Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs in Malaysian Higher Institutions

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ABSTRACT:

In recent years, there has been a noticeable global push for inclusive and equitable education. To gain insight into the inclusiveness of the special educational need students, this study aims to explore their experiences and has identified several important themes. The study employs a qualitative research method, utilizing semi-structured online interviews and thematic analysis. The findings revealed several concerns; firstly, about the subpar facilities and infrastructure found in higher education institutions were raised. Secondly, it became clear that fair treatment was a top priority. Thirdly, there is a need for increased knowledge and comprehension of the requirements and abilities of students with special educational needs. Fourthly, the participants emphasized the value of strong support networks, such as academic guidance and counselling services. Fifth, it is imperative to encourage empathy in peers, families, and students with special educational needs themselves. This study offers recommendations on how higher education institutions in Malaysia can enhance the inclusivity of students with special educational needs.

Keywords: Experiences, Higher Education, Inclusion, Special Educational Needs Students

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there has been a growing demand for inclusive and equitable education in recent years. The recognition that education should be accessible to everyone, regardless of individual skills or impairments, is at the heart of this movement (Zhou, 2023). In the context of higher education, the principle of inclusivity also applies to students with special educational needs, who not only want to learn and grow but also participate fully in the educational process, have equal access to employment opportunities, and blend in with society at large. Although institutional policies and legislative frameworks have made progress in identifying and meeting the needs of students with special educational needs, further research is needed to thoroughly understand their perspectives and expectations. Only then can these goals be truly fulfilled.

The Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD Act 2008) is enacted to *"provide for the registration, protection, rehabilitation, development and well-being of persons with disabilities"*. To recognise the participation of students with special educational needs in the education system, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia launched the Disability Inclusion Policy in 2019, which governs all types of disabilities to mitigate barriers to inclusive education, including attitude, physical, communication, and systemic or organisational barriers. These initiatives were developed to improve and upgrade facilities and support systems at every university, and universities are not allowed to discriminate against the applications of candidates with special educational needs to pursue their studies (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia, 2019). Despite established policies, challenges persist in the form of inadequate infrastructure, limited knowledge, and insufficient awareness of the specific educational needs of students, as well as a lack of support systems (Alshoura, 2023; Yusof et al., 2020; Zaki & Ismail, 2021).

To answer the research question of what the experiences of students with special educational needs in Malaysian higher education are, this study aims to provide insights into the challenges faced by students with special educational needs attending public universities in Malaysia. Ultimately, this will facilitate the development of inclusive strategies that enhance the participation of students with special educational needs at the higher education level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges faced by students with special educational needs at higher education institutions are multifaceted and encompass a range of academic, social, and institutional barriers. One significant challenge is the lack of adequate accommodations and support services tailored to the diverse needs of these students. For instance, research highlights that many higher education institutions fail to provide necessary resources such as adaptive technologies and accessible learning materials, which are crucial for students with disabilities to fully participate in their educational programs (Prudnikova, 2019). Additionally, the physical infrastructure of many campuses is often not designed with accessibility in mind, creating further obstacles for students with mobility impairments (Pretorius et al., 2018). Physical accessibility is often inadequate, with insufficient facilities and safety features (Chan et al., 2023). On the other hand, the availability of technological aids is also lacking (Liu et al., 2024).

Another critical challenge is the social stigma and discrimination that students with special educational needs frequently encounter. These students often face prejudice and exclusion from their peers, which can significantly impact their self-esteem and psychological well-being (Ng & Boey, 2022). The social isolation experienced by these students is compounded by a lack of awareness and sensitivity among faculty and staff, who may not be adequately trained to support students with disabilities effectively (Rossetti & Seno, 2015). A critical barrier to effective inclusive education in higher institutions is the insufficient training and preparedness of academic staff. Moriña et al. (2020b) highlight that many academics lack both theoretical and practical knowledge on inclusive education and disability, which limits their ability to implement necessary accommodations and support diverse student needs. Khairuddin et al. (2020) and Shah et al. (2024) also suggested that educators need to be well-trained to support students with special educational needs effectively. A lack of understanding can lead to miscommunications and a failure to implement appropriate accommodations, further hindering the educational experiences of students with special educational needs.

Paramita et al. (2024) suggested that not only educational institutions, but also society and media representatives, need to participate in promoting inclusive education. Negative perceptions and a lack of awareness about disabilities among faculty and fellow students can lead to an unwelcoming and sometimes hostile environment. This lack of understanding can manifest in various forms, such as inadequate teaching strategies that fail to consider diverse learning needs and peer exclusion from social activities. Studies by Meda and Albukhari (2023) and Moriña et al. (2020a) highlight the importance of

cultivating an inclusive culture that values diversity and promotes empathy and support for students with special educational needs. Such an environment not only improves the educational experience for these students but also enriches the university community as a whole.

Institutional policies and practices also present significant barriers. The inflexibility of academic policies and the rigidity of assessment methods can disadvantage students with special educational needs, who may require alternative formats or additional time to demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Sokolová et al., 2022). Moreover, the lack of a cohesive support system within institutions often leaves students to navigate these challenges on their own, without the necessary guidance and assistance (Rozenfelde, 2018). Effective inclusion requires a comprehensive approach that integrates disability services into the broader academic and social fabric of the institution, fostering an environment where all students can thrive (Mahlangu, 2019).

Tugli et al. (2016) highlighted the gap in inclusive policy implementation and the necessity for more robust support services within higher education institutions. Without proper accommodations, such as accessible learning materials and assistive technologies, students with disabilities struggle to keep up with their peers. Additionally, the physical infrastructure of many universities often lacks the necessary modifications to accommodate students with mobility issues, further hindering their ability to navigate the campus independently and fully participate in academic life (Amoah et al., 2023).

Moreover, the transition from secondary education to higher education presents additional challenges for students with special educational needs. The shift often involves adjusting to new academic demands, social environments, and levels of independence, which can be overwhelming without adequate support. Norwich (2021) highlights the crucial role of transition planning and emphasizes the importance of higher education institutions collaborating with secondary schools to facilitate a smoother transition for students with special educational needs.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative methodology that enables an in-depth examination of the goals and expectations of students with special educational needs in Malaysian public universities. The methodical gathering of data through semi-structured online interviews and the examination of rich narrative data was facilitated using thematic analysis, online interviews, and standardized questions. The study's participants comprised eight students from two categories of disability, namely visually and physically impaired (labelled as P1 to P8), who enrolled in public universities in Malaysia. However, details of the universities and participants involved need to be treated with high confidentiality.

These participants were selected through recommendations provided by the universities' administrative departments responsible for supporting students with special educational needs. The administrative staff identified these individuals as suitable candidates for the study, based on their capacity and willingness to participate in in-depth interviews for research purposes.

The application of a qualitative approach helps in addressing issues within a social justice framework and understanding the lived experiences of diverse groups (Liamputtong & Rice, 2022). It is extensively used in experience-type research to gain a deep understanding of individuals' experiences, perspectives, and emotions, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of individuals' experiences, perspectives, and emotions, leading to a profound understanding of human behaviour and the specific meanings and behaviours experienced in a certain social phenomenon (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013; Mehta & Naveed, 2025).

Data Collection

The purposive sampling approach was adopted to ensure the selection of participants who could provide rich, relevant insights into the research questions, thereby enhancing the study's depth and reliability. The inclusion criteria for participant selection required students to self-identify as having special educational needs. This broad definition encompasses individuals with various forms of disabilities, including physical disabilities, sensory impairments (such as visual or hearing impairments), learning difficulties, or neurodiverse conditions.

Semi-structured online interviews using the Google Meet platform were used to collect data. This strategy allowed for flexibility through asking probing questions while guaranteeing the participants' comfort and safety. This is particularly important, given their disparate geographic locations. A series of standard questions was developed as part of an interview procedure to determine what participants expected and hoped to hear regarding their educational experience, career prospects, and social integration. Standardised questions were used to guarantee uniformity and to enable more in-depth questions to probe deeper into participants' responses.

With the participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data capture. The recordings were subsequently transcribed to produce comprehensive transcripts for detailed analysis. This study has also been granted ethical approval from the institution's ethics committee prior to the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for analysing the interview data. This qualitative analysis technique facilitated the systematic identification and examination of recurring themes, patterns, and relationships within the dataset. The analysis followed Braun & Clarke (2006), a systematic and structured process comprising six key steps: familiarisation, initial coding identification, theme development, review, defining, and reporting.

This study's qualitative methodology enabled the detailed examination of students' experiences and expectations related to their special educational needs in Malaysian public universities. The methodical gathering and examination of the narrative data was made easier with the use of thematic analysis. Ultimately, this method attempted to contribute to the creation of inclusive practices and policies in higher education by offering a comprehensive understanding of the goals and difficulties experienced by special educational needs students.

FINDINGS

This qualitative study examines the experiences of students with special educational needs enrolled in higher education institutions, with a focus on public universities in Malaysia. This study reveals a range of experiences expressed by these students through semi-structured online interviews and thematic analysis. To establish an inclusive learning environment, it is crucial to address issues related to infrastructure, fair treatment, awareness, support networks, empathy, attitudes, and policies.

Infrastructure

The main issue raised by students with special educational needs in this study was the inadequate facilities and infrastructure in higher education institutions. The need for accessible and customised facilities that accommodate a range of disabilities was emphasised by the participants. Their experiences highlighted a disconnect between policy and practice, with many existing accessibility measures failing to meet their needs. This research emphasizes the urgency of making infrastructural improvements to provide a truly inclusive learning environment. As highlighted by one of the participants:

> "There is already enough infrastructure, actually. So if we can, we want to add more, not more. What is the reason? As I told you earlier, OKU is not just one type. So we look at it based on what they need. It's not the same as what I need because I'm physically disabled, so that for me needs to be tackled based on what type of disability others have." (P1)

This is further supported by another respondent who mentioned:

> "…the ramp is very steep, not safe for us. It has its measurement, but there are many people who do not follow the measurement. It's like either it's very steep or it's not suitable." (P3)

> "If there is any plan, it is better to think about the disabled as well… I really hope that all places in Malaysia become disabled-friendly." (P4)

> "It is my hope that the facilities that should be provided for disabled people can be found in all places, regardless of whether the place is in the city or outside the city, and if there are disabled people in a certain place in a certain organization or workplace or so on, the management needs to act quickly to provide the needs that should be there for the disabled." (P6)

> "I hope there are more facilities to make it easier for students, like if the elevator is broken, what is there? Maybe there is another option for students. Maybe make a class in a lower class to add it, like if there is a possibility of that, then the lecturer can use the class below to Students are like that." (P7)

Equal Treatment

For students with special educational needs, receiving equal treatment has become crucial. They made it plain that, in addition to their peers, they wanted to be treated equally and with respect by instructors, administrative staff, and prospective employers. The findings emphasised how important it is to foster an inclusive and considerate environment where students with special educational needs are valued for their contributions and abilities rather than being stigmatised due to their disabilities. Equal treatment has become a top priority for these students.

> "…society's view will also hopefully change, like they will not treat us differently." (P4)

"I hope to be able to give us the opportunity and space to be on par with others later in employment. I think that's what is lacking in Malaysia, less in terms of getting a job, the disabled people have a little difficulty or lack of confidence from the parties involved." (P8)

"I hope that the authorities reduce the gap between pwd and non-pwd in terms of economy, health, education, social, and so on." (P5)

"…it has to be balanced, it has to be balanced, what is available to be shared equally between each community, even if the community is small." (P6)

Awareness and Understanding

Participants highlighted the pressing need for greater awareness and understanding of their special educational needs and capabilities. They often found themselves in situations where family members, peers, lecturers, and institutional management lacked awareness of the challenges they faced. This lack of awareness hindered their ability to access the support they required. The findings highlight the necessity of comprehensive disability awareness programs within educational institutions and the broader community.

"…the management can provide a briefing on pwd to students involving everyone. There they can explain about the rights provided for people with disabilities in a certain place… the issue will reduce the misuse of facilities or infrastructure provided for people with disabilities." (P6)

"Parents often perceive slow learners as appearing somewhat bewildered."

"…awareness is the most important. awareness towards the community, taking care of the disabled is not the same as a normal person." (P1)

"I became disabled in 2015. I knew nothing about PWD, not until I enrolled into the university and realized that there exists a special lane for PWD." (P5)

Support Systems

Students with special educational needs have indicated that they require strong support networks that include emotional support, academic assistance, and counselling services. They emphasized the importance of these systems in their ability to navigate the challenges of tertiary

education successfully. These results underscore the importance of developing and sustaining support systems tailored to the distinct needs of students with special educational requirements.

"…it is necessary to make a program like this (dialogue) through casual chat to know what the disabled people need… for now, there is no dialogue in terms of maybe we have a WhatsApp group to ask like; just let me know the latest information." (P8)

"…there needs to be moral support…" (P1)

"… maybe, erm, the party … can arrange my internship, I think that kind of thing is difficult, how difficult can you maybe be able to convince, kind of letter to convince this student that he can do the tasks." (P7)

Empathy

The study's results demonstrated the importance of encouraging empathy and positive attitudes in peers, as well as in families and among students with special educational needs. The participants shared accounts of how compassionate and understanding attitudes positively impacted their educational journeys. These results highlight the contribution of empathy-building programmes to the development of a more welcoming learning environment.

"I think what we need is the community out there that is more sensitive and more aware of the disabled." (P3)

"…example of good management, they are alert regarding the disabled and the needs of the disabled." (P5)

"I hope that the needy disabled people are given more attention by various parties, not only HEPA Counseling and so on, but parties at various levels." (P8)

Policy Framework

To protect the rights and interests of students with special educational needs, participants emphasized the importance of having clear policies that are consistently upheld. They outlined situations in which a failure to enforce policy resulted in unequal assistance and treatment. This study emphasizes the importance of higher education institutions having strong policy frameworks that support inclusivity and ensure compliance.

"Maybe the government can put a policy where everyone, no matter the government or private sector,

needs to provide mandatory services, provide services for their employees according to the necessary facilities." (P5)

"*I hope the government obligates every party, whether private or government, for example, there is an employee who is an example of a normal employee, then suddenly the employee had an accident and needs to use a wheelchair, they cannot terminate them at will, instead they need to provide facilities.*" (P7)

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide important insights into the aspirations and concerns that special educational needs students in higher education institutions confront. They also throw light on the challenges these students face and the possibilities for improvement. Students with special educational needs expressed that their main issue is the inadequate infrastructure. Some participants emphasised the need for customised infrastructure that accommodates a range of disabilities, even though they acknowledged the efforts made to provide accessible amenities. Immediate action is necessary to bridge the gap between implementation and policy. By offering a platform where content may be made available to all students, regardless of their disabilities, e-learning can act as a transformative solution. All students will have equal access to educational resources if e-learning materials are built with accessibility features, including text-to-speech options, closed captions, and customizable interfaces. In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) tools within higher education, including their use to support students with special educational needs through personalized learning, automated accessibility features, and intelligent tutoring systems (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). To guarantee the inclusivity of students with special educational needs in higher education institutions, infrastructure is essential. Providing a welcoming and comfortable learning environment is crucial to students' success (Moriña et al., 2020a), especially for students with special needs (Debasu & Yitayew, 2024), as it accommodates diverse abilities and backgrounds, and provides equal opportunities for all learners. According to Awang-Hashim et al. (2019), this entails offering suitable learning environments, such as classrooms that are easily accessible and arranged to promote students' mobility. Yasin et al. (2011) had earlier asserted that to meet the needs of these students, special education programs must be equipped with handicapped

toilets, designated pathways, and appropriate teaching aids. Furthermore, addressing the inequalities among students with special educational needs can also be facilitated by inclusive pedagogy, which incorporates technology, uses culturally sensitive materials, and encourages collaborative learning (Utami et al., 2020). Assistive technology addresses their specific needs, improving access to learning resources and fostering a sense of belonging, ultimately creating a more supportive and equitable educational environment (Macheque et al., 2024; Mitre & Zeneli, 2024). Higher education institutions can establish an inclusive environment that facilitates the learning and engagement of students with special educational needs by making sure that the infrastructure is tailored to their individual requirements.

As stated by students with special educational needs, fair treatment is necessary to promote an inclusive learning environment. Because e-learning platforms provide all students with a uniform interface and learning experience, they can help promote equal treatment. Furthermore, by ensuring that e-learning course development adheres to universal design principles, it guarantees that the content is accessible to all users. Equal treatment can be further promoted by providing faculty members with training on inclusive teaching methods in online learning environments. Perceptions of equality might influence the inclusion of students with special educational needs in higher education institutions. According to Hamid et al. (2022), mainstream students must have a positive attitude towards students with special educational needs, as a negative attitude may hinder their inclusion. Higher education institutions must adopt a consolidated framework that emphasizes fairness, access, and reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure full inclusion (Pretorius et al., 2018). Furthermore, Mahlangu (2019) suggests that in order to achieve equality and diversity in higher education, it is essential to engage students and pay attention to their demands. Ineffective accommodations may result from misinterpreting and stereotyping the educational needs of students with learning disabilities and attention problems, underscoring the necessity of individualized and student-centered methods (Sokolová et al., 2022).

It is clear that there is a demand for greater awareness and understanding of the unique requirements and abilities of students with special educational needs. By adding disability awareness modules to courses, e-learning can be a vital tool for increasing awareness. These classes can shed light on the difficulties experienced by students with special educational needs and provide direction on how

to establish an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Additionally, asynchronous contact made possible by e-learning allows students to converse and share their experiences with peers and teachers, promoting a greater understanding. Awareness is the key to ensuring the inclusivity of students with special educational needs at higher education institutions. It is imperative that educators and all other students acknowledge and demonstrate empathy for the needs of these students. To achieve effective teaching with the use of information technology, particularly the Internet, it is crucial to identify needs and gather information on a blended learning model in higher education (Utami et al., 2020). Furthermore, cooperative learning strategies can foster the inclusion of students with special educational needs and foster a positive learning environment in the classroom (Rossetti & Seno, 2015). In order to improve students' access to and success in online learning, inclusive institutions should assess their academic practices as well. This includes developing tools for self-evaluation to help identify and remove any barriers that might be preventing the inclusivity of these students (Meda & Albukhari, 2023).

Individual awareness is essential to guarantee the inclusivity of students with special educational needs in higher education institutions. By addressing the interpersonal challenges that special educational needs students have and offering supportive services, self-awareness can be leveraged to ensure the inclusivity of these students in higher education institutions. Their capacity to negotiate social interactions is strengthened by increasing self- and social-awareness (Adams & Farmer, 2022). Supportive services should be offered to students with special educational needs in higher education to help them deal with the challenges they encounter because they are more vulnerable and experience heightened psychological discomfort (Ng & Boey, 2022). Educators' awareness of fine motor skills is crucial for effective teaching and learning sessions for students with special educational needs, and self-awareness plays a vital role in improving this awareness (Musa & Ahmad, 2019).

Students with special educational needs highlighted the value of strong support networks. Virtual support services, such as peer mentorship programs, online counseling, and academic help resources, can be integrated into e-learning platforms. These programmes can be customised to meet the unique needs of students with special educational requirements, providing them with the direction and support they need to complete their educational journey effectively. E-learning can also make it easier to obtain resources and support materials, which low-

ers barriers to asking for assistance. The support structure in place can significantly impact how inclusive higher education institutions are for students with special educational needs. Additionally, skilled educators who are aware of their students' diverse needs play a crucial role in promoting their learning and achievements (Kravchenko et al., 2021). Personalised psychological and pedagogical support, inclusive groupings, and other strategies can help meet the diverse needs of these students (Jenčik et al., 2022). One way to enhance the inclusivity of students with special educational needs is by involving them in the selection and creation of behavioural support programmes (Prudnikova, 2019). Students with special educational needs can participate, engage, and achieve equality with their peers by making a significant effort, taking advantage of flexible learning opportunities, and fostering teamwork (Johnson et al., 2022). According to Rosenfelde (2018), providing equitable opportunities and promoting active engagement for individuals with special educational needs is a crucial measure of a nation's democracy and sustainable development.

It is essential to cultivate empathy among classmates, families, and students with special educational needs. Collaborative learning opportunities that foster empathy can be facilitated by e-learning. Students are encouraged to collaborate through group projects, discussion boards, and virtual team activities, which promote a feeling of understanding and community. In higher education institutions, fostering inclusivity for students with special educational needs requires empathy (Smolyaninova et al., 2020). It facilitates the avoidance of interpersonal conflicts and fosters an environment that is supportive to all students (Botticello, 2020). According to Moriña et al. (2020a), it fosters unity among students, lessens aggressiveness, and prevents competing attitudes towards students with special educational needs. Higher education can be made more relevant, inclusive, and expansive for both students and educators by establishing multiply-voiced environments that validate the breadth of students' experiences and cultural diversity (Kousalya & Aruna, 2022). The views of faculty members regarding disability in higher education institutions also emphasise the importance of the characteristics and attitudes possessed by students with disabilities.

One cannot stress enough the significance of well-defined and strictly enforced policies in defending the rights of students with special educational needs. By acting as a centralized platform for policy communication, e-learning can facilitate the distribution and enforcement

of policies. Institutions can utilize e-learning platforms to ensure that policies regarding the rights and accommodations of students with special educational needs are understood and adhered to by all parties involved, including faculty staff, educators, and other students. To ensure that students with special educational needs have access to educational services and rights, as well as the opportunity to engage and learn alongside their peers without disabilities, inclusive education policies in higher education institutions must be strengthened (Norwich, 2021). Implementing inclusive laws and policies, however, presents particular challenges. For example, a university's physical environment has to be made more accessible, as do architectural obstacles and the social environment (Amka, 2018). Policies assisting students in minority-serving institutions necessitate choices about equity, cost, quality, impact on the country's economic performance, and international global relationships, claims Poley (2008). Funding for higher education institutions to support the implementation of universal design and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) should be considered by the authority. Prioritising faculty training will help faculty members handle and assist students with special educational needs. Public higher education institutions should collaborate with international universities to provide standardised support (Zaki & Ismail, 2021). (Figure 1).

This study sheds light on a variety of goals that these students expressed, which extend beyond merely wanting to excel academically. From their narratives, the participants convey a yearning for an educational setting that recognises and supports their range of disabilities. To better interact with the learning process, they seek educational facilities that are not only accessible but also customized to meet their special educational needs (Duque et al., 2020; Kauffman & Hornby, 2020; Börnert-Ringleb et al., 2021), which requires a systematic and holistic approach to change the ecosystem and move towards inclusive practices (Lansey, 2023). They advocate for a better understanding of their special educational needs, the development of strong support networks, the encouragement of positive attitudes among parents and peers, and the consistent implementation of policies aimed at fostering inclusivity. These shared goals underscore the importance of addressing crucial elements that can enhance the educational experiences and overall well-being of students with special educational needs in the context of higher education.
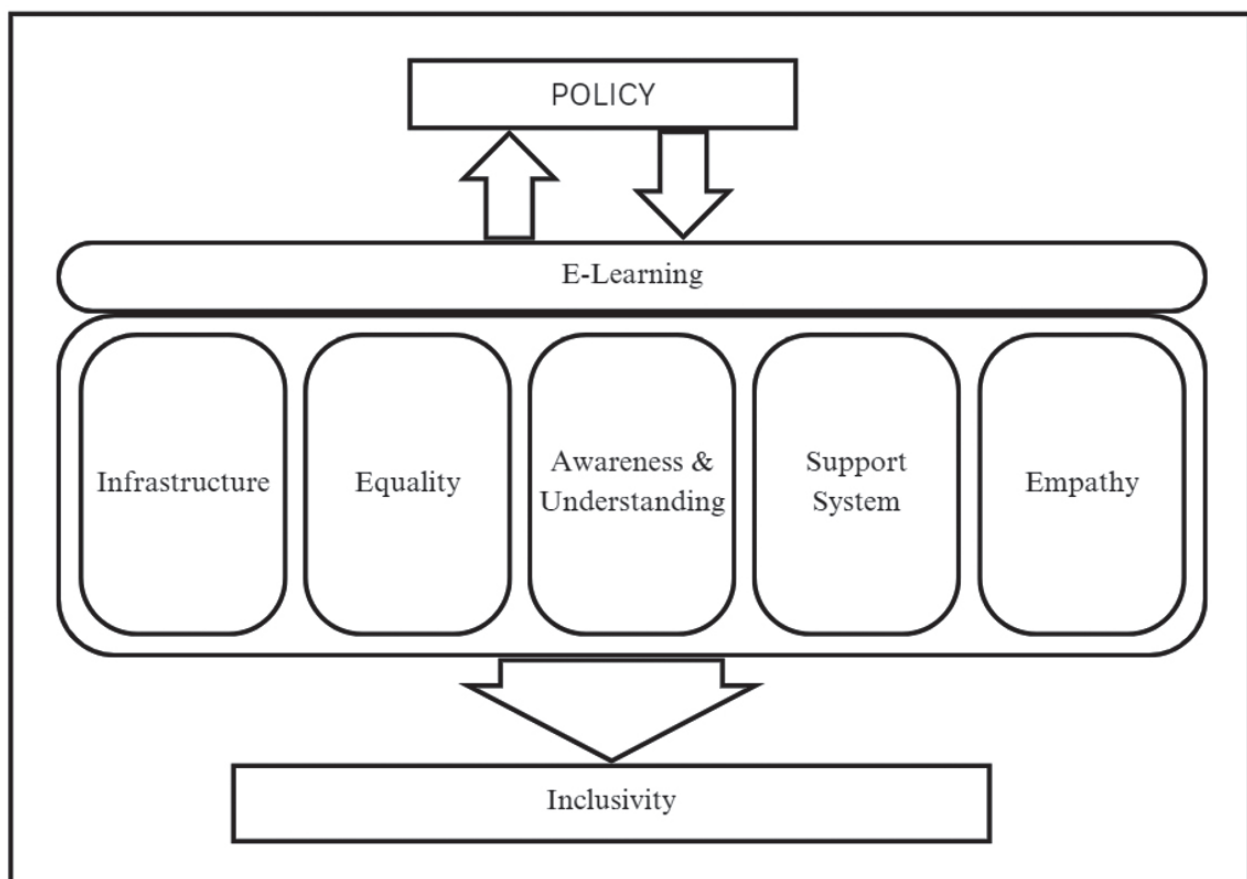

Figure 1. Public Higher Education Inclusivity Framework

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that infrastructure becomes a major concern among special educational needs students. Other than that, social-environmental concerns such as fair treatment, awareness, and empathy from others, as well as a support system, should also be taken into consideration. In addition to that, the policy to govern the inclusivity of the special educational needs students should also be strengthened. This study also highlights the vital role that e-learning plays in addressing the issues raised by students with special educational needs in higher education. When it comes to providing education and support services that promote awareness, empathy, and fair treatment, e-learning provides a flexible and inclusive platform, which can foster an environment in which students with special educational needs can flourish academically and socially, fusing it with all-encompassing policy frameworks. This will ultimately lead to a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape. By considering core acceptance constructs, social norms, sense of belonging, and enjoyment components, e-learning systems can be tailored for students with special educational needs (Ferhan et al., 2022).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to combat inequality, protect everyone's rights, and guarantee that no one is left behind, are part of the 2030 Agenda. The Malaysian government has developed rules and guidelines to guarantee full inclusion at institutions of higher learning through its relevant ministries. These include methods for attracting students with disabilities, adjustments to improve inclusion and retention, technological advancements to improve access and accessibility, and advocacy for disability diversity and equity for all students, which go beyond simple compliance. However, there are still major barriers to full integration, including the persistent stigmas associated with students with disabilities, negative attitudes, technological barriers, and a lack of understanding among university administrators, faculties, and staff.

LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences and aspirations of students with special educational needs in Malaysian higher education, several limitations should be noted. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample size, with only two types of disability, and focused exclusively on students from public universities in Malaysia. This limitation may affect the generalizability of the findings to other higher education contexts, including private institutions and other countries. The use of semi-structured online interviews, while beneficial for gaining in-depth qualitative data, may have limitations in capturing the full range of experiences due to potential issues such as internet connectivity problems and the lack of non-verbal cues. In-person interviews or a mixed-methods approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Additionally, as with any qualitative research, there is a degree of subjectivity involved in the thematic analysis. The researchers' interpretations of the data could be influenced by their own perspectives and biases. Implementing triangulation methods and involving multiple researchers in the data analysis process could help mitigate this issue. Lastly, the data was collected during a specific period, which may not fully capture the dynamic nature of policy changes and infrastructural developments. Longitudinal studies are recommended to observe how improvements or changes in policies and infrastructure impact the experiences of students with special educational needs over time. By acknowledging these limitations, future studies can build upon this research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and needs of students with special educational needs in higher education settings.

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