

Mainstream versus Special Needs Educators: Comparisons of Knowledge Levels towards Their Roles and Responsibilities in Supporting Inclusive Education

(Guru Arus Perdana berbanding Guru Pendidikan Khas: Perbandingan Tahap Pengetahuan terhadap Peranan dan Tanggungjawab dalam Menyokong Pendidikan Inklusif)

JOANNA MAH TJUN LYN*, LOH SAU CHEONG, & NOOR AISHAH ROSLI

ABSTRACT

With inclusive systems requiring major transformation and metamorphosis to educators' traditional responsibilities, extensive shifts to these "inclusive roles" are becoming a problem for both mainstream and special needs educators who find themselves in dexterous, multifaceted, overlapping and clashing responsibilities. This study examined and compared the knowledge levels of 608 mainstream and special needs educators across Malaysia towards their roles and responsibilities in supporting inclusive education in Malaysian primary schools in three stages, namely the pre-transition during transition, and post-transition stage. Questionnaire was constructed to collect data, and the data obtained was analysed descriptively. Findings indicated a general lack of knowledge among mainstream educators and special needs educators in all stages of the transition process, which is symptomatic that both groups of educators are beyond their capabilities, competencies and incontrovertibly their skills and knowledge in inclusive education. Furthermore, findings revealed that the special needs educators are marginally more knowledgeable in supporting inclusion as compared to the mainstream educators at all stages of inclusive transitions. The findings implicate that the transformation from traditional roles to modern inclusive job roles interfere with the comparison in knowledge levels between both mainstream and special needs educators and the lack of role clarity may be related to self-depreciating feelings and self-reports of lower confidence in their knowledge ability.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Roles and Responsibilities, Mainstream Educators, Special Needs Educators, Educators' Level of Knowledge

ABSTRAK

Dengan sistem inklusif yang memerlukan transformasi besar dan metamorfosis kepada tanggungjawab tradisional pendidik, peralihan yang luas kepada "peranan inklusif" ini menjadi masalah bagi pendidik arus perdana dan pendidikan khas yang mendapati diri mereka berada dalam tanggungjawab yang pelbagai aspek, bertindih dan bertentangan. Kajian ini mengkaji dan membandingkan tahap pengetahuan 608 pendidik arus perdana dan berkeperluan khas di seluruh Malaysia terhadap peranan dan tanggungjawab mereka dalam menyokong pendidikan inklusif di sekolah rendah Malaysia dalam tiga peringkat, iaitu tahap pra-peralihan semasa peralihan, dan pos-peralihan. Soal selidik dibina untuk mengumpulkan data, dan data yang diperolehi dianalisis secara deskriptif. Penemuan menunjukkan kurangnya pengetahuan umum di kalangan pendidik arus perdana dan pendidik berkeperluan khas dalam semua peringkat proses peralihan, yang menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua kumpulan pendidik berada di luar kemampuan, kecekapan dan keterampilan dan pengetahuan mereka dalam pendidikan inklusif. Selanjutnya, penemuan menunjukkan bahawa pendidik berkeperluan khas lebih sedikit berpengetahuan dalam menyokong kemasukan berbanding dengan pendidik arus perdana pada semua peringkat peralihan inklusif. Penemuan ini menunjukkan bahawa transformasi dari peranan tradisional kepada peranan pekerjaan inklusif moden mengganggu perbandingan tahap pengetahuan antara pendidik arus perdana dan keperluan khas dan kurangnya kejelasan peranan mungkin berkaitan dengan perasaan yang rendah diri dan keyakinan rendah yang dilaporkan tentang kemampuan pengetahuan mereka.

Keywords: Pendidikan Inklusif, Peranan dan Tanggungjawab Guru, Guru Arus Perdana, Guru Pendidikan Khas, Tahap Pengetahuan Guru

INTRODUCTION

“Inclusive Education” is defined by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2014) as an ideology that allows students of all backgrounds equal opportunity, access, support, and right to quality education and learning. Together with this, the Ministry of Education conceived the inclusive program (Program Pendidikan Inklusif (PPI)), alongside the Education (Special Education) Regulations 2013, Special Education Regulations 1997, and the Education Act 1996, to enable all students with special needs a fair chance at learning in the same classrooms and schools. The brainchild of the Ministry of Education, which is the inclusive education program describes the implementation of inclusion as one that is still based on ‘functional integration rather than full inclusion’ at the moment (Ministry of Education 2015). In Malaysia, students who are being transitioned into inclusive classrooms are enrolled into one of two types of inclusion, which include: i) partial inclusion, where a student is moved from a segregated and self-contained classroom to an inclusive classroom for certain subjects only, and ii) full inclusion, where a student is fully placed in an inclusive classroom (Ministry of Education 2013a).

Approximately 50% of students with special needs are currently enrolled in the inclusive program in Malaysian schools (Ministry of Education 2019), these statistics clearly show that there is a growing and increasingly crucial need for effective transitional support to meet the needs of these students in inclusive education. Like all children, inclusive education demands quality education through efficient and effective standard implementation. With such a large number of students requiring skilled support, one of the objectives of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (Second Phase) was to focus on ensuring that all educators are well-versed in their roles and clear regarding their responsibilities towards supporting inclusion and its transitions (Ministry of Education 2013b). However, progress comes slowly for the country as inclusive systems require changes at all levels of society; and this, has become more complex for educators on the job.

Inclusive education has become a practice that is synonymous with teamwork, flexibility, collaborative efforts and support from a long list of specialists, professionals and institutions (Rouse 2008). Yet, this practice has been the subject of many special education debates in Malaysia due to persistent barriers to education stemming from discriminations, legal understandings, policymaking, acquisition of resources and logistics, and routine failure of access to specialised and trained educators (eg. Mohd Kamel

2011; Lee & Low 2014; Mohd Zuri et al. 2014; Sukumaran et al. 2014). Simply at the school level, buildings must be reconstructed, students must receive accessibility to teaching and learning resources, educators must be competently trained, and have a firm grasp and mastery of their roles and responsibilities towards promoting inclusive education and transitions (UNICEF 2019).

Transitioning a student into a mainstream classroom is a multifaceted process that requires thoughtful and thorough planning, continuous monitoring, and sustainable support in order for inclusive transitions to be successful (Florian 2008). It hails for a major shift to both the mainstream and special needs educators’ roles and responsibilities as they are expected to assume innumerable new and changing roles and responsibilities in overseeing the transitions of students into inclusive classrooms. The role of the educator has traditionally been characterised by a high degree of autonomy and individuality in their decision makings (Lee & Low 2014). Prior to the shifts in inclusive teaching roles, most mainstream educators work with one teacher to a classroom while students with special needs were taught in segregated classrooms by a dedicated special needs educator. With the shifts towards inclusive education, the roles and responsibilities of the educator has metamorphosed into diverse, dexterous, multidimensional, and multifaceted roles – now dubbed “the inclusive roles”. Both mainstream and special needs educators now need to work towards shared goals, instead of individualistic efforts (Venianaki & Zervakis 2015). Because of that, there is problem for both mainstream educators and special needs educators in performing their duties effectively in inclusive education because of their overlapping, concurring and clashing roles (Rosmalily & Woollard 2019). Where does one’s job begin and end when two different roles need to coexist in the same space?

Owing to this, the major shifts to the responsibilities of the educators has forced them to forgo their individualistic autonomy and evolve from their previously known identity, roles and responsibilities (Muhamad Khairul Anuar & Abdul Rahim 2016), which is a transformation that has caused numerous confusions and perplexities in roles and responsibilities, job effectiveness, and job dissatisfaction according to local studies (Mukundan & Khandehroo 2010; Mohd Kamel 2011; Mohd Zuri et al. 2014). Putting inclusion into effective implementation has proven to be difficult in Malaysian primary schools because of the vast discrepancies in the modern work of the mainstream educator and special needs educator in sharing inclusive education goals. Inclusive education has required major shifts for

both kinds of educators towards an even more complex, demanding, as well as multifaceted roles and responsibilities (Bailey et al. 2014; Sukumaran et al. 2014; Khairul Farhah et al. 2016).

Researchers note that assuming these evolving roles and responsibilities are difficult for the Malaysian educators who traditionally tend to keep discrete boundaries on their roles and have little to no collaborations. In spite of a plethora of evidence by literature towards teacher collaborations for effective inclusion, studies report apprehension, minimal collaborations, and reluctance to assume new emerging roles, which stemmed from inexperience, a lack of preparedness, as well as a lack of specialist knowledge, and understanding (Zalizan & Manisah 2014; Muhamad Khairul Anuar & Abdul Rahim 2016; Rosmalily & Woollard 2019). Many educators prefer to maintain the traditional boundaries where they were once comfortable and in control. As stated in Rosmalily & Woollard (2019), "*Since teaching is based on specialisation, (certain educators) believed that pupils with SEN were better off in SEIP only (Special Education Intergrated Programs)*" (p. 80).

Many educators still feel that they are under-equipped and incapable to instruct a diverse range of students in the inclusive classroom; all resulting from a lack of mutual understanding on their individual roles, their counterparts roles as well as the clear frontiers and limits to where their responsibilities begin and end as mainstream or special needs educators (Bailey et al. 2015; Sukumaran et al. 2014; Khairul Farhah, Dally & Foggett 2016; Rosmalily & Woollard 2019). The shifts in educators' roles has caused a large number of mainstream and special needs educators to feel that they are out of their depth and are assuming new and emerging roles and responsibilities without proper direction, counsel or instructions.

As a result, the drastic shifts and lack of proper job clarity may in turn have also given rise to detrimental work hazards. Hints of role conflicts are present in studies between mainstream and special needs educators due to their lack of clarity on their individual roles and responsibilities in supporting transitions (Sukumaran et al. 2014; Khairul Farhah, Dally & Foggett 2016). The stress caused by conflicting knowledge and misalignment of roles are leading a significant increase in detrimental work hazards such as job stress, emotional burn outs, and lower attrition rates among educators in Malaysia (Mohd Zuri et al. 2014). Such conflict in job descriptions have been evidenced to give rise to detrimental work hazards such as job stress, emotional burn outs, and there are

evidenced that these occurrences are rampantly taking place (Nurmazlina et al. 2018).

Almost everyone appreciates a clear knowledge of what is expected of them in a working environment, and educators are no exception to this (Hong 2012). It helps them to be clear of their roles, to be consistent and to share knowledge so that this can provide the platform for educators to capture the essence of their work, be more acquainted to the changes as well as reimagine their roles in a way that can be personally meaningful to themselves (Rosso et al. 2010). Evidence has shown that clearly defined roles and meaningfulness have been associated to various positive work-related benefits, including job satisfaction, higher attrition levels, self-confidence and higher self-efficacy, improved job performance and lower anxiety rates (Mukundan & Khandehroo 2010; Mohd Kamel 2011; Mohd Zuri et al. 2014). Clear knowledge is both helpful and powerful in determining fresh and experienced educators' practice as well as identifying whether these educators' skills have slithered below acceptable standards and are in need of strengthening (Danielson 2011).

Hence, with still numerous gaps in ensuring that our educators are clear regarding their responsibilities, this study proves paramount to producing educators who are proficient with their teaching and learning, developing positive attitudes towards their tasks, and ultimately, essential towards enhancing the well-being of students with special needs and the quality of inclusive systems and services (Lignugaris et al. 2014; Dukes et al. 2016). For these reasons, this indicate that the measures taken to understand educators for their inclusive roles and responsibilities are of utmost importance and paramount to the question "What are the mainstream educator and special needs educators level of knowledge on their roles and responsibilities in supporting inclusive transitions?" as well as "How does the mainstream educators' knowledge of their responsibilities towards supporting inclusive transitions differ in comparison to the special needs educators?"

With that, this study aims to explore, examine, and compare the knowledge levels between Malaysian primary mainstream educators and special needs educators towards supporting transitions of students with special needs into inclusive classrooms in three different stages: i) Prior to transition, ii) During transitions, and iii) Post-transitions – in the domain roles of planning and preparation, classroom environment, instructions, and professional duties.

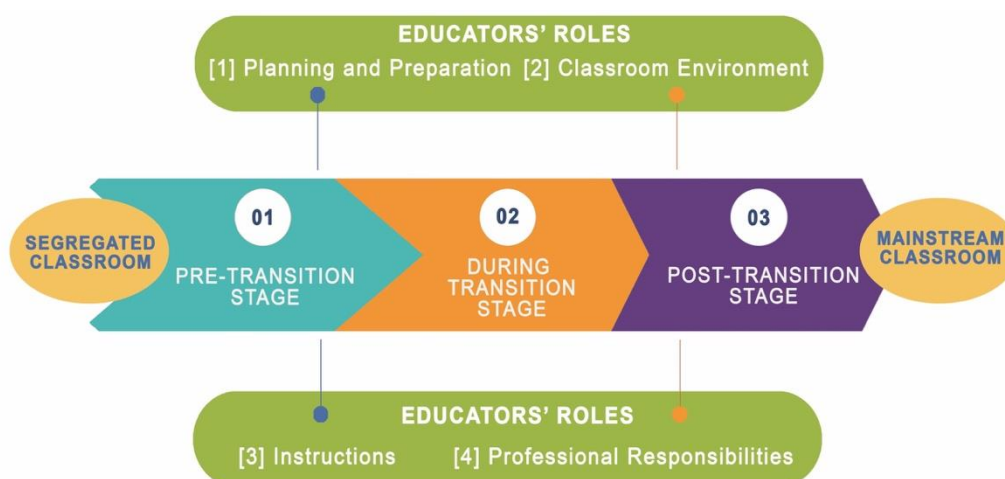


FIGURE 1. Conceptual framework (concepts of the roles and responsibilities in supporting transitions in inclusive education).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Critical attention has been given by various studies on the conceptualising of the inclusive education and how the operations of inclusive systems for transitioning a student into a mainstream classroom is envisioned. First and foremost, understand and envisioning what the process of inclusive transitions looks like is vital to mapping out an educators' job roles and responsibilities (Coe et al, 2014). Teaching, as with every other profession, needs to possess a common language of practice – one that encapsulates the vital concepts shared and valued by all members in the special education profession.

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education has introduced the guideline of inclusion in Malaysia (*Garis Panduan Program Pendidikan Inklusif Murid Berkeperluan Khas*) (Ministry of Education 2018). The Ministry of Education has identified several extremely brief roles and responsibilities of mainstream subject educators and special educators. The roles and responsibilities of mainstream subject educators include: i) receiving and implementing teaching and learning for students with special needs in an inclusive classroom; ii) collaborating with special educators to preserve the welfare of the student with special needs; iii) reporting the development and academic progress of the student with special needs; as well as iv) discussing with special educators ways to increase the teaching and learning of the student with special needs. Meanwhile, special educators are expected to: i) identify students with special needs who are eligible for inclusive placements; ii) be a shadow and counsellor aide to help the student with special need in teaching and learning, preparing the individual education plan, and collaborating with the mainstream educator in

reference to the student's progress; as well as iii) to be a resource teacher in preparing teaching aides and resource materials to assist mainstream educators in teaching and learning.

The Ministry of Education has provided baseline knowledge of what a mainstream and special needs educator's job roles would look like. However, with this rudimentary baseline knowledge, many are querying that the education system at its core still has not promoted a clear ideology of inclusive education to begin with. Thus, understanding clear roles and responsibilities within a clear conceptualised lens of what the inclusive process looks like is vital in supporting better transitions and educational outcomes; and that a full knowledge of their expected roles and responsibilities within that inclusive conceptualisation will produce more effective implementation of inclusion.

With this baseline knowledge, as effective implementation of inclusion involves preparing both mainstream and special needs educators to understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting transitions, the principal concepts of the inclusive process through the lens that inclusive education is multistage and multirole is captured. A re-conceptualisation outlook of what the inclusive transition process looks like is constructed into a conceptual framework. The roles of the mainstream and special needs educators in supporting this process of transition are centrally placed in this framework, as in Figure 1.

The following framework provides a frame of reference for how the concept of inclusion as a transition process, and educators' roles and responsibilities are interrelated. The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the process stages of

transition based on Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg 1984) and the workings of four educators' role domains that were derived from Danielson's framework (Danielson 2011). According to Schlossberg's theory, transition is a process of adaptation, rather than a singular event, in which an individual move to approach transition, be fully preoccupied by the transition, and eventually integrate the change into his or her life (Patton et al. 2016). Based on his theory, an individual in transition often identify with the process of transition through three stages labelled 'moving in' or 'pre-transition', 'moving through' or 'during transition', and 'moving out' or 'post-transition' (Schlossberg 2011).

In order for educators to be fully equipped and

proficient in supporting transitions, this framework takes into account the individuality and differentiation of inclusion and recognises that inclusive education is synonymous to a process. This framework challenges the current knowledge of inclusive education in Malaysia in that inclusive education is not an ultimate "destination" or an event that takes place in isolation, and proposes a comprehensive reconceptualization of inclusive education as one that is a process of transition. Every student undergoes a process of transition when entering inclusive education according to their own pace. Within those stages, educators navigate varied responsibilities under four broad role domains to support the transition process of a student into mainstream classrooms.

TABLE 1. Summary of Cronbach's Alpha results according to domains (N=33)

Domains	Pre-transition	During transition	Post-transition
Planning and Preparation	.93	.89	.91
Classroom Environment	.93	.91	.92
Instructions	.95	.88	.88
Professional Duties	.91	.89	.90

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENT

This study employed the quantitative cross-sectional survey research design. Structured questionnaire was constructed and used to collect data from both mainstream and special needs educators to obtain data on their knowledge of their roles and responsibilities towards supporting the three different stages of transition - pre-transition, during transition, and post-transition. The instrument is divided into three parts, which comprised of the demographic profile of the respondent, the educators' background in supporting inclusive transitions, and their level of knowledge of their roles and responsibilities in transition support. The questionnaire used 5-point Likert-scale (1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree). To avoid language barriers, questionnaires were constructed in both English and the Malay language.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument constructed, the questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, content validity test involving a panel of "experts", as well as construct validity. The pilot test involved 33 mainstream and special needs educators, and reliability findings loadings that loaded less than .40 were omitted to improve its clarity. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was also performed on all three stages of inclusions and their sub-domains, and there were strong reports of reliability and indications of high

levels of alpha values between .88 to .95. Table 1 shows the summary of the Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis. Meanwhile, four experts including an associate professor from a public university, two senior lecturers from the teacher's training colleges, and a special education senior teacher agreed that the instrument comprehensively addresses aspects of inclusive transitions and provided comments on enhancing the overall presentation of the instrument.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited using multistage cluster sampling method. The samples were first divided according to locality zones (Northern, Central, Southern, Eastern Zones, East Malaysia), and within each zone, 1 state was selected through simple random sampling to represent the targeted population of each locality zone. All mainstream and special needs educators within the Malaysian primary schools with inclusive programs were invited to participate in this study. The survey was recorded with the consent of the participants. Ethical approval from the Malaysian authorities was obtained prior to any fieldwork.

A total of 608 educators participated in the survey, which consisted of mainstream educators (n=282), and special needs educators (n=326) from Malaysian primary schools. The majority of the participant educators were female (512 out of 608), between the ages of 20 to 40 years old (512 out of 304) and acquired between 1 to 5 years of experience dealing with inclusive education (390 out of 608). The distribution indicated 30.26% of the educators were from Johor,

20.39% from Penang 7.57% from Pahang, 3.95% from Sarawak and 37.83% of the educators were from WP Kuala Lumpur.

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

Utilising descriptive statistics, responses from questionnaire were aggregated, scored and grouped in percentages according to low, moderate and high levels of knowledge. To interpret the scores into levels of knowledge, Thavanah et al. (2013) research scoring was referred. "Low" levels of knowledge from the participants were scored as $\leq 50\%$. Meanwhile, "medium" levels of knowledge from the participants were those scoring between 51% to 74%, while "high" levels of knowledge were those that scored $\geq 75\%$. Findings were divided and organised between mainstream and special needs educators.

FINDINGS

The mainstream and special needs educator's levels of knowledge of their roles and responsibilities in pre-transition, during transition, and post-transition stages are as shown in Table 2.

In the pre-transition stage, mainstream educators reported lower understandings of the necessary school readiness skills (56.1%), expert knowledge on a student's abilities, disabilities, and special needs (54.6%), and developing individual education plans in preparation for the upcoming inclusive transition (55.0%) in the planning and preparation domain. They also reported inferior understandings of classroom and behaviour management, more specifically with establishing appropriate behaviours (56.0%), and regulating inappropriate and challenging behaviours (56.4%) in the classroom environment domain. Findings on the instructions domain indicated that they were less informed of individualising instructions (48.5%), differentiating work tasks according to the specific needs of students with special needs (53.2%), while in professional duties, they specifically had lower knowledge levels in encouraging an effective teamwork between colleagues, families, and other professionals in the student's support team (50.4%) under the instructions domain and professional duties role domain respectively. On the contrary, special needs educators disclosed being more informed and understanding of their roles and responsibilities as they reported high levels of knowledge for planning and preparation (55.83%) and the classroom environment domain (43.56%). More than half of the special needs educators reported moderate levels of knowledge for the instructions domain (65.64%) while a large percentage also reported moderate levels of knowledge for the professional duties domain (43.56%). The

special needs educators were moderately knowledgeable on various areas of special needs and disabilities (45.7%) and moderately familiar with developing transition support plans (30.4%) in the planning and preparation domain. These educators also displayed significant fluency and knowledge in individualising the physical classroom arrangements (69.63%), organising orientation visits (53.99%), and clear understanding of acceptable (49.69%) and unacceptable behaviours in the classroom (52.45%). They also reported familiarity with knowledge on individualising classroom instructions (65.64%), differentiating reinforcement strategies (70.55%), and attaining necessary documentation and medical records (64.11%).

In the during transition stage, findings indicated that mainstream educators struggled significantly in the area of individualisation and differentiating educational support for students with special needs. In the planning and preparation of lessons, mainstream educators reported lower understandings in their capacity of planning daily lesson plans that can be individualised according to the interests, strengths and weaknesses (42.55%), and the specialised difficulties of the student with special needs (46.45%). The mainstream educators also indicated that they were less familiar with individualising assessments and examinations according to the specialised difficulties of the students (55.32%). Difficulties with adjusting learning to meet the needs of students were also apparent in the educators' teaching and learning instructions through the breaking down instructions into smaller, more manageable parts (43.97%), and individualising teaching content according to the needs of the student (45.05%). These difficulties are once again echoed in the instructions domain through lower understandings of examinations and assessments. Likewise, mainstream educators expressed difficulty professionally in maintaining the interest of students with special needs above anything else in decision making (58.16%) and seeing the value and dignity of students with special needs in inclusive services (69.86%). It was also noted that mainstream educators had to exert more effort in maintaining effective communication with the student's family members (69.50%). Meanwhile, special needs educators were shown to be slightly more well-informed about their roles and responsibilities in the during transition stage with a large amount of special needs educators reporting moderate levels of knowledge in planning and preparation (60.74%), classroom environment (42.94%), instructions domain (52.75%) and professional duties (42.94%). While the special needs educators did not report significantly high levels of knowledge in many domains, they were moderately informed and knowledgeable regarding the individualisation of content in planning daily lesson

plans according to the student's learning styles (41.72%), strengths and weaknesses (48.16%), and specialised difficulties of the student with special needs (60.74%). They also described moderate skills of individualisation in classroom management and reported particularly abled in providing clear predictability to maintain order in classroom. This included knowledge in establishing structure and routine (57.06%), developing clear classroom rules (54.29%), providing clear predictability on acceptable (53.68%) and unacceptable behaviours in the classroom (52.76%) – in the classroom environment domain; and moderate understandings in giving clear predictability in expectations to all work tasks (63.19%).

In the post-transition stage, it is apparent that the mainstream educators showed fair and moderate knowledge in identifying the student's gaps in independent learning skills (71.63%), but a significantly trivial level of understanding in other areas of planning and preparation to develop independent learning skills. The special needs educators indicated they were more fluent on a majority of planning aspects including understanding

the necessary independent living skills (64.72%), understanding the skill levels of the student (77.91%), utilising teaching and learning strategies to develop independent learning skills (64.72%), and the usage of teaching resources to develop those skills (61.66%). Concurrently, in the classroom environment domain, mainstream educators recorded average knowledge in establishing a "peer buddy" system (54.26%) and encouraging self-instruction skills (51.42%) to promote independent learning skills for students with special needs, while special needs educators had higher levels of knowledge in promoting a "peer buddy" system (51.23%). In the instructions domain, findings indicated that both mainstream and special needs educators were more knowledgeable with providing guidance upon task completion (63.12%, 69.02%), and utilising visual schedules to represent the steps to completing a task independently (62.41%, 63.50%). Finally, mainstream educators were more well-informed regarding recording progress (38.65%), and assessing the report information (39.01%), whilst special needs educators indicated better fluency at collaborations with family members (49.39%) and other professionals (36.81%).

TABLE 2. Mainstream and special needs educator's level of knowledge of roles and responsibilities in pre-transition, during transition, and post-transition stages (N=608)

	Mainstream Educators			Special Needs Educators		
	Low N (%)	Medium N (%)	High N (%)	Low N (%)	Medium N (%)	High N (%)
Part I: Pre-transition Stage	156 (55.32)	56 (19.86)	70 (24.82)	70 (21.47)	156 (47.85)	100 (30.67)
Domain 1: Planning and Preparation	156 (55.32)	56 (19.86)	70 (24.82)	72 (22.09)	72 (22.09)	182 (55.83)
Domain 2: Classroom Environment	156 (55.32)	98 (34.75)	28 (9.93)	56 (17.18)	128 (39.26)	142 (43.56)
Domain 3: Instructions	142 (50.35)	82 (29.08)	58 (20.57)	56 (17.18)	214 (65.64)	56 (17.18)
Domain 4: Professional Duties	142 (50.35)	98 (34.75)	42 (14.89)	84 (25.77)	142 (43.56)	100 (30.67)
Part II: During Transition Stage	198 (70.21)	70 (24.82)	14 (4.96)	100 (30.67)	184 (56.44)	42 (12.88)
Domain 1: Planning and Preparation	198 (70.21)	56 (19.86)	28 (9.93)	100 (30.67)	198 (60.74)	28 (8.59)
Domain 2: Classroom Environment	184 (65.25)	42 (14.89)	56 (19.86)	100 (30.67)	140 (42.94)	86 (26.38)
Domain 3: Instructions	184 (65.25)	56 (19.86)	42 (14.89)	98 (30.06)	172 (52.76)	56 (17.18)
Domain 4: Professional Duties	212 (75.18)	56 (19.86)	14 (4.96)	114 (34.97)	140 (42.94)	72 (22.09)
Post-transition Stage	142 (50.35)	128 (45.39)	12 (4.26)	70 (21.47)	242 (74.23)	14 (4.29)
Domain 1: Planning and Preparation	142 (50.35)	126 (44.68)	14 (4.96)	84 (25.77)	214 (65.64)	28 (8.59)
Domain 2: Classroom Environment	70 (24.82)	170 (60.28)	42 (14.89)	30 (9.20)	182 (55.83)	114 (34.97)
Domain 3: Instructions	96 (34.04)	172 (60.99)	14 (4.96)	56 (17.18)	214 (65.64)	56 (17.18)
Domain 4: Professional Duties	70 (24.82)	156 (55.32)	56 (19.86)	30 (9.20)	212 (65.03)	84 (25.77)

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that there were similarities and differences in the mainstream and special needs educator's level of knowledge of roles and responsibilities in pre-transition, during transition, and post-transition stages. These differences can be discussed in terms of several aspects, which are i) educator capability, ii) teaching force and differences in job position, iii) learning environment, and iv) self-depreciating attitudes towards reported low levels of knowledge.

Educator capability

While there are moderate levels of knowledge reported by the special needs educators, the above findings indisputably indicate that both groups of educators are evidently not proficient, skilled or experienced enough to support students with special needs, a job that is based on expertise and specialised knowledge. With the absence of high levels of knowledge within the current study, these findings demonstrate that the educators are nowhere near experts in this field of inclusion. The lack of expert knowledge as seen in the findings once again provide consistent evidence to support previous studies' claims that the roles and responsibilities of supporting inclusive education is beyond their capabilities, competencies and incontrovertibly their skills and knowledge (Loh & Sharifah Zainiyah 2013; Muhamad Nadhir & Alfa Nur Aini 2016; Rosmalily & Woollard 2019).

These gaps in knowledge by professionals who were supposedly "experts" also furnish necessary evidence to support the missing gap in previous literature who drew correlations between poor performance outcomes and a lack of appropriate educator training (Toran et al. 2016). Malaysian educators lacked, for many years, skills to address the diversity within students with special needs and lack an integrated knowledge between what they are expected to perform within. The evidence in the findings of this study supported the study by Zalizan and Manisah (2014) which stated that educators are still not equipped to address such challenges with inclusive transitions.

Teaching force and differences in job position

Findings of this study also demonstrated that the special needs educators were marginally more knowledgeable in their roles and responsibilities in supporting students with special needs into inclusive classrooms as compared to their counterpart mainstream educators in all three levels of transition. Since teaching special education is based on specialisation, it is believed that special needs

educators are the only ones who acquire the expert knowledge and that students with special needs are better off with special needs educators (Rosmalily & Woollard 2019).

It is true that special needs educators are trained experts that have acquired specialised training in providing individualised and specialised instructions to meet the educational needs of students with special needs. This is vastly contrasting to the role of a mainstream educator whose main tasks are to provide instructions in an inclusive classroom and are expected to plan and coordinate curriculum for all students (Ministry of Education 2013). Educators, like other professionals, also operate best within their given job roles and responsibilities. As the role of supporting students with special needs traditionally lied with special needs educators, it was to be expected that mainstream educators still proclaim lower knowledge levels and strong beliefs that it was not their responsibility to support students with special needs in inclusion, as concurred by Tengku Sarina Aini (2014) and Rosmalily and Woollard (2019).

It is no question that mainstream educators reported lower levels of knowledge in this study towards supporting the role of inclusive transitions which may be overwhelming to their current roles. This is because, conventionally, the classic model of special education in Malaysia greatly constricted the role of individualised and differentiating instructions for students with special needs in their isolated classrooms to special needs educators. It was solely the role of the special needs educator to support and provide aid to their difficulties, provide instructions, work collaboratively with other professionals, manage behaviours, and coordinate support services for students with special needs (Lee & Low 2014). Mainstream educators have minimally been involved in special education in Malaysia up until recently. With inclusive education now pushing the boundaries of teaching and learning, inclusion now provokes mainstream educators to deviate from the traditional ways of teaching towards roles that are more diverse, rigorous, personalised, collaborative and flexible (Amin 2016). Currently, while the mainstream educator needs to pay conscious efforts to supporting students with special needs undergoing transition, they must also be careful to create an equilibrium and balance the demands of other students in their classroom. With an average classroom size of up to 40 students in one classroom, the mainstream educators are getting more than what they bargain for as managing a class of 40 'typical' students can already pose a great challenge amongst them (Ministry of Education 2013a). With the addition of students with special needs in their classrooms, classroom management has become a formidable and intimidating

task for educators, especially when it is beyond their capabilities, competencies and incontrovertibly their skills and knowledge.

Learning environment

Based on the findings of this study, it is interesting to note that the mainstream educators reported low levels of knowledge on their roles for almost all stages of transition, except those in the post-transition stage. Teaching independence carries a great deal of weight, and perhaps these teaching practices that are unable to support individualised learning attention may have unintendedly gone a long way in promoting student independence during the final stages of phasing out inclusive transitional support.

Traditionally, mainstream classrooms are characterised by their large class sizes, despite the inclusion of students with other significant needs. However, one may argue here that perhaps coping with these large class sizes may not necessarily diminish its effectiveness when it comes to promoting independence in the post-transition stage. Inclusive class sizes are often no smaller than other classes, and often do not enable plenty of individualised attention; this may, ironically, offer vast support in promoting independent learning skills at the final stages of inclusive transitions, as evidenced in Avrimidis et al. (2000) and Westwood and Graham (2003).

Self-depreciating attitudes towards reported low levels of knowledge

With a lack of sufficient clarity and knowledge on their inclusive roles, the lack of job clarity may correlate with the attitudes of the educators and cause an underwhelming personal sense of incapability and low self-worth to the job, as suggested by the findings of Bailey et al. (2015). This might relate to the findings of this study, which indicate that both mainstream and special needs educators are evidently not proficient, skilled or experienced enough to support students with special needs. Working together with a complex variability of students demands a lot of motivation and passion in a challenging environment, and many educators struggle between accommodating to their skills, the teaching demands of special needs and maintaining the continuous motivation for these students. Educators who may not see themselves as acquiring the necessary skills to support students of varying needs and given the lack of desire to do so, might place themselves with feelings of vulnerability and cause a depreciating outlook of their capacities, as found by Konza (2008). Naturally, with a diminished outlook of themselves, self-reported lower confidence in their knowledge – one that is surrounded by self-defeat and doubt. This is inadvertently a cynical self-

fulfilling cycle for the educators. If a lack of job clarity on roles and responsibilities is perceived, this may lead to a variety of internal conflicts, dissonance, and personal disequilibrium. This then fuels a diminished sense of self-worth and confidence towards their educating capabilities and finally causes them to report lower levels of capabilities and knowledge on themselves; even if they were fully equipped and capable to do so (Rosmalily & Woollard 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study determined and compared the mainstream and special needs educators' knowledge on their roles and responsibilities in supporting inclusive education. Through a re-conceptualisation of inclusive education as a multi-stage transition process, it can be concluded that there is a general lack of knowledge in mainstream educators and special needs educators on all stages of the transition process, and this is symptomatic that both educators are beyond their capabilities, competencies and incontrovertibly their skills and knowledge in inclusive education. The findings implicate that the transformation of modern inclusive job roles interfere with the comparison in knowledge levels between both mainstream and special needs educators; and the lack of role clarity may relate to self-depreciating feelings and self-reports of lower confidence in their knowledge ability. The outcomes of this study is hoped for educators to be better able to prioritise workload and reduce the chance of work and role conflicts between mainstream and special needs educators. This will not only allow them to utilise their expertise to the fullest but sizable amount of teaching resources is lost accomplishing duplicates of roles and responsibilities. Positive transitions that is often brought about by supported transitions from families, schools and educators are significant to a student's continuity of learning and emotional well-being and ensuring better transition provision is more likely to result in fewer difficulties in adapting to an inclusive classroom environment. Hence, further research and interventions should focus on extending clarifying and equipping the educators' level of knowledge in order for positive and optimistic attitudes of inclusive education to remain high. Only then can effective inclusive education be one step closer to reaching efficiency. Some limitations should be noted pertaining the reliance of self-reported data. First, pertaining the respondents' knowledge of themselves. While self-reports are reliable and efficient in assessing phenomena that includes human tendencies, discussions have shown that it needs to be considered that self-reports can sometimes be limited to providing the full spectrum and scope one's social and behavioural tendencies. Second, the questionnaire reports are limited to the cooperation and honest

reports on the respondents who answer the questionnaires.

REFERENCES

- Amin, J. N. 2016. Redefining the role of teachers in the digital era. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 3(3), 40-45. Retrieved from <http://oaji.net/articles/2016/1170-1463510528.pdf>
- Avrimidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burdon, R. 2000. A survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one local education authority. *Educational Psychology*, 20(2), 191-212.
- Bailey, L., Nomanbhoy, A., & Tubpun, T. 2015. Inclusive education: Teacher perspectives from Malaysia. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(5), 547-559. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2014.957739
- Coe, R., Aloisi, C., Higgins, S., & Major, L. E. 2014. *What makes great teaching? Review of the underpinning research*. Retrieved from <http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-makes-great-teaching-FINAL-4.11.14.pdf>
- Danielson, C. 2011. *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for Teaching* (2nd ed.). Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Dukes, C., Darling, S. M. & Gallagher, P. A. 2016. Preparing teachers for a global society: What special education teacher educators need to know. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 39(3), 161-164.
- Florian, L. 2008. Inclusion: Special or inclusive education: Future trends. *British Journal of Special Education*, 35(4), 202-208. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8578.2008.00402.x
- Friedman, H. S. & Schustack, M. W. 2012. *Personality: Classic theories and modern research* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon
- Hong, J. Y. 2012. Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and other stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. *Teachers and Teaching*, 18(4),
- Khairul Farhah Khairuddin, Dally, K., & Foggett, J. 2016. Collaboration between general and special education teachers in Malaysia. 8th Inclusive and Supportive Education IV Congresso Internacional da Pró-Inclusão, Lisbon, Portugal, 16(1), 909-913
- Konza, D. 2008. Inclusion of students with disabilities in new times: Responding to the challenge. In Kell, P, Vialle, W, Konza, D and Vogl, G (Eds.). *Learning and the learner: Exploring learning for new times*. University of Wollongong.
- Lee, L. W., & Low, H. M. 2014. The evolution of special education in Malaysia. *British Journal of Special Education*, 41(1), 43-58. doi: 10.1111/1467-8578.12048
- Lignugaris, B., Kraft, P. T. S., McCray, E. D., & Kimerling, J. 2014. The "wicked question" of teacher education effects and what to do about it. In *Handbook of research on special education teacher preparation* (pp. 489-499). Routledge.
- Loh, S. C., & Sharifah Zainiyah Syed Yahya. 2013. Effective transitional plan from secondary education to employment for individuals with learning disabilities: A case study. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 2(1), 104-117. doi: 10.5539/jel.v2n1p104
- Ministry of Education. 2013a. *Education (Special Education) regulations 2013*. Putrajaya: Attorney General's Chambers.
- Ministry of Education. 2013b. *Malaysian education blueprint*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education. 2015. *Buku panduan pengoperasian Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi*. Putrajaya: Special Education Department.
- Ministry of Education. 2018. *Garis panduan program pendidikan inklusif murid berkeperluan khas*. Putrajaya: Special Education Department.
- Ministry of Education. 2019. *Malaysian Educational Statistics. Quick Facts 2019*. Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.my/kuat-turun/penerbitan-dan-jurnal/terbitan/buku-informasi/2722-quick-facts-2019/file>
- Mohd Kamel Idris. 2011. Over time effects of role stress on psychological strain among Malaysian public university academics. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 2(9), 154-161.
- Mohd Zuri Ghani, Aznan Che Ahmad & Suzana Ibrahim. 2014. Stress among special education teachers in Malaysia. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 114, 4-13. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.12.648
- Muhamad Khairul Anuar Hussin & Abdul Rahim Hamdan. 2016. Challenges of co-teaching in Malaysian inclusive classroom: administrators', teachers' and parents' overview. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 217, 477-486.
- Muhamad Nadhir Abdul Nasir & Alfa Nur Aini Erman Efendi. 2016. Special education for children with disabilities in Malaysia: Progress and obstacles. *Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 12(10), 78-87. Retrieved from <http://www.ukm.my/geografia/images/upload/9.geografi-a-ogos16-muhdnadhir-edam.pdf>
- Mukundan, J., & Khandehroo, K. 2010. Burnout among English language teachers in Malaysia. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER)*, 3(1), 71-76. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.19030/cier.v3i1.163>
- Nurmazlina Mohd. Isa, Hardev Kaur & Rozalli Hashim. 2018. Job stress, work-to-family conflict and social support in the education industry. *Journal of Administrative Science*, 15(3). Retrieved from: <http://jas.uitm.edu.my>
- Patton, L. D., Renn, K. A., Guido, F. M., & Quaye, S. J. 2016. *Student development in college: Theory, research and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rosmalily Salleh & Woollard, J. 2019. Inclusive education: Equality and equity (Teachers' views about inclusive education in Malaysia's primary schools). Retrieved from <http://ejournal.upsi.edu.my/index.php/JPB/article/view/3070>
- Rosso, B. D., Dekas, K. H., & Wrzesniewski, A. 2010. On the meaning of work: A theoretical integration and review. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30, 91-127. doi: 10.1016/j.riob.2010.09.001
- Rouse, M. 2008. *Developing inclusive practice: A role of teachers and teacher education?* Retrieved from

- <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/eitn/documents/issue16/EITN-1-Rouse.pdf>
- Schlossberg, N. K. 1984. *Counseling adults in transition*. New York: Springer.
- Schlossberg, N. K. 2011. The challenge of change: The transition model and its application. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 48(8), 159-162.
- Sukumaran, S., Loveridge, J., & Green, V. A. 2014. Inclusion in Malaysian intergrated preschools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(8), 821-844. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2014.981229
- Thavanah, B., Harun-or-Rashid, M., Kasuya, H. & Sakamoto, J. 2013. Knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding HIV/AIDS among male high school students in Lao People's Democratic Republic. *Journal of International AIDS Society*, 16. doi: 10.7448/IAS.16.1.17387.
- Toran, H., Westover, J. M., Kamaralzaman, S., Mohamed, S. & Mohd Yasin, M. H. 2016. The preparation, knowledge and self-reported competency of special education teachers regarding students with autism. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 24(1), 185-196.
- Tengku Sarina Aini Tengku Kasim. 2014. Teaching paradigms: An analysis of traditional and student-centred approaches. *Journal of Usuluddin*, 40, 199-218.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2014. *Inclusive education: Malaysia*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/InclusiveEducationMalaysia_-_v4_27_May_2014.pdf
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2019. *Inclusive education*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/education/inclusive-education>
- Venianaki, A. & Zervakis, S. 2015. Collaboration practices between special education teachers and mainstream teachers in secondary education. *Journal of Education & Social Policy*, 2(6), 42-46.
- Westwood, P., & Graham, L. 2003. How many children with special needs in regular classes? Official predictions vs teachers' perceptions in South Australia and New South Wales. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 5(3), pp 24-35.
- Zalizan Mohd Jelas & Manisah Mohd Ali. 2014. Inclusive education in Malaysia: Policy and Practie. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 18(10), 991-1003. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2012.693398

Joanna Mah Tjun Lyn
 Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling
 Faculty of Education
 University Malaya
 Email: joannamah90@gmail.com

Loh Sau Cheong
 Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling
 Faculty of Education
 University Malaya
 Email: lohsch@um.edu.my

Noor Aishah Rosli
 Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling
 Faculty of Education
 University Malaya
 Email: aishahr@um.edu.my

*Author for correspondence, email: joannamah90@gmail.com

Submitted: 13 April 2020
 Reviewed: 29 April 2020
 Accepted: 6 May 2020
 Published: 31 May 2020