

# The Perspectives of Early Childhood and Special Needs Teachers on Developing a Synergistic Model for Inclusive Early Childhood Education in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) is fundamental in ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all children, including those with special educational needs. In Malaysia, however, the implementation of inclusive practices remains fragmented due to the absence of a comprehensive and collaborative framework. This study explores the perspectives of early childhood and special needs teachers to inform the development of a synergistic model for IECE in Malaysia. A total of 1,065 teachers participated in the study, comprising 90% early childhood teachers and 10% special needs teachers. Findings reveal three critical dimensions for an effective inclusive model: Accessibility, Participation, and Support. Under Accessibility, the need for a universal design for learning ( $M = 4.43$ ) emphasizes flexible curriculum structures that accommodate diverse learning abilities and styles, while early intervention ( $M = 4.43$ ) underscores the importance of identifying developmental needs at an early stage. In terms of Participation, teachers rated socio-emotional development support ( $M = 4.57$ ) and behavioural development support ( $M = 4.53$ ) as key priorities, reflecting the need for systematic professional development to enhance teachers' capacity in managing diverse classroom dynamics. The Support dimension highlights the importance of blended programmes ( $M = 4.47$ ) and collaborative partnerships ( $M = 4.47$ ) among teachers, parents, administrators, and multidisciplinary professionals to sustain inclusive practices. Overall, the findings indicate a strong consensus on the urgency of a synergistic model that bridges mainstream and special education through shared resources, continuous professional learning, and structured collaboration. The study contributes empirical evidence to advance Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2013–2025 and supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 in ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a crucial global priority, acknowledged for its significance in ensuring equitable access to high-quality education for all children, including those with special needs (Yoke-Yean et al., 2021; Kong, 2022). Inclusive education highlights the needs of each child, regardless of their physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional needs, to fully engage in the educational framework (Yoke-Yean et al., 2021; Khin Nyein et al., 2021). Inclusive education is an equality, non-discrimination, and appreciation for children with special needs, and it aims to establish a nurturing setting where every child can flourish (UNESCO, 2020; Awang et al., 2024).

A noticeable transition has occurred in recent decades towards embracing inclusive education globally. The Salamanca Statement (1994), UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) represent international frameworks advocating inclusive education. These frameworks emphasize the importance of adapting the educational system to meet

the diverse needs of all students, thereby facilitating accessibility, participation, and support (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020).

A global scale of international policy debates has been encouraged by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (UN, 2006), which highlights the rights to implement inclusive, high-quality, and cost-free primary and secondary education on a reasonable basis with others in their respective societies (UN, 2006). The regulation for inclusive education, as defined in this convention, does not clearly define the reality of early childhood education, which involves the nurturing and instruction of children aged 6 years and below (Yoke-Yean et al., 2021; Kong, 2022; Chin, 2023a).

Apart from the Guidelines for Inclusion of Students with Special Needs and Handbook of Operations served by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia, the Malaysian government's support for inclusive education is presently stated in the Education Blueprint (MOE Malaysia 2013) for 2013 – 2025. Among the initiatives proposed to facilitate inclusion are allocating resources for training special education teachers and specialists, upgrading facilities in mainstream schools (i.e., building ramps, railings, special needs toilets, and lifts), and creating public awareness of and involvement in the education of children with SEN. These initiatives were initially proposed for the first wave (2013 – 2015) to strengthen existing schools with inclusive education programmes. In the second wave (2016 – 2020), these reforms expanded to include more schools nationwide. The Education Blueprint proposes that special education be included as a core subject in teacher education, and an additional 1600 teachers be trained in the first wave of the Blueprint. Professional learning is offered to teachers and school leaders interested in specialising in SEN teaching and curriculum development (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 - 2025, 2013).

Launched in 2019, the Zero Reject policy marks a significant shift towards making education inclusive for all children with special educational needs (SEN) throughout Malaysia (Special Education Division, 2018). There has been incremental progress with early childhood inclusion in many developed and developing countries. Meanwhile, the Department of Special Needs, Ministry of Education, published guidelines for inclusive education for students with special needs in 2013 and revised them in 2018; however, specific guidelines for early childhood education have yet to be established.

Accessibility aims to promote both physical and educational accessibility (Zainon et al., 2025; Yuege & Zaharudin, 2025). Physical accessibility refers to the design and layout of buildings, outdoor environments, ramps, elevators, automatic doors, and other access features that enable children to access all areas of the school independently and safely (Radzi, Ismail & Ab Wahab, 2020). Participation from adults are important to promote the participation of mainstream children and children with special needs in inclusive early childhood (Ghazali, Alias & Nasri, 2023; Shariff & Khairuddin, 2024). Collaboration among key stakeholders (families, medical specialists, education stakeholders, and the community) is a cornerstone for implementing high-quality early childhood inclusion (Awang et al., 2024; Zainol et al., 2025; Ibrahim, 2025).

## METHODS

This phase aims to identify the needs for developing a synergistic model of inclusive early childhood education to promote accessibility, participation, and support for children with special needs. The method used was a quantitative survey design. The survey has been distributed to the 1,065 selected respondents, 90% early childhood teachers and 10% special needs teachers across selected preschools and childcare centres in Malaysia. The respondents were selected for needs analysis phase because the participants were directly involved in early childhood education and special education for more than 5 years of experience working with children with special needs in Malaysia.

The questionnaire was validated by 13 experts from early childhood education, special needs education, and academicians based on relevance, clarity and suitability. The questionnaire items went through several stages, including being developed based on three main constructs derived from inclusive education literature: accessibility, participation, and support. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) using Cronbach's Alpha to obtain descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. According to Chua (2021), this method is often used to calculate Cronbach's alpha

reliability coefficient, which assesses the statistical reliability of the study instrument. The analysis determines the perspectives of early childhood and special needs teachers on developing a synergistic model for inclusive early childhood education in Malaysia.

### Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire was developed based on three main constructs derived from inclusive education literature: accessibility, participation, and support. These three constructs were selected because effective inclusive early childhood education requires more than providing physical access to learning environments. It also involves ensuring meaningful participation and establishing continuous support systems for children with special educational needs (SEN). Therefore, the questionnaire items were designed to identify teachers' perspectives on the essential elements required for developing a synergistic model of inclusive early childhood education in Malaysia.

The first construct, accessibility, refers to the extent to which children with SEN are able to access meaningful learning opportunities within inclusive early childhood settings. This construct consists of three key components: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), curriculum adaptation, and early intervention. The UDL component focuses on providing flexible teaching approaches, multiple methods of instruction, and varied learning experiences to accommodate children's diverse abilities and learning needs. Curriculum adaptation examines the extent to which learning content, teaching strategies, and classroom environments can be modified to ensure that children with SEN can participate in educational activities. Meanwhile, early intervention focuses on the importance of early identification of children's developmental needs and the provision of appropriate support services at an early stage to reduce learning barriers.

The second construct, participation, focuses on the active involvement of children with SEN in inclusive learning experiences through collaboration and engagement among relevant stakeholders. This construct includes stakeholder involvement, socio-emotional development, and behavioural support. Stakeholder involvement highlights the importance of collaboration among teachers, families, administrators, and professionals in creating an inclusive environment. The socio-emotional development component emphasises the role of inclusive practices in supporting children's emotional well-being, social interaction, confidence, and relationships with peers. In addition, behavioural support addresses the need for appropriate strategies to assist children with SEN in managing behaviour, developing self-regulation skills, and participating effectively in classroom activities. The third construct, support, represents the continuous resources, systems, and professional assistance required to sustain inclusive early childhood education practices. This construct consists of professional development, collaboration, and intervention services. Professional development focuses on enhancing teachers' knowledge, skills, and confidence in implementing inclusive practices. Collaboration refers to the coordination and communication between early childhood teachers, special education teachers, families, and multidisciplinary professionals to ensure consistent support for children with SEN. Intervention services involve the integration of specialised assistance, such as therapy and developmental support, to address children's individual needs and promote holistic development.

Based on these three constructs, the questionnaire items were developed and organised into three dimensions: accessibility, participation, and support. The items were adapted and developed from previous inclusive education literature and refined according to expert feedback to ensure their relevance to the Malaysian early childhood education context.

### Reliability Analysis (Cronbach Alpha)

Table 1.0 The summary of Cronbach's Alpha for Reliability Testing of Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Table: Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| 0.962            | 30         |

The results of the pilot study are Cronbach's alpha coefficient  $\alpha = .962$ , as shown in Table 1.0. Furthermore, in line with Cohen (2018), the interpretation of Cronbach's alpha values can be evaluated by looking into the classification in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Cronbach Alpha (Cohen et al., 2018)

| Score         | Reliability of Variables |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| > 0.90        | Very High Reliability    |
| > 0.80 – 0.90 | High Reliability         |
| 0.70 – 0.79   | Reliable                 |
| 0.60 – 0.69   | Low Reliability          |
| < 0.60        | Very Low Reliability     |

Therefore, based on a pilot test conducted on 30 respondents, the study instrument has a Cronbach's Alpha validity value of 0.962 and has very high reliability (Cohen et al., 2018). As shown in Table 1.1, the construct of accessibility consisted of 8 items, participation consisted of 6 items, and support consisted of 5 items. The complete list of questionnaire items is provided in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Cronbach's alpha value for each construct

| Bil | Construct     | Cronbach's Alpha Value | Bil. Item |
|-----|---------------|------------------------|-----------|
| 1   | Accessibility | 0.950                  | 8         |
| 2   | Participation | 0.827                  | 6         |
| 3   | Support       | 0.892                  | 5         |
|     | Total Value   | 0.962                  | 19        |

### Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the university research ethics committee. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study.

## RESULTS

The results show the findings of accessibility, participation, and support for children with special needs.

## FINDINGS

The discussion of findings was presented in Section 1, which examined the results of Phase 1. This phase aimed to determine the necessity of developing a synergistic model to promote accessibility, participation, and support for children with special needs. The findings were organised into four sections based on the questionnaire administered to respondents: Section A (demographics of respondents), Section B (accessibility), Section C (participation), and Section D (support).

A survey method was employed, using a 19-item questionnaire that was distributed to 1,065 respondents. These respondents consisted of early childhood teachers in Malaysia. The findings were reported using descriptive data of percentages, means, and standard deviation.

### Questionnaire Analysis

The questionnaire consisted of four sections, identified as Part A, B, C, and D. Part A addressed the demographic information of respondents while Part B focused on the need analysis of accessibility. Part C examined the participation of stakeholders, and Part D explored the support provided by stakeholders to children with special needs. For analysis, the findings were classified into three levels of mean interpretation, as presented in Table 1.3.

**Table 1.3** Mean score range interpretation.

| Group Code | Mean Score  | Reasoning Level |
|------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1          | 1.00 - 2.33 | Low             |
| 2          | 2.34 - 3.67 | Moderate        |
| 3          | 3.68 – 5.00 | High            |

Source: Wiersman (2000)

## Findings of Part A

These findings show the demographics of the respondents.

## Demographics of the Respondents

Five items have been asked in the demographic analysis in Part A. The elements of early childhood teachers to be analysed are gender, academic qualifications, work experience, field of expertise, and experience in handling children with special needs. A total of 1,065 respondents in Malaysia participated in the research by responding to the questionnaire distributed. Information from the demographic data is used to get the number and percentage of teachers. The overall findings of the study can be found in Table 1.4.

**Table 1.4** Demographics of The Respondents

|                        | Category                                                                                                                                                                     | Percentage (%)                                                                                                                                            | Total              |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Gender                 | Female<br>Male                                                                                                                                                               | 99.25% (n=1,057) 0.75% (n=8)                                                                                                                              | 100.0% (n = 1,065) |
| Academic Qualification | Diploma<br>Degree<br>Master's Degree<br>Doctor of Philosophy<br>SPM<br>Sijil Rendah Pelajaran<br>Sijil Perguruan Prasekolah<br>Sijil Pendidikan Prasekolah<br>STPM<br>Others | 71.36% (n=760)<br>16.81% (n=179)<br>1.97% (n=21)<br>0.28% (n=3)<br>7.42% (n=79)<br>0.75% (n=8)<br>0.56% (n=6)<br>0.9% (n=1)<br>0.19% (n=2)<br>0.56% (n=6) | 100.0% (n = 1,065) |
| Working Experience     | 5 years and below<br>5-10 years<br>10-15 years<br>15-20 years<br>20-25 years<br>25-30 years<br>30-35 years<br>35-40 years<br>40-45 years                                     | 19.25% (n=205)<br>19.15% (n=204)<br>31.92% (n=340)<br>8.27% (n=88)<br>10.70% (n=114)<br>9.01% (n=96)<br>4.60% (n=49)<br>0.75% (n=8)<br>0.09% (n=1)        | 100.0% (n = 1,065) |
| Field of Expertise     | Early Childhood Education                                                                                                                                                    | 100.0% (n = 1,065)                                                                                                                                        | 100.0% (n = 1,065) |

|                                                 |                   |                |                    |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Experience Handling Children with Special Needs | 5 years and below | 16.22% (n=205) | 100.0% (n = 1,065) |
|                                                 | 5-10 years        | 34.35% (n=434) |                    |
|                                                 | 10-15 years       | 5.78% (n=73)   |                    |
|                                                 | 15-20 years       | 7.04% (n=89)   |                    |
|                                                 | 20-25 years       | 0.47% (n=6)    |                    |
|                                                 | 25-30 years       | 0.63% (n=8)    |                    |
|                                                 | 30-35 years       | 0.79% (n=10)   |                    |
|                                                 | 35-40 years       | 0.87% (n=11)   |                    |
|                                                 | 40-45 years       | 0.08% (n=1)    |                    |
|                                                 | Others            | 33.78% (n=427) |                    |

Referring to **Table 1.4**, the number of male respondents was 8 (0.75%), and the number of female respondents was 1,057 (99.25%). Females were more likely to respond than the male respondents. This is because early childhood teachers in this district are predominantly female.

A total of 1,065 respondents participated in this study. Table 2 also shows the academic qualifications of the respondents. The table shows that respondents with a diploma had the highest percentage, at 760 (71.36%), while respondents with Sijil Pendidikan Prasekolah had the lowest percentage, at 1 (0.09%).

Also, the results of this study show that 340 (31.92%) of the respondents have working experience from 10-15 years, while 40-45 years, 1 (0.09%) respondent. In terms of field of expertise, the percentage of early childhood education is 1,065 (100%). Experience handling children with special needs for 5 years or below, 205 respondents (16.22%), while 40-45 years, 1 respondent (0.08%).

### Findings of Part B (Accessibility)

The importance of developing a synergistic model to promote accessibility for children with special needs is highlighted.

Questionnaire Part B has drawn attention to the importance and requirement of accessibility to develop a synergistic model to promote accessibility, participation, and support for children with special needs in early childhood. Since the early childhood teachers' needs vary from one another, it was necessary to identify their perception of inclusive education.

**Table 1.4** Finding Means and Standard Deviation of the acceptance level of a synergistic model of inclusive early childhood to promote accessibility, participation, and support for children with special needs.

| No | Item                                                                                                                             | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| B1 | Access to inclusive education provides learning opportunities for children with special education needs (SEN).                   | 4.37       | 0.669              |
| B2 | Access to inclusive education provides quality learning environment for children with special education needs (SEN).             | 4.40       | 0.621              |
| B3 | Universal Design for Learning (UDL) supports inclusive education access by providing a variety of teaching methods.              | 4.33       | 0.661              |
| B4 | Universal Design for Learning (UDL) supports inclusive education access by providing a variety of learning methods.              | 4.37       | 0.669              |
| B5 | Universal Design for Learning (UDL) gives access to inclusive education for children with SEN based on the physical environment. | 4.37       | 0.556              |

|    |                                                                                                                            |      |       |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| B6 | Universal Design for Learning (UDL) gives access to inclusive education for children with SEN based on curriculum content. | 4.43 | 0.568 |
| B7 | The right for education is fulfilled by making the necessary adjustments to address the children's learning needs.         | 4.40 | 0.621 |
| B8 | Children with synergistic support services can receive appropriate educational access when SEN is detected earlier.        | 4.43 | 0.626 |

Table 1.4 shows the interpretation of data on the acceptance of a synergistic model of inclusive early childhood to promote accessibility, participation and support for children with special needs. The findings indicate that all accessibility components recorded a high level of agreement among respondents. The mean scores ranged from 4.33 to 4.43, indicating that teachers strongly perceived accessibility as an essential element in developing inclusive early childhood education. The highest-rated components were curriculum adaptation and early detection of SEN ( $M = 4.43$ ), suggesting that teachers recognise the importance of flexible learning approaches and early support in reducing barriers for children with special needs. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score was observed for UDL in providing various teaching methods ( $M = 4.33$ ), indicating that teachers may require further support in implementing diverse instructional strategies.

### Findings of Part C (Participation)

The researcher needs to identify the level of perspectives of the ECE teachers towards the development of early childhood to promote accessibility, participation, and support for children with special needs in Malaysia.

**Table 1.5** Finding Means and Standard Deviation of the acceptance level of a synergistic model of inclusive early childhood to promote accessibility, participation, and support for children with special needs.

**Table: Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Items**

| No. | Item                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| C1  | Modification and additional support to children with SEN is required through full synergistic involvement of stakeholders (educators, families, practitioners, experts and administrators).                                                    | 4.43       | 0.679              |
| C2  | The diversity of learning approaches in intervention is to support learning based on the needs of children and families.                                                                                                                       | 4.33       | 0.606              |
| C3  | The synergy of stakeholder involvement is to support the holistic development of children, especially socio-emotional, for the implementation of quality inclusive education.                                                                  | 4.57       | 0.568              |
| C4  | The synergy of stakeholder involvement is to support the holistic development of children, especially behavioral, for the implementation of quality inclusive education.                                                                       | 4.53       | 0.571              |
| C5  | The National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum (ECCE) supports the participation of children and organizations in providing inclusive services by taking into account the needs and providing opportunities for children with SEN. | 4.23       | 0.679              |
| C6  | The National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) supports the participation of children and organizations in providing inclusive services by taking into account the needs and providing opportunities for children with SEN.                 | 4.10       | 0.759              |

The participation dimension also demonstrated a high level of agreement, with mean scores ranging from 4.10 to 4.57. Stakeholder involvement in supporting children's socio-emotional development obtained the highest score ( $M = 4.57$ ), highlighting the importance of collaborative practices in inclusive education. In contrast, the role of KSPK in supporting inclusive participation recorded the lowest score ( $M = 4.10$ ), suggesting the need for further strengthening of curriculum implementation to address diverse learning needs.

### Findings of Part D (Support)

The agreement on the suitability and usability of early childhood to promote accessibility, participation and support for children with special needs in Malaysia.

**Table 1.6** Finding Means and Standard Deviation of the acceptance level of a synergistic model of inclusive early childhood to promote accessibility, participation, and support for children with special needs.

**Table: Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Items**

| No. | Item                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| D1  | A tiered support system of the synergy of individuals and organisations in providing inclusive services to children and families.                                                                        | 4.40       | 0.563              |
| D2  | Professional development for all stakeholders (educators, families, practitioners, experts, and administrators) needs to be integrated to support the synergy of mainstream care and education services. | 4.43       | 0.568              |
| D3  | Intervention services and therapy must be integrated to support the synergy of mainstream care and education services.                                                                                   | 4.37       | 0.615              |
| D4  | Programme of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and special education programs need to be implemented in a blended learning to support children with SEN.                                                   | 4.47       | 0.507              |
| D5  | Effective collaboration and communication among all stakeholders are important to support policies, resources and implementation of high-quality inclusive early childhood education programmes.         | 4.47       | 0.507              |

The support dimension showed strong agreement among respondents, with mean scores ranging from 4.37 to 4.47. The highest-rated components were blended learning and stakeholder collaboration ( $M = 4.47$ ), demonstrating teachers' recognition that continuous cooperation and flexible learning approaches are important for sustaining inclusive practices.

## DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that accessibility is a fundamental component of inclusive early childhood education, particularly through curriculum flexibility, early intervention, and adaptive teaching practices. Teachers demonstrated strong agreement that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) supports access to inclusive education through curriculum content (B6,  $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 0.568$ ). This suggests that teachers recognise the importance of adapting curriculum structures to accommodate the diverse learning needs of children with SEN. This finding is consistent with UNESCO (2020), which highlights curriculum flexibility as an essential strategy for reducing barriers to learning. From the perspective of inclusive education, curriculum adaptation enables children with SEN to access meaningful learning experiences and promotes their social, emotional, and cognitive development (Hill & Kershaw, 2024).

The findings also highlight the importance of early identification and support services, as reflected in B8 ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 0.626$ ). Early detection allows schools and families to provide timely intervention, including individualised learning plans, therapy, and specialised resources, which can improve children's participation in

inclusive settings (Labutis, 2024). Therefore, accessibility within the proposed synergistic model should not only focus on physical access but also include early support mechanisms that address children's individual developmental needs.

Although all accessibility items recorded high agreement, B3 (UDL in providing various teaching methods) obtained the lowest mean score ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.661$ ).

This suggests that teachers may experience challenges in implementing diverse instructional strategies due to limited training, resources, or classroom demands. This finding supports Kasinathan (2023), who reported that some Malaysian preschool teachers feel insufficiently prepared to implement inclusive teaching approaches. Thus, continuous professional development is necessary to strengthen teachers' ability to apply UDL effectively.

The participation findings demonstrate that stakeholder involvement is essential in promoting meaningful inclusion. The highest-rated item was stakeholder synergy in supporting children's socio-emotional development (C3,  $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 0.568$ ), indicating that teachers view collaboration among educators, families, and professionals as important in supporting children's holistic development. This finding aligns with Ahmad (2025), who emphasised that effective inclusive education requires coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders.

Although the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) item recorded the lowest mean score within this construct (C6,  $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.759$ ), the score remained within the high agreement range. This suggests that while teachers acknowledge the role of curriculum frameworks in supporting inclusion, successful implementation may depend on teacher preparedness, school resources, and institutional support. Therefore, participation within the synergistic model requires not only inclusive policies but also effective implementation at classroom and organisational levels.

The support dimension highlights the importance of sustainable systems that enable inclusive practices. Teachers strongly agreed that blended learning and stakeholder collaboration are important components of inclusive education (D4 and D5,  $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 0.507$ ).

The high rating for blended learning suggests that teachers recognise its potential to provide flexible learning opportunities and additional resources for children with SEN. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that blended learning can support diverse learning needs through the integration of digital and face-to-face approaches (Ghani et al., 2022; Daskan & Yildiz, 2020).

Similarly, the strong agreement on stakeholder collaboration (D5) reinforces that communication among teachers, families, administrators, and specialists is essential for translating inclusive policies into practice. This reflects Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem perspective, where collaboration between home and school environments contributes to consistent support for children with SEN (Tong & Irene, 2024). Therefore, collaboration should be considered a core element rather than an additional support within the proposed synergistic model.

However, intervention services and therapy integration (D3) received the lowest mean score within the support construct ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 0.615$ ). Although the score indicates positive agreement, it suggests possible challenges in integrating specialised services into early childhood settings. These challenges may relate to limited access to professionals, resource constraints, and inter-agency coordination. Therefore, strengthening collaboration between education and professional support services is necessary to ensure comprehensive support for children with SEN.

### **Development of the Synergistic Model for Inclusive Early Childhood**

Based on the findings, the synergistic model was developed through three interconnected dimensions: accessibility provides the foundation for children to be included in inclusive early childhood, participation ensures meaningful involvement of children through stakeholder collaboration, while support sustains inclusive practices through professional development, intervention services, and resource integration.

## Model of Inclusive Early Childhood

### SYNERGISTIC MODEL OF IECE



#### SUPPORT

(Professional development, collaboration,  
intervention services, blended learning)



#### PARTICIPATION

(Stakeholder involvement, socio-emotional,  
behavioural development)



#### ACCESSIBILITY

(UDL, curriculum adaptation, early detection)



Children with Special Needs

Inclusive Early Childhood Education

## CONCLUSION

This study analyse the perspectives of early childhood and special needs teachers on developing a synergistic model for inclusive early childhood education in Malaysia. The findings reveal that accessibility, participation, and support are three essential constructs of inclusion. Teachers highlighted the importance of curriculum flexibility and early intervention to ensure accessibility, while participation was reinforced through socio-emotional and behavioral development supported by strong stakeholder collaboration. Meanwhile, the support dimension underscores the need for professional development, blended learning, and effective communication among stakeholders. Therefore, the perspectives can serve as a foundation for ongoing teacher training, inter-agency collaboration to promote high-quality, inclusive early childhood education in line with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and Sustainable Development Goal 4.

## Author's Note

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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