

CHALLENGES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS:  
TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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To my loving God, dad, mum and brother

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## ABSTRACT

This research is set to understand the challenges faced by teachers teaching special education in rural schools based on the following research questions; What are the factors that contribute or impede the efficiency of special education in rural schools? and How can special education in rural schools be developed to provide quality education for rural special needs children?. The Framework of Action Salamanca, 1994 is used as a basis of understanding the essentials of special education school. This research is conducted qualitatively using a narrative research design. Samples are selected purposively, whereby 3 special education teachers from a rural district in Johor with experience of more than 4 years are interviewed using semi structured interviews. The combination of narrative and semi structured interviews provides rich information of experience narrated in their own words and own settings. Data is analysed verbatim and triangulated using member checking and document analysis. The findings indicates that administration, facilities, transportation, lesser number of teachers, educational opportunity, funds and support from community are issues faced by these teachers. The overall research indicates that teachers are happy with their present condition although they have suggested that buildings should be modified to suit special education prior to establishment and special education schools should not be placed within the same vicinity. Throughout this research, ethical issues was uphold.

## ABSTRAK

Pendidikan khas dan pendidikan luar bandar masing-masing mempunyai cabaran tersendiri. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan memahami isu-isu yang dihadapi oleh guru-guru pendidikan khas di luar bandar berdasarkan soalan-soalan kajian seperti berikut; Apakah masalah yang dihadapi oleh guru pendidikan khas di luar bandar?, Apakah langkah yang diambil untuk menambahbaik pendidikan khas di luar bandar?. Framework of Salamanca 1994 digunakan sebagai rangka untuk memahami pendidikan khas berkualiti. Kajian ini dijalankan secara kualitatif menggunakan kaedah naratif. Sampel kajian dipilih secara bertujuan di mana 3 guru yang mempunyai pengalaman lebih dari 4 tahun daripada sekolah di Johor ditemubual. Data dianalisis secara verbatim dan triangulasi dijalankan untuk meningkatkan kredibiliti. Dapatan kajian mengutarakan isu-isu seperti pentadbiran, pengangkutan, jumlah guru yang kurang, fasiliti kelas, peluang pendidikan, kewangan dan sokongan dari komuniti. Kesimpulan kajian mendapati guru mencadangkan beberapa penambahbaikan seperti kelas pendidikan khas perlu diubahsuai bagi memenuhi keperluan murid sebelum program dijalankan dan lokasi Antara satu sekolah pendidikan khas dengan sekolah pendidikan khas lain perlu dijarakkan. Secara keseluruhan, guru-guru berpuas hati dengan gaji, tugas dan lokasi berkerja mereka. Dalam melaksanakan kajian ini, etika kajian diamalkan.

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# **CHALLENGES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Malaysia is a developing country with a population 28.9 million (Economic Planning Unit, 2012). The land mass consist of 330,803 square kilometers, which consist of urban and rural area. In the year 2010, 35% of the population remains in rural areas (PEMANDU, 2010). As the country strives to achieve a developed nation status by the year 2020, many parts of the country including rural areas are being developed to help accelerate the process.

Developments in rural areas are crucial because more than 7% of the rural population in Malaysia is living in poverty (Henry Ngun & Amir Hussain, 2011). Eradication of poverty is vital as it is seen as a stumbling block towards a nation progress. One of the strategies to eradicate poverty is through education (World Bank, 2013). As mentioned in a report by United Nations Malaysia (2011), “educational attainment is correlated with economic growth and with achievements in poverty

reduction, health (including maternal and child health) and broad quality of life indicators". This implies that, by neglecting educational opportunities, the human capital of a country will be under-utilized and consequently hinder progress.

Looking at the positive aspects of education, the government enacted the Education Act 1961 which states that all children from age 6 and above have to attend compulsory primary school. However, the act did not include children with special needs. The education act mentioned free education for children with special education needs (SEN) but it was not compulsory. It was only in 2003 that a revised act 29(A) mentioned that education for children with SEN is compulsory.

The revision of the education act proves to be a turning point in Malaysia education system because equal opportunity in education is given regardless of the child's capabilities. By educating children with SEN, they will be equipped with skills which will help them in terms of employment, thus making them independent (Mohd.Nordin Awang Mat, no date).

## **1.1 History of special education**

To understand the rationale behind this research, it is important to understand the historical issues of special education. Contemporary authors on special education highlight the importance understanding history of special education because many of today's current issues exist since the dawn of special education and thus lesson learnt from the past should serve as a platform to understand present issues (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). Therefore, to understand the history of special education in Malaysia, it is important to understand the condition of disable people and what instigated the movement of special education in the past.

Education for children with SEN can be traced back in the 1700's beginning in Europe. Initially, disabled people were seen as deviants of society. The difference in their physical attributes and /or mental capacity made them ridiculed in the society. As mentioned in Winzer (1940), people with disabilities

were subjected to abuse, condemnation and destruction. With rare exceptions, disabled persons were regarded with aversion and subjected to astounding cruelty; in most cultures they were scorned as inferior beings and were deprived of rights and privileges. Their afflictions were misunderstood, frequently looked upon as having super natural causes and therefore being un-nameable to human treatment. Legal mandates denied them basic rights; theological canons excluded them from church membership and philosophy pronounced them as incapable of mental or moral improvement.

As disabled people continue to survive amidst the mockery and humiliation, ideas of human rights, democracy, equality begin to emerge in America and France (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). These humanitarian deeds took into consideration the rights of disabled people and surge to protect and allow them dignity in society. Over the time, schools were opened around Europe to educate disabled people but the focus was primarily for deaf and blind students.

Likewise in Malaysia, prior to the awareness of disability, children who were born deformed were abandoned in holy places, kept hidden at home or placed in orphanages (Noraini, 2000). It was only later when missionaries arrived in Malaysia during the colonial era, that education for disabled was considered. In 1920's, the Anglican church established a school for the blind called St.Nicholas in Malacca. This school was later move to Penang in 1931. Consequently, another school for the blind, Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind, in Johor Bahru was established to support the needs of blind children in the southern peninsula. Even then, funds to erect this building were garnered from public donations, Princess Elizabeth's marriage collection and Welfare Lottery Department (Wong & Sebastian, 2002). The establishment of Princess Elizabeth school for blind also saw the official involvement of government in special education (Nordin, 2002). Amidst the development of education for the blind, the Federated School of Deaf was opened in 1954 so that deaf children would have similar opportunity to be educated.

The opening of special education schools brought about reforms to the education acts. Almost two decades after the Education Act 1961 was enacted, a Cabinet Committee report was published and it focused on delegating tasks to different part of ministries such as Social Welfare, Education and the Health ministry (Mohd.Nordin, 2010). Besides that, the report also stated that children with cognitive disabilities (mental retardation) should also be given formal education. To handle various tasks regarding special education, a Special Education Department was set up in 1995.

Finally, Education Act 1996 which replaced Education Act 1961, placed special education under the umbrella of Ministry of Education and stipulated that the duration of children with SEN in primary or secondary schools can be extended depending on their needs but not lesser than normal children. This act was also influenced international stands on education for children with SEN such as UNESCO's International Declaration on Education for All (1990). Subsequently, many other acts have been enacted concerning special education.

The acts mentioned cover the entire population of children with SEN in Malaysia. Nevertheless, as stated by Nora Mislán (no date), although there are numerous effort to educate children with SEN, some of them are "left out due to geographical and socioeconomic factors". Geographical factors comprise areas such as rural or remote areas where education for children with SEN might not be prominent.

As an educator in a rural special education school, I have encountered numerous issues. For instance, despite having a well-equipped classroom, there is low enrollment rate due to three other schools placed within the vicinity. Besides that, there is lack of parental involvement due to the fact that some of them are illiterate and embarrassed to admit that they have children with SEN. Furthermore, when there are few students, the funds allocated are based on the number of students thus making it difficult to carry out activities. Hence, it is my concern in this research to identify the challenges conducting special education rural school so that the issues highlighted can be rectified.

## **1.2 Research objective**

The objective of this research is to identify the challenges of implementing special education in rural schools based on teachers' viewpoint. Based on the teachers' experience, methods of rectifying the challenges will be identified and further guidelines will be formulated to improve teachers' effectiveness of teaching special education in rural schools.

## **1.3 Research Question**

This research seeks to answer the following question from a teachers' perspective.

1. What challenges faced by special education teachers' that impede the efficiency of special education in rural schools?
2. How can special education in rural schools be developed to provide quality education for rural special needs children?

## **1.4 Significance of study**

The results obtained from this research will be useful to authorities in the education and planning department, principals, teachers, parents and special education advocates. Although this research is focused on special education in rural schools, planners and teachers from the urban area might also find the results useful as special education is available in almost every part of Malaysia and the issues highlighted might be somewhat similar to issues in non-rural areas.

For educational planners, this research will give an insight on what issues to take into consideration prior to establishing special education in rural areas. Besides that, the

measures taken by teachers and not have been thought before to overcome obstacles in running special education in rural schools can be emulated to other schools.

Parents and advocates of special education will be enlightened by the issues brought up and they can understand better the needs of their children in special education. Furthermore, this research will help highlight the role of parents and advocates in collaborating with schools and ways they can contribute towards the smooth functioning of these schools.

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