CHANGING EMOTIONS BEFORE CHANGING WAYS: LEADERSHIP AND GUIDANCE TO IMPROVE TEACHERS INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Like many countries across the world, Malaysia has affirmed its commitment to quality and transformative inclusive education. However, the complex journey to provide a quality inclusive education can lead to inconsistency in practice. To address these concerns and to better understand the challenge at hand, this study obtained teachers' views on school-based professional development for promoting inclusive education in Malaysia's primary schools. 76 teachers including administrators were sampled from five primary schools. 25 individual and eight focus group interviews were conducted. In addition, 10 classroom observations were carried out before the individual interviews. Data were analysed thematically using qualitative analysis software. To enhance teachers' inclusive practice, it is found that besides school leadership and the understanding of inclusive education, the values and positive attitudes of teachers are important. Only through strategies and actions that can cause change to the emotions, and thus, attitudes and motivations of teachers, might there be a change in the way in which teachers will act.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, inclusive practice, leadership, coaching, professional development

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has developed the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 as a systematic effort to comprehensively transform the education system. The Blueprint focuses on access to education, improving standards (quality), bridging achievement gaps (equity), strengthening unity among pupils, and optimising system efficiency (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The Blueprint also outlines the vision and aspirations for each pupil and the education system that can meet the needs of the country in the future. The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) needs to implement eleven strategic and operational shifts to achieve the desired vision. This is in line with the 4th Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations and the UNESCO Declaration: Incheon Declaration Education 2030 (UNDESA, n.a.) which establishes the need for inclusive education and lifelong learning for all.

The challenge to achieve an economically developed inclusive community in the 21st century requires transformation in the education system. The government's vision "75% of pupils with special needs enrol in inclusive education programs by 2025", (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013, pp. 4-19) outlined in Wave 3 of the Blueprint cannot be realised efficiently without an understanding of the concept of inclusive education as well as commitment from various parties in all levels. The MOE currently announced their aim to focus on seven main thrusts which includes making communication between the ministry and schools more efficient and transparent (Perimbanayagam, 2022). The fourth thrust is to pay attention to the issue of school dropouts as well as literacy and numeracy problems so that the education gap can be bridged. The fifth focuses on the welfare of teachers because they are the main core

of effectiveness of education delivery. The pledge to provide continuous professional support for teachers shows the significance of the provision of quality education to all.

Furthermore, quality teaching and learning for all pupils, regardless of ability, requires inclusive teaching practices to ensure their optimal achievement. In ensuring that this happens, school leaders can take a significant role and become an important factor in influencing success to achieve the vision set by the MOE. School leaders who are dynamic and able to act in tandem with the needs of the times and upcoming challenges are critical. Inclusive leadership practices, roles and responsibilities lie at the interface between education policies and their implementation at schools (Turner-Cmuchal & Óskarsdóttir, 2020, p. 17). It emphasises the potential for school leaders to play a key role in supporting wider system transformation at all levels of policy. Moreover, implementing effective continuous professional development (CPD) requires understanding of the critical elements and transformative process of learning, leading to teacher change (Calleja, 2018).

This study responds to the call for research by examining teachers' views about their CPD needs to improve their inclusive practice. This study aims to investigate teachers' need for CPD in increasing support and understanding the need for a successful promotion of inclusive education in primary schools. Its main objective is to explore teachers' views on the requirements for school-based CPD to enhance their inclusive practice. The paper is focused on answering what school-based CPD is needed to enhance teachers' inclusive practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Below is the related literature which considers the interface between the developing concept, philosophical position and political support to meet the educational needs of all learners and their professional behaviours, in terms of emotions, attitudes and motivations. The development of pedagogic and organisational approaches to meeting special educational needs is based on the transition from exclusion to segregation and to integration leading to inclusive practices. The review considers research relating to teachers' attitudes towards and acceptance of philosophical and political reform.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a concept closely related to children with special needs (or formerly known as disabled children) and special education. The literature review emphasizes the importance of historical context (Armstrong et al., 2011; Clough & Corbett, 2000; Gibson, 2015) to theoretical and empirical transformation although it is not a linear process (See Figure 1). The ongoing debate about the concept has led to the evolution of the inclusive concept. Therefore, from the emphasis on special educational needs and the focus on disabilities and deficiencies, inclusiveness means that all pupils must be supported and helped to succeed (Farrell, 2000).

Research Context

Due to colonialism, Malaysia has become a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual country. Since then, the national education system has been built based on ethnic unity, identity, equal opportunities, lifelong education, quality culture and international competitiveness. MOE emphasises that this system focuses on

developing pupils holistically, with a strong sense of national identity (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). This involves aspirations of the system and pupils with clear performance benchmarks to evaluate reform progress. There are five system aspirations: access, quality, fairness, unity, and efficiency. Pupil aspirations are knowledge, bilingual competence, thinking skills, ethics and spirituality, leadership skills and national identity (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012).
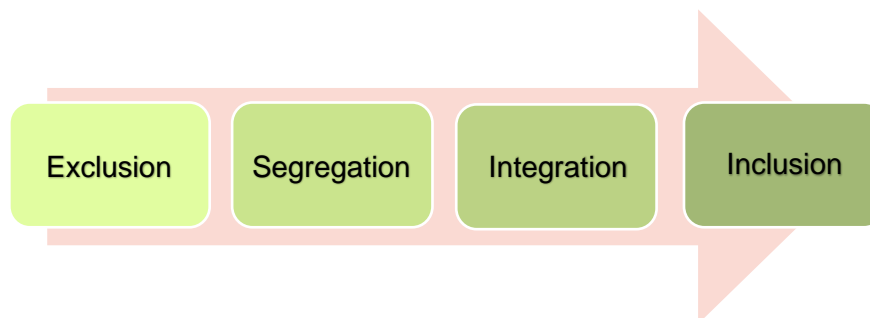

Figure 1: Development of inclusive education
(Source: Rosmalily & Woollard, 2019; Salleh & Woollard, 2019; Rosmalily, 2022)

Inclusive education in Malaysia is an extension of the provision of education provided for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and was introduced in the Education Act 1996 (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014). It is a continuation of the opportunity for pupils with SEN to study with mainstream pupils. However, there is no clear statement about inclusive education for pupils with SEN in the Amendment to the Education Act 1996 (1998). Inclusive Education Programme is defined as an "education programme for pupils with special needs who can learn together with mainstream pupils by placing one to five pupils with special needs in one class" quoted from *Sidang Media Khas Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia* (Perimbanayagam, 2022). This concept of inclusive education focuses on special educational needs, where participation is in line with the integration model of the 1980s (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014), rather than unconditional 'total inclusion' (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2004, p.29). Furthermore, the diversity of the Malaysian context with its various ethnicities, language culture and different schooling options affects the success of the promotion of inclusive education. Studies conducted at the implementation level also argue for change (Hussin et al., 2008; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014). This issue has been reinforced by the findings of studies that teachers lack knowledge and understanding of the values of inclusive education, and need CPD (Adnan & Hafiz, 2001; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014; Lee & Low, 2013).

Continuing Professional Development of Teachers

Professional and quality teachers are very important for any educational reform (UNESCO, 2015). Teachers are considered 'agents of change' (Day et al., 2007), therefore must be prepared with multiple roles to respond to increased diversity in the classroom (Allan, 2015) beyond their initial training. In the context of this study, all related terms, such as lifelong learning (Collin et al., 2012) are referred to as continuous professional development (CPD). The term 'professional development' was chosen, not 'professional learning', because the term professional development is used in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and understood by most Malaysian teachers.

Teacher CPD consists of all-natural learning experiences as well as conscious and planned activities that are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom (Day, 1999). Guskey (2000) argues that those processes and activities are designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of pupils. Thus, the outcome of teachers' participation in CPD activities is change; change in classroom practices, attitudes and beliefs that support their students' learning (Abakah, 2023).

Globally, governments harness teacher CPD to foster teacher quality, improved pupil learning, and enhances educational outcomes (Abakah, 2023) since improved teacher quality correlates strongly with pupil learning and achievements and schools' quality (Borghouts et al., 2023; Melesse & Gulie, 2019). Therefore, increasing the support and effectiveness of CPD is fundamental to developing quality teachers.

Providing quality education and pupil achievement is a complex issue as the world enters the 21st century due to its ever-expanding, global, and interactive nature. The technological progress that emerged in this century affects all aspects of life, moreover, the challenges posed by the changing nature of contemporary society, the needs of pupils and policies. This puts pressure on the relationship between professionalism and teacher autonomy in turn to the question of existing teaching ability, pedagogy suitability and teacher knowledge repository (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Therefore, teachers as professionals must change (Evans, 2008).

Research shows various perspectives when conceptualising CPD. For teachers to be more effective, the CPD programme should prove a positive effect on the teacher's teaching practice and have a significant different effect on the academic, social, and behavioural progress of pupils (Walter & Briggs, 2012). The CPD is considered to support teachers in contributing and shaping educational policies and practices and is linked to the transformative model (Kennedy, 2014). CPD that is concrete and class-based (Barber & Mourshed, 2007) allows educators to improve the knowledge and skills needed to deal with pupil learning challenges (Mizell, 2010).

After identifying teachers' needs, CPD activities need to be planned appropriately to support and help teachers to teach creatively and confidently (Anderson, 2001). Transformational leadership involves increasing the level of motivation beyond the exchange values to achieve higher performance and self-actualisation of the followers, while transactional leadership entails the exchange values of things to produce minimum production without higher-order purpose (Nguni et al., 2006). In reviewing the literature on leadership styles and school improvement, Jamal (2014) concludes that transformational leaders could improve the school's function. Teachers also face constant challenges and are responsible for multiple tasks and priorities inside and outside the school. Therefore, getting teachers' views is important to understand their CPD needs. They are individuals who know and understand the pupils, the challenges and realities of daily operations and are experienced in the school context. The involvement of teachers in choosing their own CPD activities leads to visible improvements in subject knowledge and their commitment to teaching, teaching practices and their pupils' learning (Cordingley et al., 2005).

Schuelka (2018) argues that supportive leadership, training and supporting all teachers in inclusive practices are crucial for successful inclusive education. Earlier, Booth and Ainscow (2002), in the Index of Inclusion, emphasise the role of leadership

styles in developing inclusive practice and culture. Transformational leadership involves the process of increasing the level of motivation beyond the exchange of values to achieve higher performance and self-actualisation of the followers, while transactional leadership entails the exchange of values of things to produce minimum production without higher order purpose (Nguni et al., 2006). In reviewing the literature on leadership styles and school improvement, Jamal (2014) concluded that transformational leaders could improve the school function and teaching process, where the leaders focus on the needs of their employees.

METHODOLOGY

This research takes an ethnographic approach to studying a phenomenon and uses an interpretive qualitative research methodology with the application of various methods of data collection. The empirical results drawn from this Malaysian context are analysed and the discussion draws connections between the finding and the international academic and professional literature in inclusive education.

Data Collection

The research methods include individual interviews and semi-structured focus groups. Interviews are flexible and effective in obtaining detailed answers to research questions. 25 classroom observations were also carried out before individual interviews. This is to understand the context and atmosphere in the class and to help construct questions in individual interviews. Individual interviews are conducted for 60 minutes, and focus group interviews are for 90 minutes. The analysis of individual and focus group interviews was integrated to achieve the goal of exploring the phenomenon and validating the group and individual perspective data. Interviews were conducted in the Malay language (the national language) to avoid language issues.

Sampling and Sample

A purposive sampling strategy (Cohen et al., 2011) was used. Data was collected from five national schools in Kinta District, Perak: three schools with Special Education Integration Program (SEIP) and two non-SEIP schools. Respondents involved in this study include head teachers, senior assistants, and mainstream and special education teachers in schools with SEIP only. Those involved in individual interviews were not involved in focus group interviews. There were two groups of respondents of focus group interviews from School 1, School 4, and School 5. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically through an inductive approach using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) NVivo 11 software through the lens of interpretivist and constructivist approaches (Saldaña, 2015). The coding process involved the process of separation and grouping to evaluate codes, categories, and themes (Bazeley, 2013). The coding approach uses the Professional Competence Teacher Model 'Cognitive Activation in the Mathematics Classroom and Professional Competence of Teachers' (COACTIV) (Baumert & Kunter, 2013). This model combines the theory of professionalism with literature on competence. According to this model, four aspects of competence need to be developed through professional development,

namely beliefs, values, and goals; motivational orientation; professional knowledge; and self-regulation. Data analysis was done in Malay language.

Table 1: *Distribution of participants*

School		Number of Respondents		Total of Respondents
SEIP	Non-SEIP	Individual Interview	Focus Group Interview	
School 1		11	7	24
			6	
School 2		0	7	7
School 3		2	5	7
	School 4	6	6	19
			7	
	School 5	6	6	19
			7	
Total 5 schools		Total 25 interviews	Total 8 focus group interviews	76

FINDINGS

The following is an interview excerpt that is presented without changing the meaning and purpose conveyed by the respondent. Respondents' opinions about the need for effective continuous professional development to improve teachers' inclusive practices are influenced by their understanding of inclusive education practices in Malaysia. A pseudonym has been used and the symbol '*' represents the special education teacher. Individual interviews are marked as 'II' and focus group interviews as "Fg". Figure 2 illustrates the themes related to the context of this paper.

School-based Continuing Professional Development Expectations

Respondents expressed the need for continuous professional development (CPD) in improving knowledge, information, teaching and learning strategies and getting the latest input on government policies.

"We will get new inputs, policies, and get the latest knowledge and teaching techniques. We should not imitate the traditional ways, but instead continue to move forward on par with the pupils, who are sometimes more advanced than us". (II, S4, Safa)

Safa expressed the need to improve oneself. This shows that school based CPD aims for teachers to learn and be updated on the evolutions in education even if they do not have the opportunity to attend courses outside of school.

However, there is an opposing opinion as quoted below:

Zania: LADAP often touches on the same thing. Motivation to teach, teaching methods, techniques. Teachers who have been teaching for 20 to 30 years, feel there is no innovation, just repeating the same things for our memory. (FGb, S4)
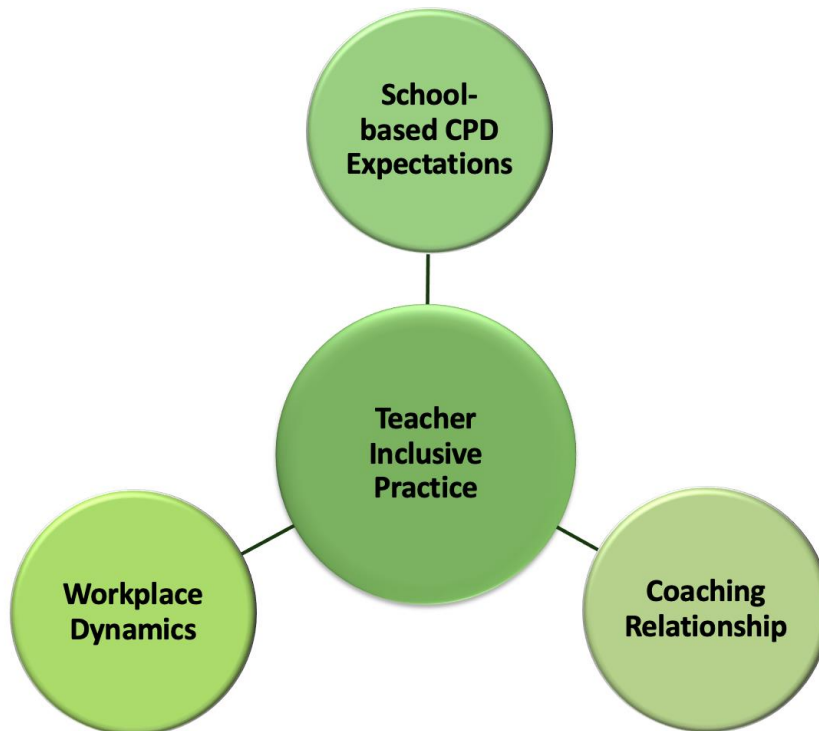

Figure 2: The theme

This illustrates several issues including topics and activities and, more importantly, the group states that experienced teachers feel there is no improvement. It also means that teachers need to re-evaluate their respective involvement in CPD activities:

Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the prescribed CPD.

Nora: LADAP isn't what we require.

Mary: Everything is from the higher-ups.

Nora: So, dissociate from teachers' PdP. Furthermore, LADAP is not about all subjects; it only focuses on core subjects. (FGb, S5)

In this extract, the respondents stated that all LADAP activities were determined by the school leaders, and they could not express opinions of the required LADAP to improve their teaching and learning (PdP) practice. Therefore, the development of teachers' ideas, knowledge and skills needs to be encouraged and school leaders can respond appropriately to the views expressed by teachers. In other words, teachers need in-service training (LADAP) that meets their needs, motivates, and improves knowledge and teaching and learning skills for the subjects taught (based on specialisation/options) to ensure optimal achievement of each pupil. The findings indicate the relevance of listening to teachers' voice, sparking interest, motivating teachers to search for inclusive pedagogy and giving feedback, which then gathers momentum and becomes a culture of excellence.

Workplace Dynamics

Many respondents voiced the importance of workplace dynamics and teacher relationships with learning communities at school. Workplace dynamics are seen as important for school-based CPD whether formal or informal, for improving teaching and learning practices, and in solving problems and developing teamwork to achieve school objectives.

"*Previously, the work culture was different among senior teachers. We tend to follow, learn from them. But these newcomers aren't. I'm not sure. Perhaps too much workload, anxious, unable to handle tasks. New teachers, nowadays, don't want to learn, or don't care. So, the workload isn't balanced*". (II, S4, Mia)

Mia compared the work culture in her early years of teaching to the current culture in school, implying a different commitment to learning and improvement among teachers. There was a counter-perspective regarding senior and junior teachers. This showed that the power distance culture that led to a hierarchical relationship and defensive attitude among teachers impedes successful school-based CPD.

Another important element that was raised was the respondent's feeling of insecurity to share views that are considered sensitive, which revealed teachers' anxiety to voice their views:

"*My heart is beating fast (share views). I do not agree at all, any activity that takes the teacher's personal time. I don't know about your (opinion). I don't want to add details*". (II, S4, Ida)

However, a head teacher asserted:

"*I always say, 'No matter what the problem is, we can't get angry and accuse others. Sit together and work it out".* (II, S4, Rosnah, Head Teacher)

Differences of opinion can be seen between leaders and teachers in the same school in the extracts above. This shows that a positive environment that encourages the sharing of ideas, opinions and information is very important. A positive and conducive environment in this context involves social aspects not just the physical components of the school such as infrastructure.

This implied challenges in communication and efforts to change teaching practice. Developing positive environments and work cultures would facilitate a learning community and school dynamic to allow teachers to constantly cooperate, learn and work together, thus creating helpful school-based CPD in promoting inclusive education. Participants believed communication and understanding between teachers to be significant in helping them benefit from school-based CPD. The mutual respect and trustworthiness in the school community demonstrated the importance of workplace dynamics to accommodating school-based CPD. Supportive leadership was perceived as important in developing a sustainable dynamic in the school community.

However, the power-gap culture that exists in schools undermines ongoing professional development activities and programmes.

*Izz: * While teaching, we are engrossed, never aware of our weaknesses ... Via PLC, we feel comfortable when our colleagues observe us ... able to discuss improvement. But, not with the headmaster, we [nervous...].*

Aini: Nervous… assessment. (Fga, S1)

Izz* insists that teachers feel comfortable with their respective teaching practices, without realising their weaknesses. This shows a lack of reflection on self-efficacy. However, with their fellow teachers, they can help each other through observation and discussion to improve, comfortably, instead of being uncomfortably observed by the headmaster. Therefore, their teaching will be more natural (even in observation) as they become more confident. Respondents explained that they were observed by the head teacher for the purpose of giving marks. So, they prepare best when observed, unlike their usual teaching practice. The group claimed that the objective of performance evaluation (through observation) was not achieved because there was no discussion of progress, goals, or the need for them to improve teaching practice. This reveals the power gap culture in schools. It shows that the teachers are not confident to have a meeting or discussion with the head teacher about their performance. It is also not comfortable for school principals to point out teachers' weaknesses (as well as their strengths) and discuss challenges and opportunities for their improvement. It is anticipated that teachers are more comfortable being creative in teaching under transformational leadership. This relates to what Kennedy (2005) emphasised in providing transformative CPD.

Perhaps the interaction in the school community is influenced by cultural factors, that is, avoiding things that can offend others or cause bad feelings. The lack of discussion can also be explained by an environment that is not conducive to open and positive communication, as well as observation methods and time management. This element leads to the importance of bottom-up approach in leadership. This, together with transformative leadership, represents opportunities to suggest and receive feedback about teachers' requirements of school-based CPD and practice.

Coaching Relationship and Leadership

There was a counterview regarding senior and junior teachers. This showed that the power-distance culture that led to a hierarchical relationship and defensive attitude among teachers impedes successful school-based CPD. Adam, talking about the effect of school-based CPD and the challenges to implementing the input, said:

"I don't want to blame anybody but that happens because of the higher-ups. Many of them, with different orders and usually without asking teachers. I'm not sulking, but it's the reality in education. Not just to me but, all new teachers... Some senior teachers don't like to listen to newer, younger teachers' ideas. Their acceptance isn't good, that's an obvious barrier, besides the input". (II, S1, Adam)

The importance of the coaching relationship between newer and more experienced teachers was of concern to the teachers.

Moreover, all respondents thought that school leaders have a very important role to ensure that the objectives of inclusive education are achieved, LADAP needs to be planned and implemented effectively and have a positive impact on teachers in terms of knowledge and skills of CPD and subsequently become quality teachers for all pupils.

"Headmasters should play their role. The important thing is that superiors must be active; proactive. God willing, those at a lower level will be smooth. No problem. That is the need of the organisation. Management: plan that is relevant to LADAP in achieving school goals". (II, S1, Tuah, Senior Assistant for Special Education)

In the extract above, Tuah thinks that enthusiastic, responsive, and dynamic leaders can inspire, motivate, and guide and lead teachers towards achieving the objectives they want to achieve.

DISCUSSION

Although there are various ways to conceptualise successful inclusive education, Schuelka (2018) argues that the 'Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education' issued by UNESCO (2017) is the clearest guide. Schuelka (2018, p. 4) summarises the main dimensions to create an inclusive education system into five main components: (1) inclusive policies that promote the success of all pupils; (2) a flexible and accommodating curriculum; (3) strong and supportive school leadership; (4) equitable distribution of resources; and (5) teachers who are trained in inclusive pedagogy and understand their role to guide diverse pupils in the classroom. Inclusive values are important (Ainscow, 2007; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Booth & Ainscow, 2002) and the understanding that inclusive education can be achieved through continuous efforts by all, starting at the school level.

The findings demonstrate teachers' preference for a change in leadership style. With a distant power culture and hierarchical practice, teachers felt undervalued. The themes, School-based CPD Expectation, Workplace Dynamic and Coaching Relationship, reflect three different dimensions of the teachers' response. Participants pointed to headteachers' and other administrators' roles and responsibilities to initiate effective school-based CPD. They express the need for a positive environment, support, coaching and mentoring to be more creative and effective for all pupils reflected in the Workplace Dynamic theme. Booth and Ainscow (2002), in the Index of Inclusion, emphasise the role of leadership styles in developing inclusive practice and culture. Also, the findings correlate to those scholars such as Penuel et al. (2007) and Bouwmans et al. (2017), who emphasise the significance of teachers' voices and participative decision-making. Additionally, Mohamed et al. (2018) assert that teachers have a high perception of their engagement in professional learning. This suggests that it is important for headteachers to inspire teachers to become excited about teaching, to discuss, plan and evaluate teaching together and to observe and learn from each other, as well as to share effective practices (Allison, 2014).

The world and subsequently educational systems are fundamentally changing. In the 21st century, the mix of local and global influences shapes the experiences of citizens in different places. Conflict and war, increasing inequality of wealth and income, identities and changing norms on society, changing of economic powers, living in a global society, mitigating environmental and ecological damage, migration, and mobility, void of vision and foresight, and technological disruption are interrelated but not hierarchical challenges for the 21st century (University of Lincoln, n.a.). Each work individually, and together they create an even more unstable and uncertain future. Technological, societal, and environmental shifts are reshaping how schools engage with pupils, stakeholders, and communities. To survive the face of increasing changes, schools need talent that matches the complexity of the world they operate in. To survive, schools need diversity, equity, and inclusion to unlock the power and potential of all talent. School leaders work with organisations to drive real change, building inclusive schools by design, not default. They transform the behaviour and mindset of teams, individuals, and leaders. They, then support them with fair and

equitable structures and processes, because the hard truth is that behavioural inclusion without structural inclusion will not change the status quo.

Leadership practices and organisational conditions are important in promoting inclusive education and preparation for sustainable change (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010) and this is reflected in Workplace Dynamics and Coaching Relationship. Leaders and teachers need to discuss, plan strategies, and learn from experience; this involves further development or improvement of existing practices for transformative CPD (Kennedy, 2005). It is important for headteachers to inspire teachers to become excited about teaching, to discuss, plan and evaluate teaching together, to observe and learn from each other, as well as to share effective practice (Allison, 2014). Studies that focus on competency-based education to improve professional competence, for example by Bouwmans et al. (2017) suggested that transformational leadership has a direct and indirect influence on teacher learning. Participatory decision-making (Bouwmans et al., 2017), where a culture of trust (Morgan, 2014) and workplace dynamics allow teachers to be creative is reflected in the Workplace Dynamic. Listening to the voice of teachers (Penuel et al., 2007) and pupils is an inclusive practice (Messiou, 2006); indication of good practice as a caring society (Warin, 2017) and an inclusive school (Slee, 2011). It also inspires all to make a commitment (Warin, 2017) to learn and reflect on the reality of school practices and map out strategies (Charlton, 2012) for developing inclusive teacher practices (Flutter, 2007) including all aspects of the Coaching Relationship. Intelligent accountability (O'Neill, 2013) must be ensured through control systems such as establishing time for learning, consistency, and clarity of roles within the overall strategy. To support policies for inclusive education, there should be no hierarchical relationships yet monitoring both policy implementation at various levels and policy integration.

However, strong support and collaboration among parents and teachers, school administration, government officials, and Teachers Union (Morgan, 2014), teachers, as well as resources (Ali et al., 2006; Bouillet, 2013; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Xu & Malinen, 2015) and instructional leadership (Mngo & Mngo, 2018) are important elements in gearing education system towards inclusive values, subsequently sustainable inclusive education. These require appropriate leadership to create the necessary conditions/situations - a professional school culture and school-wide leadership. The purpose is to help everyone, from all backgrounds, achieve their full potential, help the schools thrive, improve wider society, and bring people closer together within a Workplace Dynamic.

School leaders in Malaysia whilst expected to play instructional leader role, focus more on management issues (Ikram et al., 2021). Undeniably, the dynamic aspect of education, leading schools with various teachers and varied resources place a great challenge on school leaders. Nevertheless, rebuilding trust, motivating, and supporting teachers is imperative towards inclusive schools. Transformational leadership is vital in increasing the affective commitment among teachers (Veeriah et al., 2017). Supported teachers have positive attitudes and a high degree of readiness (Baharuldin et al., 2019), to empower themselves with various skills needed to enhance pupils' outcomes. Moreover, inclusive leaders are critical to success. Leaders unlock individual potential, enhance the collective power of teams, and support the school's ability to innovate and grow. In other words, leaders must be creative in planning strategies and act to change the feelings, attitudes, and motivations of teachers (and themselves) to change and become more inclusive in their practice.

CONCLUSION

To achieve an inclusive education system, education reform is needed. A variety of factors have been identified and emphasised in the literature and even mentioned in the Blueprint. The main significant factors include elements at the implementation level, namely teachers and school leaders. In this context, teachers as active agents need to constantly improve their professionalism. Indirectly, transformative school administration and leadership are critical. Positive and instructional leadership can provide a conducive environment to encourage the development of ideas, information sharing, expertise, and skills in a professional learning community to achieve the objective of inclusive practice to improve pupil outcomes. Professional learning community is a platform for teachers to collaborate and share best practices to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning, hence enhance pupils' achievement.

The global crisis due to the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic has not only impacted the economy but the education sector has also been affected. Pupil teaching and learning sessions are mostly conducted online. In-service training sessions and professional learning communities must fit the new practice norm. The MOE has developed a PLC Kit highlighting 13 strategies and collaborative tools, which helps teachers cultivate PLC activities to enhance teacher competence for pupils' outcomes (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019). The three concepts that focus on issues, improve strategies and share the best practices will guide the school leaders in planning and implementing the PLC activities. Teachers also need to have inclusive training and guidance to improve inclusive practices so that no pupils fall behind in learning and get quality education. School management and learning in the pandemic era obviously requires a radical transformation that requires the initiative and support of school leadership to ensure the quality of inclusive education.

The study was implemented to understand teachers' perspectives on inclusive education and the helpful school-based CPD in promoting inclusive education. It was found that teachers believe that school leadership and guidance are critical in supporting them to develop professionally and to be more inclusive of all. Given autonomy and accountability, school-based CPD could inspire teachers (and other school staff) to embrace inclusive education. Further potential research, prompted by this study, includes studies on collaboration and a team-driven culture in schools, not only among teachers but with other stakeholders such as parents, policy-makers, NGOs and even pupils that could be initiated to promote inclusive education. By considering their views, staff participation and support for the inclusion of diverse pupils would increase. This study was carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic. Research findings and teachers' opinions may differ during a pandemic. Therefore, to continue the supportive and effective CPD, other studies need to be carried out to review and examine teachers' opinions regarding the need for CPD. Moreover, this study is limited to national schools. It is acknowledged that more heterogenous participants (both mainstream and special education) would offer interesting, valuable data and a wider perspective.

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