support groups to empower parents, and pilot inclusive school programmes to model good practices. Despite these efforts, many teachers remain insufficiently sensitised to inclusive education, and implicit biases—such as low expectations of students with disabilities—continue to shape classroom interactions, limiting opportunities for genuine inclusion (Zhang & Miao, 2022; Qu, 2024). This tension between cultural traditions, social stigma, and policy-driven reform illustrates the deep-rooted socio-cultural barriers that China must overcome to realise fully inclusive education.

In Egypt, negative cultural attitudes remain one of the biggest barriers to inclusive education. Many families and communities still view children with disabilities as unable to succeed academically, which creates strong resistance to their enrolment in mainstream schools (Elshabrawi Hassanein et al., 2021; Yehia, 2021). This stigma often results in parents keeping their children at home, or schools being reluctant to accept them, reinforcing cycles of exclusion. To address these issues, the Learning Improvement for Everyone (LIFE) programme has involved parents, teachers, and even religious leaders in sensitisation sessions aimed at changing mindsets and encouraging more supportive attitudes (UNICEF & MoETE, 2022). Civil society groups, such as the Egyptian Society for the Rights of Disabled Children, have also played a major role by leading advocacy campaigns and creating platforms to defend the rights of children with disabilities (Elshabrawi Hassanein et al., 2021). In addition, positive examples of inclusive education are now increasingly featured in national media, showcasing success stories that help shift public perceptions and promote acceptance. However, these efforts face deep challenges, as cultural change in Egypt remains a slow process shaped by long-standing social beliefs and a general lack of exposure to inclusive practices in daily school life.

In conclusion, both China and Egypt demonstrate that cultural and societal attitudes remain powerful barriers to inclusive education. While awareness campaigns, advocacy, and pilot initiatives have made progress, deeply rooted stigma and

traditional beliefs continue to hinder the full acceptance of children with disabilities in mainstream education.

- **Successes and Challenges**

China has recorded notable successes through its multi-tiered approach to inclusive education. The development of the quadripartite system—which integrates special schools, special classes, resource rooms, and regular classroom participation—has created a flexible framework that accommodates students with varying levels of need (Alduais & Deng, 2023). This system ensures that children with disabilities are not confined to a single pathway but can be placed in settings appropriate to their abilities and readiness, while still promoting gradual movement toward greater inclusion. Legal anchors such as the 1986 Compulsory Education Law and the 2008 Regulations on Education for Persons with Disabilities have further institutionalised the right to education for students with disabilities, providing a strong policy basis for reform. At the local level, pilot programmes in cities such as Shanghai and Zhejiang have pioneered curriculum adaptation, established demonstration schools with resource rooms, integrated assistive technologies, and strengthened school–family partnerships, offering practical models that inform national reforms (Qu, 2024; Zhou & Deng, 2021). In addition, China has increasingly leveraged educational technology and online awareness campaigns to widen access, provide professional development opportunities for teachers, and reduce stigma toward disability in society (Qu, 2024). These combined measures highlight China’s capacity to experiment with different models while gradually scaling successful practices at the national level.

Despite these achievements, China continues to face systemic challenges that limit the full realisation of inclusive education. Implementation quality remains uneven, with significant disparities between well-resourced urban centres and rural provinces where schools often lack facilities, trained staff, and access to assistive technologies. Teacher preparation also poses a persistent barrier, as there is no unified national certification for inclusive education, and many educators lack both the confidence and the pedagogical skills to accommodate diverse learners (Zhang & Miao, 2022). Furthermore, students with severe or multiple disabilities are still frequently excluded or provided only minimal services, reflecting structural gaps in the existing system (Zhou & Deng, 2021). At a cultural level, the strong societal emphasis on academic competition and standardised performance continues to marginalise students who cannot conform to uniform expectations, reinforcing patterns of exclusion despite policy reforms. These challenges illustrate that while China has made important strides, the journey toward fully equitable and inclusive education remains ongoing.

Egypt, on the other hand, has made considerable legal and programmatic progress in the last two decades. Legislative milestones such as Law No. 139 of 1981, which empowered the Ministry of Education to establish special schools, the 2014 Constitution, which formally embedded inclusive education principles, and Law No. 10 of 2018, which expanded protections and access to services for persons with disabilities, have collectively strengthened the educational rights of this group (Egypt INCLUSION Education Profiles, n.d.; Yehia, 2021). Programmes such as Learning Improvement for Everyone (LIFE) and the Inclusive Education for Exceptional Children (IEEC), developed with support from UNICEF and other partners, have further advanced these efforts by training over 1,700 personnel—including teachers, school heads, psychologists, and social workers—distributing adaptive materials such as large-print textbooks and hearing aids, and promoting co-teaching models alongside student-centred approaches in pilot schools (UNICEF & MoETE, 2022). These initiatives have contributed to improved awareness among educators, greater parental engagement, and notable changes in school practices within the targeted regions.

Nevertheless, systemic challenges persist in Egypt. Constrained ministry budgets limit the ability to expand these reforms nationwide, while coordination among stakeholders remains fragmented, leading to isolated implementation rather than integrated strategy (Handicap International, 2018; Policy Brief 9, 2022). National monitoring systems to assess the effectiveness of inclusive initiatives are also underdeveloped, making it difficult to evaluate or replicate successful practices. Many programmes continue to operate on a project-based and donor-driven basis, raising concerns about long-term sustainability once external funding ends. Furthermore, the Inclusive Education Unit within the Ministry of Education and Technical Education (MoETE) faces shortages in technical expertise, staffing, and institutional authority, which hinders its capacity to scale up effective models beyond pilot schools. These barriers highlight the gap between promising legal frameworks and localised programmatic progress on the one hand, and the systemic reforms needed to embed inclusive education across Egypt on the other.

In comparing both cases, China's trajectory appears more structured under a state-led governance model, characterised by centralised mandates and provincial-level implementation. Egypt's approach, by contrast, relies more heavily on collaborative, donor-supported interventions with a greater degree of decentralised execution. Despite these contextual differences, both countries face a similar set of challenges: scaling up successful initiatives, sustaining teacher training, engaging communities, and embedding inclusive values within wider education reforms. These comparative insights highlight that robust legislation alone is not enough—effective and inclusive education also requires consistent follow-through, adequate resources, and long-term cultural change.

Conclusion

The experiences of China and Egypt highlight both the progress and persistent barriers in advancing inclusive education within developing country contexts. China demonstrates how a state-led, centrally coordinated strategy can gradually embed inclusive education into national laws, teacher training systems, and digital infrastructure, though challenges remain in implementation quality and addressing severe disabilities. Egypt, on the other hand, shows the potential of donor-supported programmes and community-driven initiatives to generate awareness and build localised success, but struggles with sustainability, nationwide scaling, and institutional capacity. Despite their contrasting governance models, both countries reveal common lessons: legal frameworks alone are insufficient without effective follow-through; teacher training and resource allocation must be sustained and equitably distributed; and cultural transformation is critical to dismantle stigma and normalise inclusion in mainstream schools. For Malaysia, these cases underline the importance of combining structured policy direction with community engagement and cultural change, ensuring that inclusive education is not merely legislated, but fully lived in classrooms, communities, and digital spaces.



Comparative Analysis of Inclusive Education Practices

The review of inclusive education practices in Malaysia, Finland, Australia, China, and Egypt is based on four key themes: teacher training and support, resource allocation, cultural and societal attitudes, and the overall successes and challenges. The following table provides a comparative summary of these findings across the five countries.

Table 3.1: Comparative Analysis of Inclusive Education Practices in Malaysia, Finland, Australia, China, and Egypt

Topic	Malaysia	China	Egypt	Finland	Australia
Teacher Training and Support	• Shortage of adequately trained special education teachers • The Curriculum Development Division of the Ministry of Education of Malaysia- vocational education plans (Specific Vocational Skills- KVS) <u>Trainings</u> • In-Service Professional Development- Collaboration with hospitals and higher learning institutions ▪ Workshops and Seminars	• Most teachers especially those in rural areas lack adequate pre-service or in-service training related to inclusive practices • Historically influenced by Confucian educational ideals, Chinese schooling emphasises academic excellence and uniformity. <u>National-level policy interventions.</u> • The 2010 Outline of the National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development	• Issues of underprepared teaching personnel. • Training is often delivered through donor-supported, short-term initiatives. <u>Significant interventions:</u> • LIFE (Learning Improvement for Everyone) programme led by UNICEF and MoETE • Training coverage is narrow compared to national needs, and post-training supervision is	• Centralized and comprehensive approach. • Mandating all teachers obtain a master's degree. • Continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers. • Training is conducted with full salary benefits. Employers have the authority to assign training to full-time teachers and determine acceptable programs.	• The Australian Curriculum is inherently inclusive. • Comprehensive approach strategies is varied according to region. • Tools like the ABLES assessment and reporting suite- to help educators align student capabilities with learning progressions and the curriculum • Guiding principles- Australian Disability Standards for Education

	▪ On-the-Job Training- Under the guidance of senior educators ▪ Inclusive Education Training • Collaboration with Parents and Other Professionals • Specialized Skills Development- training in various teaching strategies • Certification and Accreditation ▪ Bachelor's Degree in Special Education ▪ Diploma in Special Education	• 2017 and 2021 Special Education Promotion Plans (encouraged universities to integrate special education training into curricula. • Online platforms (eg: WeChat)- increase outreach and awareness among teachers • Lack of unified certification and ongoing support for teachers remains a gap.	inconsistent. • Policy Brief 9- embedding inclusive pedagogy into pre-service training and decentralising MoETE's capacity to sustain nationwide reform.	• Education providers (eg: municipalities) responsible for organizing and funding CPD. Employers- organize and fund their staff's professional development, including in-service training. • Regional authorities and the National Board of Education also provide in-service training. <u>Programs and Policies for Inclusive Education:</u> • Teacher Education for Special Needs (SEN) Teachers (e.g.: additional training & Master's degree programs in special education) • Learning Support and Special Needs Teacher	(2005) & Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. • Students with disability are taught in a variety of contexts depending on the best interests of the student. • Some regions face shortages of special education teachers. <u>Supporting materials and guidelines for the teacher:</u> • The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education commissioned an online inclusion toolkit for educators • package of e-learning lessons on the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, with a focus on the Disability Standards for
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				Programs (focus on understanding diverse learning abilities, inclusive teaching methods, and individualized education planning. • National Core Curriculum- requires teachers to adapt their teaching methods to cater to all students • Projects and Initiatives (e.g.: KiVa Program and Accessible Learning Environments Initiative) • Collaborative Learning and School-Based Training (peer learning and workshops, in-service training includes case studies and practical solutions for handling diverse classroom dynamics) • Multi-Disciplinary	Education 2005 • Many Australian jurisdictions subscribe to this library of online supported learning modules for their teachers • Several free short e-learning courses for parents
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				Support Teams (Training programs include modules on working with psychologists, counselors, and social workers)	
Resource Allocation	• The allocation process involves financial, human, and material resources • Inadequate funding for inclusive education ▪ Limited government budget ▪ High cost of assistive technology ▪ Inadequate special education grants • Inadequate infrastructure and educational materials	• Deeply affected by its vast geography and rural-urban disparities. • Urban schools are more likely to have resource rooms, assistive technologies, and trained support staff. • Rural institutions frequently lack basic infrastructure for children with disabilities. • The 2017 and 2021 Special Education Promotion Plans- national funding and the construction of 2,000 pilot resource	• Many schools lacked accessible toilets, ramps, or visual and auditory aids (Handicap International, 2018). • LIFE programme provided inclusive equipment to 181 schools- accounted for a small proportion of total public schools. • Inclusive Education for Exceptional Children (IEEC)- introduced whole-school approaches, including learning assessments and student tracking	• Equitable resource allocation- ensures that schools have the necessary tools, staff, and funding to support inclusive practices. • Resources are decentralized. • Provides flexibility for schools to design individualized learning plans, support services, and adapt curriculum materials. • Primarily publicly funded, with municipalities	• Australia's funding model for inclusive education varies by state- challenges in ensuring equitable distribution. • Some schools are well-resourced; others face funding gaps. • Ongoing challenges related to funding allocations • Disagreements between federal and state governments- delays in implementing school reforms and

	Efforts 1. Provide access to quality, relevant and appropriate education for SEN. 2. Plan and implement the construction of new or full replacement SES. 3. Provide support services and augmentative and assistive equipment to meet the needs of SEN <u>Policies and strategies</u> • Special Education Integration Program (Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi, PPKI) • Guidelines for Special Education Learning Support Equipment and	centres, particularly in underdeveloped regions. ▪ utilisation is often hindered by the shortage of trained personnel to manage these spaces. • Family's socioeconomic status- children from low-income households are less likely to receive the specialised support they need	mechanisms. • Implementation remains fragmented (UNICEF & MoETE, 2022) ▪ constrained ministry budgets ▪ lack of consistent coordination mechanisms across regional education authorities.	responsible for providing resources to schools. • The Finnish National Agency for Education offers additional funding to support inclusive practices (e.g.: special needs grants for higher education exchange programmes). • SEN are entitled to various support services, including part-time and full-time special education, learning instruments, and assistant services, all tailored through personal education plans.	funding agreements, affecting the timely provision of resources for inclusive education. • Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD 2020a) collects information of Australian school students who receive an adjustment to address disability- allows schools to better plan for and support teachers across the school to personalise learning for their students. • Ongoing discussions to reform the national funding model
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	Materials • Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013				
Cultural and Societal Attitudes	• A lack of understanding and awareness of disability. • Misconceptions or societal constructions about the causes of impairments. • Negative media coverage spreads misinformation and lacks sensitivity • Law and policy can reinforce prejudice and anxieties about disability, perpetuating harmful views. • Children with disabilities face unfavorable	• Traditional values continue to shape perceptions of disability. • Rural areas- disability is often stigmatised as a source of family shame, leading to non-enrolment or withdrawal from schools. • Numerous teachers remain insufficiently sensitised to inclusive education practices- implicit biases toward students with disabilities continue to affect classroom dynamics <u>Government strategies</u> • launching public	• Widespread societal stigma towards disability. • Cultural attitudes often paint children with disabilities as incapable of academic achievement. • LIFE programme engaging parents, teachers, and religious leaders in sensitisation sessions. • Civil society organisations (e.g.: Egyptian Society for the Rights of Disabled Children) led advocacy campaigns to raise	• Education system is geared toward inclusion and only children with the most severe special needs have separate classrooms or schools. • Fully inclusive classroom. • Finnish society generally embraces an inclusive approach, with a strong focus on equality and social cohesion, which is embedded in its education policies. • The community and families typically support inclusion, and	• Attitudes toward inclusion in Australia vary ▪ commitment to inclusion recognized in law but implementation sometimes hindered by community attitudes or misconceptions about disability. • Growing recognition of the need for inclusive education. • Australian parents of children with disabilities- view

	attitudes, bullying, social rejection, and isolation.	awareness campaigns • establishing family support groups • introducing pilot inclusive school programmes. • China's challenges stem largely from educational and philosophical traditions	awareness. • Inclusive success stories– highlighted in national media to reshape public narratives and promote acceptance. • Systemic cultural change remains a long-term endeavour influenced by entrenched societal beliefs and limited exposure to inclusive practices. • Egypt's challenge influenced by misinformation, insufficient awareness, and religiously framed misconceptions.	stigma around disabilities is relatively low. • Finnish parents generally support inclusive education, recognizing its benefits for both children with and without special needs.	inclusive education favorably, believing it promotes social and academic development. • Emphasize the right of their children to participate in mainstream education. • Attitudes vary depending on the nature of the child's disability. • Parents of children with physical disabilities– more positive views towards inclusion compared to those whose children have behavioral or mental disabilities. • Government initiatives, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
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					• Student Support Group (SSG)- ‘the team around the student’ (students’ parents/caregivers, their teacher and the teacher’s aide/s, a school leader or coordinator) responsible for students with additional needs across the school. • Victorian Department of Education has developed guidelines to support students with disabilities and additional learning.
Successes and Challenges	Success • 6,404 primary and secondary schools are reported to implement the Inclusive Education Program	• More structured within a state-led governance model, characterised by centralised mandates and provincial implementation. • China’s challenge lies in managing scale across	• Egypt’s barrier is more financial and administrative in nature. • Leans heavily on collaborative and donor-supported interventions with more	• Recognized globally for its robust teacher training, equitable resource allocation, and societal support. Success	Success • The development of progressive policy frameworks and targeted teacher training programs. • The 10-year Inclusive Education Plan,

	• 113,186 students with special educational needs (MBPK) were registered under Special Education Schools (SPK), Special Education Integrated Programmes (PPKI), and Inclusive Education Programmes (PPI) • Development of specialized training modules for teachers in special education • Collaboration with organizations (UNICEF Malaysia, National Autism Society of Malaysia-NASOM, Malaysian Association for the Blind-MAB, Persatuan Dyslexia Malaysia, PDM) Challenges • Implementation varies significantly across schools, often depending	diverse provinces. Success • multi-tiered approach to inclusive education • flexible infrastructure that responds to varied learner needs • essential policy anchors (1986 Compulsory Education Law and the 2008 Regulations on Education for Persons with Disabilities) • Pilot programs in cities (e.g.: Shanghai and Zhejiang) demonstrated advancements in curriculum adaptation, inclusive pedagogy, and school-family partnerships Challenges • Implementation quality remains inconsistent-	decentralised execution. Success • Legislative milestones such as Law No. 139 of 1981, the 2014 Constitution, and Law No. 10 of 2018 • Programmes (e.g.: LIFE and IEEC) developed with support from UNICEF and other partners ▪ introduced inclusive training for over 1,700 personnel ▪ distributed adaptive materials ▪ promoted co-teaching and student-centred approaches in pilot schools Challenges • constrained ministry	• Mandatory teacher qualification, which requires educators to hold a master's degree. • A strong emphasis on continuous professional development (CPD). • Decentralized funding model empowers schools to design tailored solutions for students with special needs (e.g.: KiVa anti-bullying initiative). • Equality and inclusion are embedded in national policies, families and communities. Challenges • Regional disparities in the allocation of resources and support services.	alongside the Disability Standards for Education (2005). • The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) • ABLES (Abilities Based Learning and Education Support) • Teacher training is a key focus in Australia, with professional development programs. • Initiatives such as e-learning modules on the Disability Discrimination Act and personalized learning strategies. • Advocacy efforts by
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	on local leadership and resources • Educators- lack of knowledge and skills • Uncontrollable and predictable behavior such as bullying classmates • Student's behavioral & cognitive problem • Education system Facilities and equipment (classroom & school facilities, lack of financial support, insufficient teaching resources)	between urban centres and rural provinces • Many teachers continue to lack standardised certification in inclusive education • the cultural emphasis on academic competition often marginalises students with diverse learning needs, reinforcing exclusion	budgets • fragmented coordination among key stakeholders • limited national monitoring mechanisms • Many inclusive education initiatives remain project-based and donor-driven, lacking long-term sustainability. • limited technical expertise and staffing	• rising demand for individualized support has increased the workload for educators; staff burnout.	organizations like the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) • National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Challenges • Systemic inconsistencies. • Variations in funding models across states and territories. • Societal attitudes toward inclusion. Stigma and misconceptions about disabilities persist in some communities
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CHAPTER 4: RECOMMENDATION FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Drawing on lessons from both developed (Finland and Australia) and developing (China and Egypt) countries, Malaysia can strengthen its inclusive education system by focusing on five interrelated areas: teacher training, infrastructure, resource allocation, socio-cultural attitudes, and curriculum design.

- **Teacher Training and Support**

Finland and Australia highlight the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) as the backbone of inclusive practice. In Finland, CPD is funded by employers, regional authorities, and the National Board of Education, often delivered through workshops, peer learning, and collaborations with psychologists and social workers (European Agency, 2020; FINEEC, 2019). Australia complements this by providing teachers with online inclusion toolkits, disability law modules, and access to specialist support roles, enabling teachers to tailor learning through one-on-one support where needed (AITSL, 2021).

From the perspective of developing contexts, China integrates inclusive pedagogy into national teacher training policies, supported by digital platforms such as the Smart Education of China (SEC) and Remote Synchronous Classrooms (RSC), which expose teachers to flexible approaches (Wu, 2025). In contrast, Egypt's reliance on donor-driven training such as the UNICEF-supported LIFE programme demonstrates both the value of targeted interventions and the risks of limited sustainability (UNICEF & MoETE, 2022).

Recommendation for Malaysia: Embed inclusive pedagogy as a mandatory component of pre-service training, while ensuring ongoing CPD for in-service teachers. DELIMa can be upgraded to host modules on inclusive teaching, case studies, and micro-credentials, modelled on Finland's CPD system but enhanced with China's technology-driven outreach.

- **Infrastructure and Physical Accessibility**

Finland and Australia emphasise universal design principles (UDL) in schools, featuring flexible classrooms, sensory rooms, and inclusive toilets, while ensuring strong digital equity such as universal device access and compliance with WCAG accessibility standards (FAIDD, 2019; DFAT, 2021).

China advances this further with digital innovation under its 14th Five-Year Plan Action Plan, promoting smart campuses, cloud computing, AI, and VR to expand access for students with disabilities (Zhou, 2024). Tools such as captioned video lectures, screen readers, and voice translation apps have been piloted to make learning more personalised (Dong, 2022; Ge & Hu, 2019).

Recommendation for Malaysia: Enhance physical accessibility in all schools (ramps, toilets, sensory rooms) while strengthening digital accessibility through DELIMa. Priority should be given to affordable, high-impact tools such as Frequency Modulation (FM) systems for hearing-impaired students and screen readers for visually impaired learners, ensuring access extends beyond urban to rural schools.

- **Resource Allocation and Policy Implementation**

Finland applies needs-based funding formulas and evaluates inclusion through municipal services and national scorecards (FINEEC, 2019), while Australia uses the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) to guide funding and operates state-based inclusive support centres (Australian Government, 2020).

China's Special Education Promotion Plans channelled national funding into underdeveloped provinces and created 2,000 resource centres, though many face staffing shortages (Zhang & Miao, 2022). Egypt, in contrast, suffers from fragmented funding and weak coordination, with most initiatives dependent on external donors, limiting scalability (Policy Brief 9, 2022).

Recommendation for Malaysia: Move towards a needs-based funding model supported by robust national data collection (similar to Australia's NCCD). Resources should prioritise equitable distribution to rural and underserved schools, while partnerships with technology providers (as in Finland) could expand digital accessibility solutions at lower cost.

- **Socio-Cultural Attitudes and Community Engagement**

Cultural acceptance is key to sustaining inclusion. Finland embeds equity into legislation and social norms, supporting parents through networks and workshops (European Agency, 2020). Australia promotes awareness through campaigns like Every Student, Every School, peer mentoring, and partnerships with advocacy groups such as CYDA (CYDA, 2021).

Egypt demonstrates the power of community-based sensitisation, where parents, teachers, and religious leaders participate in awareness sessions, supported by media campaigns (UNICEF & MoETE, 2022). China complements this with family support groups that empower parents to advocate for their children (Qu, 2024).

Recommendation for Malaysia: Launch a nationwide awareness campaign to reduce stigma, leveraging partnerships with NGOs, community leaders, and media outlets (adapted from Egypt). At the same time, establish parental training and peer-support networks (adapted from China) to ensure families are active partners in the inclusive education journey.

- **Curriculum, Individualised Planning, and Sustainability**

In Finland, every student receiving special or intensified support must have an Individualised Education Plan (IEP), reviewed annually with parents (European Agency, 2020). Australia mandates IEPs under the Disability Standards for Education, integrating them into the national curriculum and emphasising annual progress reviews (AITSL, 2021).

Both countries ensure sustainability by piloting reforms locally before scaling nationally, supported by multi-agency collaboration and long-term strategies such as Finland's 2016 curriculum reform and Australia's 10-year National Disability Strategy (Australian Government, 2021).

Recommendation for Malaysia: Mandate IEPs for all students with special needs, ensuring annual reviews and parental participation. Pilot inclusive practices regionally before scaling up, guided by a multi-year roadmap aligned with Malaysia's education blueprint, ensuring reforms are both scalable and sustainable.

Table 4.1: Recommendation Framework for Inclusive Education in Malaysia

Theme	International Practices	Malaysia – Suggested Adaptation
Teacher Training & Support	Finland: CPD, peer-learning. Australia: Toolkits, e-learning, specialist roles. China: SEC & RSC for teacher training. Egypt: LIFE short-term training.	Embed inclusive pedagogy in pre-service training. Make CPD mandatory. Add inclusive modules into DELIMa.
Infrastructure & Accessibility	Finland: UDL classrooms, assistive tech, sensory rooms. Australia: Affordable assistive devices, WCAG standards. China: SEC, smart campuses, captioned videos, voice apps. Egypt: Limited accessibility in schools.	Improve physical facilities (ramps, toilets, sensory rooms). Strengthen digital inclusion via DELIMa (FM systems, captioning, screen readers). Focus first on low-cost tools.
Resource Allocation & Policy	Finland: Needs-based funding, municipal support. Australia: NCCD data, inclusive grants. China: 2,000 pilot resource centres. Egypt: Donor-driven, fragmented.	Create needs-based funding model. Ensure urban–rural equity. Build public–private partnerships (tech, NGOs).

Socio-Cultural Attitudes & Community	Finland: Parent networks, equity laws. Australia: Awareness campaigns, advocacy groups. China: Family support groups. Egypt: LIFE sensitisation, NGO/media campaigns.	Launch nationwide awareness campaign. Provide parent training & support groups. Involve NGOs, leaders & media.
Curriculum & Sustainability	Finland: IEPs with annual parent review. Australia: IEPs in national curriculum. China: Flexible “quadripartite” system. Egypt: IEPs in pilot projects only.	Mandate IEPs nationwide. Pilot inclusive curriculum before scaling. Develop multi-year roadmap with clear targets.

Conclusion

Malaysia’s inclusive education framework must balance the systemic strengths of developed models (Finland and Australia) with the practical lessons from developing peers (China and Egypt). The ultimate goal is to build an ecosystem that combines strong legal backing, needs-based funding, inclusive teacher training, accessible infrastructure, and community-driven cultural change—ensuring that inclusive education in Malaysia is not only legislated but lived in every classroom.



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