

Inclusive Education in A Hybrid Setup for Early Childhood Education

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Abstract. *Inclusive education in a hybrid setup for Early Childhood Education in Malaysia represents a pivotal shift in the country's approach to ensuring equal educational opportunities for all children. This innovative approach merges the principles of inclusivity to create a more accessible and flexible learning environment. Little Leaders Childcare Centre is the first Inclusive registered nursery in Selangor state. We Believe in educating children through an inclusive diversity way, full of love, compassion and understanding for each other from an early age forming a holistic development. Little Leaders Childcare Centre (LLCC) is the first hybrid childcare center in Malaysia. To open a childcare center in Malaysia, you are required to get licenses from Local Authority, Health Ministry and Fire Department. LLCC has all these three licenses. LLCC objectives are assisting parents working in Menteri Besar Selangor incorporated, government and private departments located in Bangunan Darul Ehsan and its surroundings. Helping special children so that they can be given early intervention through regular therapy sessions. Provide children the opportunity and space to enjoy complete facilities in a conducive environment. Being a 'world class' model is a world-class example of a hybrid center. Vision: maximizing every child's potential through structured, fun-filled activities. Mission: to instill good values based ON Islamic teachings; to develop strong character, confidence and self-esteem; and to nurture caring, responsible and outstanding leaders for our society, at par with global standards. Objective: the concept of inclusive education centers on providing children with disabilities or special needs opportunity to learn alongside their typically developing peers.*

Keywords: *early childhood education, hybrid setup, inclusive education*

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, there is a growing need for inclusive education in early childhood settings, especially in a hybrid setup that combines both in-person and online learning. Inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. It promotes diversity, fosters a sense of belonging, and ensures that every child receives quality education.

In the 1990's, Malaysian government first committed itself to the concept of inclusive education although the 1996 Education Act retained a very fluid concept of inclusion by limiting it to students who were able to follow instructions in mainstream classrooms.

In the Malaysian context, a distinction has not been drawn between a purist conception of full inclusion (Heiman 2004), whereby students with special educational needs are given access to the same curriculum in the same classroom as their peers) and the more common practice of in-and-out (Heiman 2004), whereby students with special educational needs follow a modified curriculum, and may spend time outside the mainstream classroom (sometimes termed 'integration').

Importance of inclusive education in early childhood

Research shows that inclusion in early childhood settings has profound and lasting benefits for all children. When children with disabilities are included in regular classrooms, they can learn from their peers without disabilities and develop important social and academic skills.

Inclusion fosters empathy, understanding, and acceptance of individual differences for typically developing children. It provides them with invaluable lessons on diversity, adaptability, and the importance of inclusion in a larger society. When children grow up in inclusive environments, they are more likely to become tolerant, compassionate adults who advocate for inclusivity.

One of the significant advantages of early childhood inclusion is its positive impact on the psychological well-being of children. Inclusion promotes a sense of belonging, acceptance, and self-worth among all children, irrespective of their abilities. This has several psychological benefits for children with disabilities and their neurotypical peers.

Inclusion goes beyond physical presence; it creates an environment where children feel valued and accepted for who they are. When children with disabilities are included in regular classrooms, they can feel pride in their accomplishments and appreciated for their unique abilities. Witnessing their peers recognizing their talents and providing support boosts their self-esteem, confidence, and overall happiness.

Furthermore, the benefits of inclusion extend to children without disabilities as well. By seeing their peers with disabilities succeed and thrive, they learn the importance of celebrating individual strengths and embracing differences. This fosters a positive self-image and promotes inclusive attitudes, creating a more accepting and compassionate society.

In addition to the psychological benefits, early childhood inclusion has numerous academic advantages for children with disabilities and their neurotypical classmates. Inclusive classrooms create a stimulating and supportive learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of all children, fostering optimal cognitive development and a love for learning.

When children with disabilities are included in regular classrooms, they have access to the general curriculum and learning opportunities provided to their typically developing peers. This exposure enhances cognitive development by challenging them academically and promoting critical thinking skills.

For example, imagine a child with autism who is included in a regular classroom. The child can observe and learn from their neurotypical peers in this inclusive environment. They may see their classmates engaging in problem-solving activities or group discussions. As a result, the child with autism is exposed to new ideas and ways of thinking, stimulating their cognitive development.

Moreover, inclusive classrooms often employ various teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities, benefiting all children. Teachers may use visual aids, hands-on activities, or technology to present information differently. This inclusive approach broadens the learning experience, encouraging students to think creatively and develop problem-solving skills.

For instance, consider a classroom where a student with a visual impairment is included. The teacher may provide materials in braille or use audio recordings to ensure the student can access the information. This benefits students with visual impairment and allows their classmates to learn about different ways of receiving and processing information.

Challenges in implementing inclusive education in a hybrid setup

First and foremost, humane education (Pendidikan Manusiawi) in the context of inclusive education within a hybrid setup for early childhood education in Malaysia involves fostering a learning environment that not only accommodates diverse needs but also instills values of compassion, empathy, and understanding among students. Here are key considerations for incorporating humane education into inclusive practices in a hybrid early childhood education setting in Malaysia:

- a. *Inclusive Curriculum Design*: Develop a curriculum that integrates humane education seamlessly. This includes selecting materials, stories, and activities that promote empathy, kindness, and understanding of differences. The curriculum should be flexible enough to cater to both in-person and online learning environments.
- b. *Professional Development for Educators*: Provide training and professional development opportunities for early childhood educators to enhance their understanding of humane education principles. This includes strategies for creating an inclusive and compassionate classroom environment, both in physical and virtual settings.
- c. *Parental Involvement*: Engage parents in the process by promoting awareness of the importance of humane education. Provide resources and strategies for parents to reinforce these values at home, creating a collaborative approach to fostering empathy and understanding.
- d. *Individualized Support and Differentiated Instruction*: Implement individualized support plans for children with diverse needs, ensuring that each child's unique requirements are met. Differentiate instruction based on learning styles and abilities to create an inclusive learning experience for all students.
- e. *Promoting Social Interaction*: Facilitate opportunities for social interaction and collaboration, even in virtual settings. Foster a sense of community and belonging among students, encouraging them to understand and appreciate each other's perspectives and differences.

Incorporating humane education into inclusive practices in a hybrid setup for early childhood education in Malaysia requires a holistic and culturally sensitive approach. By nurturing a learning environment that values empathy and diversity, educators can contribute to the holistic development of children and promote a more inclusive and compassionate society. Furthermore, building the character of Malaysian (Pembinaan karakter bangsa Malaysia) within the context of inclusive education in a hybrid setup for early childhood education is crucial for fostering well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to society. Here are considerations for promoting character development in this specific setting:

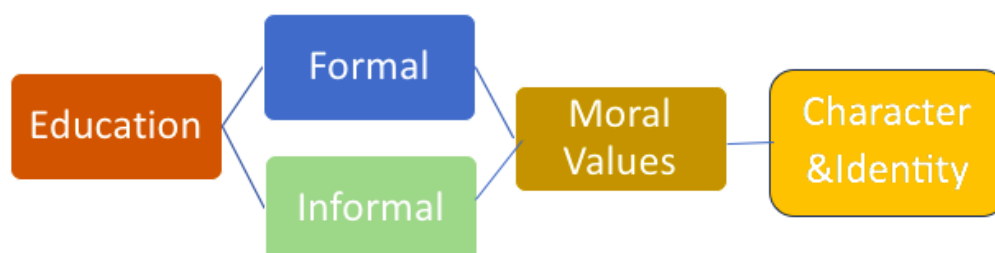
- f. *Inclusive Storytelling*: Utilize storytelling to convey moral values and character-building lessons. Ensure that stories are inclusive and representative of various backgrounds, abilities, and family structures, fostering empathy and understanding.
- g. *Emphasis on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)*: Integrate SEL components into the curriculum to help children understand and manage their emotions, develop empathy, and build positive relationships. SEL skills are crucial for fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment.
- h. *Cooperative Learning Activities*: Design activities that encourage collaboration, teamwork, and shared responsibility. Both in-person and virtual group activities can promote character development by fostering communication, cooperation, and mutual understanding.

- i. *Service Learning Projects*: Engage children in age-appropriate service learning projects that allow them to contribute to their communities. This could include virtual community outreach initiatives that promote kindness, responsibility, and civic engagement.
- j. *Modeling Positive Behavior*: Teachers and caregivers play a vital role as role models. Demonstrate and reinforce positive behaviors, values, and attitudes. Highlight examples of empathy, kindness, and respect for diversity in both virtual and physical learning environments.

By integrating these considerations into the inclusive education framework within a hybrid setup, early childhood educators in Malaysia can contribute significantly to the character development of children. This holistic approach not only prepares children academically but also equips them with the social and ethical foundations needed for active and positive citizenship. Lastly, to encourage *Karamah Insaniah* to be incorporated into inclusive education within a hybrid setup for early childhood education in Malaysia.

- k. *Cultivating Respect for Human Dignity*: Incorporate teachings and activities that emphasize the intrinsic value and dignity of each child. This can be integrated into lessons, stories, and discussions that highlight the uniqueness and worth of every individual.
- l. *Inclusive Pedagogy*: Adopt teaching strategies that cater to diverse learning needs. This could involve providing multiple ways for children to engage with the material, accommodating different learning styles, and offering varied assessment methods to ensure fair evaluation.
- m. *Cultural Sensitivity*: Promote an understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and backgrounds. Early childhood education programs can celebrate cultural diversity through inclusive activities, stories, and events that respect and honor the cultural richness of Malaysia.
- n. *Values-Based Curriculum*: Develop a curriculum that explicitly integrates values associated with "*Karamah Insaniah*." This may involve collaborating with religious or community leaders to ensure that the curriculum aligns with cultural and ethical values.
- o. *Continuous Professional Development*: Provide ongoing training and professional development for educators to enhance their understanding of values such as "*Karamah Insaniah*" and to equip them with effective strategies for incorporating these values into their teaching practices.

It's important to note that any initiatives related to "*Karamah Insaniah*" in early childhood education should align with local cultural and educational policies in Malaysia. Additionally, collaboration with stakeholders, including parents, educators, and community leaders, is essential for the successful implementation of inclusive education principles in a hybrid setup.



2. Results

They will receive personalized support and accommodation while benefiting from the social interactions and stimulation. Moreover, it equips educators with the necessary tools and equipment to cater to the unique learning needs of each child. Our Little Leaders Child Care Centre in Shah Alam, the first one in Malaysia @ hybrid model emphasizes the importance of collaboration between educators, parents, specialists and community to create a holistic and inclusive educational environment.



3. Conclusions

In conclusion, our Little Leaders Child Care Centre an inclusive education hybrid setup for Early Childhood Education in Malaysia symbolizes a progressive step toward fostering a more inclusive society. This approach blends the best of both worlds, ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities, have equal access to quality education while preparing them to become leaders. Our sharing is a real existing centre at the Government Office premise at Shah Alam City Centre.

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