



Inclusive Education – A Focus on Malaysia

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DEPUTY Education Minister I, Datuk Mary Yap Kain Ching highlighted Malaysia's delivery of education services to children with disabilities, at the IDPP Multi-stakeholder Roundtable on Inclusive Education Policy.

She said though the Education Ministry's Special Education Department holds the primary responsibility to provide education for children with disabilities in Malaysia, the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) in the Prime Minister's Department is tasked to oversee the implementation and to assess its progress in relation to the policies on education of this category of children.

"The other government agency that looks into providing special education to students with disabilities is the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD).

"Through its Social Welfare Department (JKM), learning and skills training services are implemented in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based rehabilitation (CBR) centres," she told the Roundtable.

In addition, NGOs and the private sector play an important role too in this field of education as there are non-profit learning and care centres (example, Malaysian Care Community Services, Kiwanis Centre) that provide early intervention, learning, rehabilitation and training programmes for children with disabilities.

Yap, who is Member of Parliament for Tawau, said this role invariably fills an important gap in the public system. The National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC) actively campaigns and raises the awareness of the need for parents and teachers to identify children with disabilities so that early intervention can take place to assist them.

Enlightening the delegates, the Deputy Education Minister I explained that in the Malaysian context, inclusive education refers to creating schools which welcome all learners, regardless of their characteristics, disadvantages or difficulties.

"Which means it includes the traditionally excluded or marginalised groups as well such as disabled children, girls, children in remote villages, and the very poor. "These invisible groups were excluded from government policy and access to education then but now the Ministry of Education (MOE) is making these invisible groups visible in schools," she pointed out.

In her presentation, Yap elaborated on Malaysia's move towards inclusive education. In line with the global focus towards inclusive education, Malaysia officially made serious efforts to integrate students with special needs into the sphere of mainstream education.

"This was done through its involvement in workshops and training activities by the United Nations (UN) and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)."

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or CRC in short (1989), the UN Standard and Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), UNESCAP Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (2002), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and Incheon Strategy (2012) shared the common concern for the dire need to educate every child, regardless of his/her disability or learning difficulty. Subsequently, the National Special Needs Education System was introduced in the Malaysian Education Act (1996), and the Education (Special Education) Regulations (2013) provide the legal framework for special education for children with disabilities in the country. These regulations are applicable to government or government-aided schools.

The Deputy Education Minister I also shed light on Malaysia's preparation for the implementation of Inclusive Education. It was in 1993 that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) took the first initiative to offer the pre-service teacher preparation programme leading to a Bachelor of Education degree in Special Needs Education. This programme was developed alongside with three universities in the United Kingdom, namely The Universities of Manchester, Birmingham and Cambridge, the Roundtable was told.

Yap said today, the University of Malaya is an active participant of IDPP, offering even a Masters degree programme with the integration of disability-related content.

"I understand that a cohort of 5 IDPP fellows and two other students will be following this Masters programme in the University of Malaya. "Congratulations! I am sure this programme will provide meaningful and relevant learning experiences for this cohort of post-graduate students," she said.

According to Yap, the effort carried out by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to implement inclusive education effectively is ongoing.

This, she said, is reflected in Chapter 4 (Pages 15 -20) in the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025), which states that the MOE is committed to moving more students with special needs towards the Inclusive Education Programme (IEP) as well as raising the overall quality of provision.

A series of initiatives under Wave 1 (2013-2015) which focus on strengthening the foundation are being implemented while Wave 2 (2016-2020) will scale up the initiatives with Wave 3 (2021-2025) assessing and consolidating the initiatives for further improvement.

She added : "Apart from that, a guidebook prepared by the Special Education Division of MOE is provided to direct the implementation of the Inclusive Education Programme (IEP). "Disabled-

friendly facilities are being provided too in the respective schools to cater for the needs of these children."

Yap's paper also gave emphasis to the "Way Forward".

First and foremost, if we aspire to create a society of respect and acceptance for children with disabilities, we need to be driven by strategic partnerships comprising the families and communities, local and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international organisations and governments.

"This is in the context of inclusive education for the global knowledge economy in ASEAN," she said.

On top of it, Yap added, we need to create a strong awareness among the communities that students with special needs have the potential to excel and their disability can be minimised if they are given equal opportunities to learn in the mainstream classes.

The Roundtable heard that the latest thinking on the critical importance of inclusive education highlighting on what can still be done calls "for a review of the existing practices, perspectives and frameworks through carrying out case studies and making relevant analyses of the data collected."

This move, Yap said, needs to explore the full array of social and educational benefits of the different programmes for students with disabilities. "It also needs to explore how related evidence of return on investment in the global knowledge economy can be manifested and managed across ASEAN."

Among those present were Dr Derrick L. Cogburn (Executive Director of IDPP, American University); Dr Mohd Hazlim Shah bin Hj Abdul Murad, (Deputy Director INPUMA, University of Malaya); Dr Mohd Hamdi Abd Shukor (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and International), University of Malaya; and Mr Shuichi Ohno (Executive Director of The Nippon Foundation).

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