



# Zero Reject Policy: A New Pathway of Inclusive Education in Malaysia

Nur Kamariah Ensima<sup>(✉)</sup>, Mohd Isa Hamzah, and Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yassin

The National University of Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia  
nurncmau@gmail.com

**Abstract.** Zero reject policy (ZRP) was policy introduced by Ministry of Education in Malaysia, December 2018 purposely to advance the implementation of Education For All Policy in Malaysia. This concept paper objective is to identify the factor that should be considerate in order to implement ZRP. The resercher used document analysis from previous research. There are 59 journal and article have been analysis and the findings shown that, teacher knowledge, acceptance and readiness among the factor that influents the implementation of the ZRP in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Zero Reject Policy · Inclusive Education · SEN

## 1 Introduction

The Education for All Goals were introduced in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and later reinforced in World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 2000. Ainscow (2020), Amstrong (2011), The Millennium Development Goals, make countries around the world committed to fight for access to education free, quality and compulsory education for primary education started 2015, UNESCO (2007). In the 'A World Fit for Children' Conference, the result of a document from the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children in 2002, countries around the world agreed to make a firm commitment to fight for children's rights and formulate various strategies and actions to achieve education for all objectives. Zalizan et al. (2000), Zuki et al. (2016)

In order to achieve Education for All, Malaysia has taken the initiative to provide a platform for the disabled by participating in International conferences sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This participation is to fight for the rights of the disabled or Special Education Needs Pupils (SEN) in enabling their involvement in mainstream education. Zalizan et al. (2000), Zuki et al. (2016), Liyana (2013), Norliah et al. (2016). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education in 1994 was also adopted by Malaysia in achieving an inclusive education approach to enable every educational center to openly accept all individuals regardless of race, intellectual, language, religion and physical UNESCO (1994). This framework is a guideline throughout the state including organizations and policy makers to include and involve every individual into the same education

system including special children, children who are in rural areas and underprivileged children. In fact, the term ‘education for all’ is to eliminate the disabilities and inability of these children in learning to enable them to get the same education as other children.

The Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013–2025 is a comprehensive reform plan for education policy. The plan highlights Malaysia’s intention to improve its education system such that it ranks first in the International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) by 2025. Although the government may wish to mimic the success of other nations, many believe that the efficacy of such “policy borrowing” is restricted by contextual and cultural variations. A reform plan in Asia is the Malaysian Education Development Plan (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Malaysian Policy Formation.

Malaysian education policy reform has three basic components. First, globalization’s influence on foreign policy borrowing is proven. The influence of globalization may be observed in the PPPM’s emphasis on improving Malaysia’s place in international leagues such as PISA and TIMSS. Second, in this country with a centralized structure, the top-down method is still dominating. Negotiations with stakeholders are required in order for the reforms to be completely accepted. However, data on the influence of such conversations on policy reform is scarce. Third, a suitability-based strategy is regarded as critical in attaining reform goals. The policy of equalization or ‘one-size-fits-all’ is not seen as suitable to be implemented in achieving the objectives of reform.

Malaysian education is administered at four different levels: federal, state, district, and school. The Ministry of Education Malaysia, led by the Director General of Education Malaysia, is in responsibility of developing policies and regulations, while the State Education Department is in charge of organizing and supervising the execution of educational programs, initiatives, and activities. Furthermore, the State Education Department must provide advice to the Ministry of Education on overall planning. The District Education Office acts as a link between the school and the state, organizing and monitoring school-based activities. Headmasters and principals in schools must give professional leadership in school administration.

UNESCO describes inclusive education as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners”. Based on this definition, it is clear that any group in this country is marginalized from receiving education only because of differences in their social status and abilities. As such, the MOE has focused on promoting inclusive education in the country by focusing on reducing the dropout rate and ensuring that people with disabilities (OKU), low income background, indigenous people and undocumented children also receive education as students. others. In the meantime, MOE also strives to ensure that every student with disabilities receives a proper education.

This is in line with UNESCO’s recommendation to make education for all by 2015. Thus, among the efforts made by the MOE is to provide disabilities -friendly facilities in schools, starting with Special Education Schools and Special Education Integration Program and increase cooperation between Ministries, corporate companies and Non Profit Organization (NGO) in order to give privilege to special education services. On top of that, MOE also provide special allowance to special education teacher’s.

Since the 1990s, UNESCO’s appeal for education for all has reverberated in 164 countries, and the Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO) 2015 recognizes countries in

the globe in mid-success towards educational destinations all (EFA). Globally, there have been significant advances in expanding access to education. Student attendance in elementary schools has climbed from 83% in 2000 to 91% in 2015, thanks in part to industrialized nations' political commitment through the Millennium Development Goals and Education For All (EFA) (United Nations, 2018).

Malaysia emphasizes the importance of this education by recommending the subject of Special Education into the Malaysian Education Act 1996. Zalizan et al. (2000), Zuki et al. (2016), Hussin et al. (2012), Lee et al. (2014) This initiative is to enable special children with learning disabilities, physical problems or other disabilities to enjoy the complete infrastructure provided by the school. The term 'special education' was officially used for the first time in Malaysian law (Laws of Malaysia, 2012). 'Special Education' is defined as education that meets the needs of Special Needs Pupils, while 'Special School' is classified as a school that provides special education services (based on the regulations laid down under Sect. 41).

## 2 Zero Reject Policy

The Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013–2025 is a reform which aims to ensure an increase in universal access rates among children from preschool to upper secondary level by 2020. Thus, the education for all began to resonate in Malaysia from 2018 with the tagline "Education for All, Responsibility of All" which given an autonomy and accountability for schools and universities. Therefore, MOE introduced a new policy announced in December 2018, known as Zero Reject Policy (ZRP).

Relatively ZRP is not a new policy but is related to compliance with the Education Act 1996 [Act 550], Sect. 29A. According to Compulsory Primary Education, Subsect. (2) Every Malaysian citizen residing in Malaysia shall ensure that if his child is six years old on the first day of January in the current school year, the child is registered as a pupil in a primary school in that year and remains a primary school pupil throughout the period of compulsory education. Subsection (4) A parent who violates Subsect. (2) is guilty of an offense and, upon conviction, is subject to a fine not exceeding 5,000 ringgit or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or both.

Therefore, based on ACT 550, Ministry of Education in Malaysia emphasizes that SEN has the right to receive compulsory education at the primary school level. Student with SEN also has the right to receive education in line with their disability either to Special Education Schools or mainstream schools through Inclusive Education or Special Education Integration Program. With the implementation of this ZRP, Students with Special Needs (SEN) can register anywhere in the school they are interested in and the school cannot reject the student's application.

In 2019, the Ministry has introduced a comprehensive Zero Reject Policy for Students with Special Needs (SEN). The implementation of this policy is to ensure that all people with disabilities are not exempted from entering the school environment. Apart from that, the 'Circular on Voluntary Parental Involvement in the Classroom' is also an important policy through "Initiative number 62 on Parental Involvement, Community and Private Sector in line with the aspirations in the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013 to 2025". Involvement of Volunteers in the Classroom in the

preschool, primary, secondary school levels including special education schools and integrated special education programs will be able to assist in the launch of the Teaching and Learning (TL) process. The statement also clarified that at the end of June 2019, a total of 735 schools with fewer students with SEN had accepted this policy without any complaints. This is seen to have led to good and positive achievements at the initial stage in the implementation of the Zero Rejection Policy in the country. The implementation of this policy is also for the monitoring of each SEN in terms of their respective strengths and weaknesses so that teachers can provide individual educational plans and TL methods for the students.

Due to the characteristics of education are dynamic and constantly evolving, this change is a process of learning and improving the quality and delivery of knowledge. Lynch, S et al. (2008), Lawrance – Brown (2004) Ainscow(2020). However, the change is closely related to the implementation of teachers in the classroom Sallend (2005) because teachers whose role is to ensure the success of a policy covers the quality or effectiveness of a policy because policy implementation will include aspects of readiness and ability and capacity of teachers to complete the policy. Al quairini et al. (2020), Wan et al. (2016).

### **Teacher' Knowledge**

#### **Policy and implimentation Knowledge**

The MOE 2019 report on 49 respondents from several levels on education policy in Malaysia found that the complexity of the implementation of education policy reform was due to the 'implementation gap' between policy aspirations and implementation in schools and rooms. First, there is an emphasis on the 'top-down' process in a centralized system where information upgrades reported by respondents experience information fluidity through this upgrade process resulting in differences in the message understood with what policymakers intended. Second, the lack of emphasis on the 'bargaining model' although the direct involvement of School Improvement Partners and School Improvement Specialist Coaches in schools has led to some targets in PPPM being improved and changed. *suai*. Third, the 'persuasion model' can be seen through an extensive consultation process to adapt the PPPM. Success can be seen with widespread support for reform.

#### **Profesional Knowledge**

The MOE Statistics Report 2019 shows an increase in the number of SEN student in primary schools from 1,220 students in 2017 to 1,296 students in 2018 and continued to increase to 1,312 students in 2019. Meanwhile, the number of special education classes for primary schools also increased from 3,084 in 2017 to 5,350 in 2018 and 5,653 classes in 2019. Meanwhile, until July 2019, a total of 7,162 students followed the full inclusive program in regular primary schools while 485 students followed the inclusive program for integrated schools and even 11,621 primary school students follow a partially inclusive program.

However, a total of 1,004 primary school teachers did not attend teaching courses while 32,540 primary school teachers were at the teaching certificate or diploma level. Of the total, 94 are special education teachers. As such, the current national challenge

is to improve access to education in terms of enrollment, achievement, and quality of learning as this is increasingly becoming a mainstream development concern.

### **Pedagogical Knowledge**

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge in implementing zero reject policy may not have been studied in Malaysia. Yet our concern is over the ability of teachers to implement this policy in the classroom. Malaysia named this policy as Zero Reject Policy that is all students should be given equal rights in education that is education is for all. While foreign countries may use different terms such as Education for All (EFA) or Universal Design For Learning.

Riddell's (2019) study of policy implementation The Education (Additional Support For Learning) Scotland Act 2004 amended 2016 and first implemented in 2018 found that in the early stages its implementation was much influenced by individual understanding compared to the original purpose of the policy. However, with the implementation of the policy has succeeded in increasing 16% of students with disabilities to school in Scotland where only 10% in 2010 and 26% in 2018.

For South African countries, the introduction of policies involving SEN has been introduced since 1994, but Ahmmmed et al. (2014) study found that The Department of Basic Education in South Africa still finds failures in terms of infrastructure, allocation, teacher capacity and curriculum. While for Saudi Arabia, education for all or Universal Design for Learning is still in the development stage. Alqurani et al. (2018). In a study of 130 teachers, only 48 (36.9%) had attended a course on the policy and even more unfortunate, only 32 of them implemented the policy. Thus, the findings of Alquraini (2020) found that 74% of respondents agreed that they need more pedagogical courses to implement the policy in the classroom.

The School Sector Reform Program (2009–2015) was introduced in Nepal as a platform to answer the call for education for all. Bank et al. (2019) study of 21 households with 15 children found that the policy faced four main challenges involving community views, stigma and discrimination, assessment of learning and infrastructure facilities. Teachers also described as less positive, especially involving students who are weak in education and even students who have not mastered the skills of writing and reading at a certain age have been denied their right to school. In fact, the parents also told about the suicide attempt of their 12-year-old son because he was not given the opportunity to go to school due to his physical disabilities. The situation is further complicated as the teacher community is less motivated and the community also considers these underprivileged students as a burden.

### **Teacher's Acceptance Towards Student with SEN**

Inclusive education provides opportunities for students with special needs to undergo teaching and learning process as well as socialize with other mainstream students. Inclusive education coincides with 'Public Law 94-142 part B' which states that inclusive education provides educational opportunities to all students with special needs. A report from the Special Education Division, MOE (2012) mentioned that the schools that have the Special Education Integration Program and implement inclusive education are 355 schools, namely 161 primary schools and 194 secondary schools. This recorded only

6% of SEN student placed under Inclusive Education, while 89% registered under Special Education Integration Program and 5% enrolled in Special Education Schools. This enrollment percentage needs to be increased to reach 75% in 2025. As of 2018, the inclusive education enrollment percentage increase to is 40.54% (data as of January 2018).

MOE report also touched on the acceptance of some primary teachers, including administrators, on the presence of students with special needs in mainstream classes. This is due to a lack of understanding of the implementation of inclusive programs in schools. Many are of the opinion that the presence of these students will complicate administrative matters as well as affect school performance, due to teachers perception towards students with SEN have low cognitive ability due to problems in comprehension, speech, writing and solving mathematical problems as well as physical and sensory disabilities that will lead to overall academic performance of the school.

Teachers 'and administrators' acceptance of inclusive education is closely related to the readiness and experience of handling students with special needs during teaching and learning process. Most of the mainstream teachers involved in inclusive programs were found to be less experienced and skilled in educating and teaching student with disabilities. In addition, the interaction between peers with SEN student is limited due to peers do not know about SEN as well as the lack of mastery of social skills and interaction of SEN itself. Pupils with special needs usually have low levels of self-confidence which makes them insecure to associate and interact with friends and teachers.

Meanwhile, the United Nations, 2018 also estimates that 57 million primary school children from low-status families around the world are still out of school while what will definitely improve the quality of education has been recognized as an urgent concern in the world. Furthermore, equity in access to school is not shared, particularly among children with impairments. This minority is still widely excluded from schooling. (Bruggink and colleagues 2016; UNESCO, 2010; WHO, and World Bank, 2011).

Children with disabilities have lower school attendance rates and lower transition rates to higher levels of schooling in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, & World Bank, 2011). According to research conducted in 30 nations, children with impairments are 10 times less likely than their counterparts to attend school (Lessard et al. 2014). The influence of this disability is one of the strongest factors in their non-attendance at school compared to other factors. (WHO, & World Bank, 2011). This is because, these disabilities make their learning process very limited.

Although SEN enrollment is increasing in most developing countries and this increase also includes the quality of SEN education (Maulana et al., 2015, Maclister et al., 2019) but evidenced from research showing how student with SEN is less excluded from the curriculum and teaching as the mainstream. (Kaushik, 2018). In addition to school practices that isolate the student with SEN is not support the inclusive learning and environments that can also contribute towards why SEN do not attend school. (Miles et al., 2010, Maclister et al., 2019, Molosiwa et al. 2016).

### **Teacher's Readiness**

Teacher readiness is one of the aspect should be emphasized to produce quality education for students. Teachers must be knowledgeable and dedication in education so every student can acquire knowledge with enthusiasm and discipline while applying positive

values. Maulana et al (2015), Thomson et al. (1999, 2000) Ravenscorft et al. (2019), the achievement of a student is based on the positive values conveyed as a result of a teacher's technique that will have an impact in an education. They also stressed that teachers should apply appropriate approaches to produce quality education for students such as involving all students in problem solving techniques regardless of their background. This will be able to reduce the gap between normal students and students with special needs. Teachers should have this value awareness to achieve equality of every student in the education sector.

Social, race, ethnic, religious and language aspects are also among the approaches that should be given emphasis to teachers in delivering education. In addition, Malaysia, which is known as a multicultural country, must emphasize consistent education regardless of race, ethnic background or disability to enable every individual to obtain the same education. This effort will be able to create inclusiveness to the education system in Malaysia by creating a system or process of reform in a more comprehensive institution Zuki et al. (2016), Zalizan et al. (201). To achieve this goal, teachers must be sensitive in the emphasis on strategy by ensuring that equality is given equally to every student. According to Obidike, Anyikwa & Enemou (2010), apart from the aspects already mentioned above, teachers should be exposed to knowledge and skills in the use of technology in the classroom. In this era of modernization, the use of technology has been widely used indefinitely, so teachers must use this opportunity by applying technology-based teaching techniques. However, today, most teachers are less exposed to the use of information technology. This is due to the limitations of the platform in channeling this exposure to the teacher community. In the study *Appropriation, Mastery and Resistance to Technology in Early Childhood Preservice Teacher Education*, James Laffey (2004) described that teachers will make an impact in their teaching when they do not master information technology skills. The mastery of these skills is considered as a linear movement that begins with the teacher's awareness of the importance of information technology. The adaptation and innovation of teachers in the use of information technology will in turn improve learning and teaching techniques. Therefore, the exposure of information technology is important to educators and teachers in facing the era of modernization in the 21st century to produce a younger generation that is more competitive and innovative in the future.

### **Teacher's Skills**

The effectiveness of the teacher's teaching and learning process also depends on the teacher's interest, knowledge and skills as broad knowledge of the subject will help teachers identify aspects of student learning. Arnold (1998) Athanases et al. (2020) Abdul et al. (2005). The level of teacher knowledge, interest, skills of teachers in 42 schools in Pontian is at a moderate level of only 59.07%. Abdul et al. (2005) In fact 69.97% of the respondents also admitted that the most dominant factor in the smoothness and effectiveness of teaching and learning is the level of knowledge and skills of teachers. This study also supports the study of who found that effective teachers are dependent on their interest and knowledge in the subject being taught. Buli et al. (2014) Burn (2005) Callender et al. (2017) agreed that teachers' knowledge in the field will affect the teaching and mastery of students. Clark et al. (2019).

The findings of Nadhir et al. (2016) found that even 64.10% of primary teachers are willing to conduct inclusive classes but they do not have strong skills to help make teaching and learning more organized and structured. Norliah et al. (2016). The implementation of inclusive education is an obstacle in this country due to the problem of lack of skills in understanding the student problems who are said to have learning difficulties with those who are less self-motivated. This confusion about students with special needs involves teachers who have never have any exposure about special education. The failure of teachers to understand this context leads to the existence of elements of stigma and stereotypes that make teachers in the first place do not give equal space to students who are having learning difficulties. Harris et al. (2019), Nadhir et al. (2016), Norliah et al. (2016), Salend (2005), Thomlinson (1999, 2000).

Therefore, the acceptance of mainstream teachers to SEN students who have not been diagnosed is more positive than students who have been labeled with a problem. Thomlinson (2000) The effect of labeling on SEN student's is significant in the implementation of inclusive education. Liyana (2013). This also affects the implementation of teacher teaching and learning involving SEN students. Thus, early disclosure not only gives equal rights in education but also takes into account the humanitarian aspect. Mohammad & Alfa (2016) even the content of teacher studies subjects now needs to be refined by providing exposure to all teachers to identify the diversity of students and students with learning difficulties. Zalizan (2010). This is because, 60% of teachers have never attended a course on conducting inclusive education causing teachers to teach in a teach a-whole. Norliah et al. (2016).

Teaching techniques that use multiple levels in one classroom have proven successful abroad. However, the issue of lack of exposure to special education also occurs in Hong Kong where only 16% of teachers have knowledge about students with problems while 67% receive only a little exposure. In fact, 70% of these under -exposed teachers are those who have served 6 years. Liu et al. (2019).

Therefore, in order to address the diversity of students in the classroom, teachers need to have pedagogical skills that through the implementation of adaptive learning that integrates the diversity of students with the individual achievements of each student. This is because, in inclusive education this not only involves certain groups but efforts to transform the entire education system that extends to all students regardless of background or level of educational needs. Unesco, 2017. Policymakers around the world have led to education reform by upholding the global transition towards more inclusive education, as well as making inclusive teaching a mandatory professional competency for teachers in many countries. Burns & Shadoina-Gersing, 2010; OECD, 2015. However, these reforms also require teachers to strive to implement inclusive teaching however teachers face the problem of lack of knowledge and skills to meet the diverse learning of students. Bank et al. (2019), Vantiegham et al. (2020).

### 3 Conclusion

Education is critical to a country's economic growth and development. The teaching and learning process that takes place in the classroom is the strongest predictor of a country's future success. In today's global economy, a country's prosperity is heavily reliant on

its people's knowledge, skills, and competences. As a result, it is not unexpected that a country with highly educated population will be able to experience more economic success. Furthermore, education is the cornerstone for country building and promoting togetherness. Education also allows individuals to enhance their level of life, become successful members of society, and actively contribute to the nation's progress. Through interaction in society enables individuals from various socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds to learn to understand, accept, and appreciate differences, thereby sharing experiences and aspirations to build Malaysia's future.

Thus, the goal of a human rights-based approach to education is to ensure that every child receives a quality education that respects the rights and dignity of each individual. However, achieving this goal is much more complex and faces a variety of challenges. The right to education is high on the agenda of the international community and has gained much agreement on human rights and is recognized by governments as important in social development and transformation efforts. Recognition of children's right to quality education has been established for the past 20 years. Therefore, the introducing of ZRP will bring Malaysian into the new pathway in SEN. However, the implementation of ZRP must come together with the readiness, knowledge and acceptance among mainstreams teachers as a main player. Various courses and training are fully welcomed to enhanced teachers skills and knowledge.

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