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Between the lines: A critical realist discourse analysis of inclusive education policy  
development in Malaysia from 1996 to 2018

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## ABSTRACT

Enhancing access to equitable and quality education for children with special educational needs in Malaysia has been a vexing policy issue. Within these debates, its inclusive education policy has been nationally promoted as a solution to this equality crisis, but not without widespread critique. This thesis adds voice to this growing concern by arguing that the IE policymaking process in Malaysia is imbued by several contradictory considerations that are contingent upon the relationships between key policymakers and its local politics, culture, and the economy. Given the complex nature of IE policymaking, this research explores the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia over three reform periods from 1996 to 2018. Of particular interest, this study investigates how inclusive education is conceptualised, the key discourses and intertextual relations that governed its conceptualisation, and the extent to which contextual factors have influenced key policy actors' decisionmaking in the development of inclusive education policy over time in Malaysia.

The research hinges on a critical realist ontology and critical theory to provide critical explanations of the workings of invisible structures and power in influencing inclusive education policy development in Malaysia. It draws on critical realist discourse analysis through the pairing of the discourse-historical approach and the strategic-relational approach as both conceptual and analytical lenses. Within this theoretical and methodological framework, a historical case design is employed to explore the transnational and contextual reasons for why and how international standards of inclusive education travel across levels and evolve with the passage of time. Document analysis and semistructured interviews are employed to collect data. In total, five key inclusive education policy documents are analysed and interviews with six key policymakers are conducted.

The analyses of this study suggest that the conceptualisation of inclusive education experienced a subtle shift from an othering framework to selective inclusion. While more categories of disabilities are statutorily included in the inclusive education policy documents, access and opportunity to study in suitable schools for children with special educational needs continue to be determined based on their potential. Additionally, this

study indicates that this conceptualisation over time is considerably influenced by the medical, charity, lay, rights, and neoliberal discourses of inclusion. It found that such discourses have implicit and explicit intertextual relations to both local and international policy pronouncements. Furthermore, the study implied that the evolution of IE policy in Malaysia is influenced by the strategic decisions employed by powerful social actors to fulfil the wider as well as local cultural, political, and economic conditions. These conditions include the desire to achieve Western modernity, legitimating disabled bodies into a social order, and the reproduction of neoliberal-ableist ideologies triggered by the need to gain a developed nation status and climb the international academic ranking.

This research is of importance as little has been written about how inclusive education policy moves across levels from the global to the Malaysian context and across time. It holds a significant methodological implication, as it contributes to the establishment of critical realist discourse analysis as an effective analytical framework for research into inclusive education and policy analysis. It also offers a platform to advance recommendations for policy and practice for policymakers, academics, and stakeholders “on the ground” concerning the education of children identified as having disabilities or special educational needs in Malaysia.

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challenges encountered by both policymakers and children with disabilities in the development of inclusive education policy documents. Your tangible compassion for humanity inspired me to work dedicatedly towards the completion of this thesis, which could in some ways contribute to the creation of a more inclusive society.

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## GUIDE TO ACRONYMS

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CRPD	Conventions of the Rights of People with Disabilities
EFA	Education for All
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
IE	Inclusive Education
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MICs	Middle-Income Countries
MMoE	Malaysian Ministry of Education
NEP	National Education Philosophy
NDP	National Development Policy
NVP	National Vision Policy
NTP	National Transformation Policy
OKU	<i>Orang Kurang Upaya</i> (Persons with Disabilities)
PT3	<i>Penilaian Tingkatan 3</i> (Lower Secondary Assessment)
PWDs	People with Disabilities
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SPM	<i>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</i> (Malaysia Certificate of Examination)
SRA	Strategic-Relational Approach
STAM	<i>Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia</i> (Malaysia Higher Certificate for Religious Education)
STPM	<i>Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia</i> (Malaysia Higher School Certificate Examination)
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UPSR	<i>Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah</i> (Primary School Achievement Test)
USA	United States of America

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Can you get her to shut up? I am trying to get some sleep,” an able-bodied passenger on a flight from Melbourne to Kuala Lumpur requests. This is one of the many demands that my cousin has struggled with. My 11-year-old niece, Natasha, was formally diagnosed with autism when she was four. For Natasha, living in an able-bodied world means acquiring the ability to use nonaccessible bathrooms and standard public transportation, attend “normal” schools, communicate effectively, and live independently. Prior to her diagnosis, Natasha’s parents had never heard of autism. They thought that the humming and constant flicking of straws were cute character quirks and found them to be quite endearing. After learning that the quirks were self-stimulating autistic behaviours, they felt angry with Natasha. Often when I visited them, Natasha would ask me to spin a disc with my finger. My cousin would reprimand me and say, “Don’t encourage it. It will make her more autistic.” However, it was the messy divorce, a series of parental meltdowns, and Natasha’s twin brother, Max asking, “When is daddy coming back?” that broke my heart. A study conducted by Hartley et al. (2010) has suggested that there is a greater likelihood of marital divorce for parents of children with autistic spectrum disorder than for parents of children without disabilities. Would my cousin and her husband still be together if they had been more prepared, if they had known more about autism, and if there was more acceptance of this form of difference in society?

What is now understood as an able-bodied privilege (Castrodale, 2017) is the notion that nondisabled people know what is happening for people with disabilities better than people with disabilities themselves. This form of social privilege results in assumptions about who Natasha is, what she needs, and how she should behave that exclude her from the world of her peers. For example, she was labelled ‘unmanageable’ at a mainstream school for wandering off the school compound. She was then placed in a segregated special school, separated from her brother. With the assistance of legislation and disability rights policies, I thought there would be a place in society for Natasha. Yet, she is considered ‘troublesome’ for not being able to sit down obediently on flights. How can we find a way to challenge the existing social, cultural, and political context, so as to make inclusion a reality rather than a pipe dream for people with disabilities? What can Natasha teach nondisabled people about

how we as a society manage the fact of social difference? These questions have empowered me as a teacher and a family member of a young person with a significant disability with the hope of creating a better place for all children in our society.

In 2009, I joined the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MMoE) and for a decade, I taught English to students between 7 and 12 years of age in two rural mainstream primary schools in Sarawak, Malaysia. Having an area that is almost equal to that of Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak is located in the northwest of Borneo Island and is the largest among the 13 states in Malaysia. When the school I worked in started accepting students with special educational needs (SEN) based on the District Education Office's discretion or *budi bicara*<sup>1</sup>, I recognised some of the emotions, tensions, and dilemmas the school administrators, teachers, and parents were experiencing. They were similar to those experienced by Natasha's family. It was during this period that I first encountered the notion of inclusion when I met Albert (pseudonym). Albert was formally diagnosed with hydrocephalus, a form of cognitive impairment commonly associated with sensory difficulties which may affect learning and behaviour (Kahle et al., 2016). To protect the school's reputation, the school administrators had reservations about enrolling Albert, as he was perceived as a liability. Despite these, he was admitted. Upon enrolment, my school administrators had to keep up with competing demands of academic excellence and achieve an ideal inclusive setting set by the district, state and federal level mandates. This situation had, inadvertently, created an insurmountable amount of stress and pressure for us, teachers, to perform. For example, I observed how Albert has been unintentionally excluded and punished for not being 'participative' and 'cooperative' in classrooms. My experience with Natasha guided my decision to attend to Albert using a one-to-one approach, my purpose being to assist him academically as much as I could. I recognised at times that I had unwittingly made Albert 'invisible' during my lessons by focusing on children who seemed to have higher learning potentials, allowing his opportunity to learn slide by. I struggled with this guilt of not being

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<sup>1</sup> *Budi bicara* is a widely used term in *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malaysia's national language) to mean discretion. However, to accommodate to the culture and worldviews of the Malay community, *budi bicara* carries nuances of meanings as the term is extended to cover qualities such as "generosity, respect, sincerity, righteousness, consideration for others" as well as intellect and reason (Richardson et al., 2016, p. 79).

prepared to attend to different learning needs, as I was neither exposed to any inclusive pedagogy courses during my initial teacher education programme nor had I received any ongoing professional development training on learner diversity.

It was in 2019 that I felt an increased sense of unease when I participated in an international conference—Special Education International Conference—that was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In what follows I illustrate, through a short account, an area of tension that arises from a discussion during the conference on the different conceptualisations of inclusive education (IE). The conversation below is between two participants, a disability activist and an academician with experience working at the national level in advocating for IE. This dialogue has been reconstructed from my journal:

Disability activist: We can see that running three types of education systems is not economically sustainable for Malaysia. So, ultimately, running one system will save a lot of money. Not only that, labelling children and placing them in special schools are forms of exclusion.

Academician : But individual needs need to be recognised and identified so that support can be adequately provided.

Disability activist: I have to disagree because identifying disability has generated stigma, specifically in the Malaysian community. This means children with disabilities may not necessarily be welcomed and accepted in mainstream schools.

Although it is difficult to identify the influence of contextual struggles on educational inclusion within the Malaysian context in such a short example, the dialogue highlights a major disagreement. This was a heated exchange of opposing ideas about inclusion in education. Here, the disability activist and academician disagreed on a subtle, but distinct, difference in practice when it comes to supporting children with disabilities in schools. From this account, I learned that there are some seemingly unresolvable issues and difficulties in managing IE, which were highly debated at the conference, because participants came from diverse contexts with different understandings and experiences of inclusion.

My own family experiences, my dilemma in the classroom as a teacher, and gaining direct access to such debates in an international conference enabled me to challenge my thinking about IE policies and the inclusion of students with disabilities in Malaysia. Through this journey, I came to realise that IE policymaking can be subjected to multiple influences such as policymakers' conception of inclusion and a country's sociocultural, political, and economic milieus. These IE policies, in turn, are argued to play an important role in facilitating the acceptance and inclusion of individuals with disabilities within a classroom and in society in general (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] Malaysia, 2017, 2019). Working with Albert, I found it disheartening to see how often he was reduced to merely his disability. How could we change from "Do you mean Albert, that retarded boy?" to saying "Do you mean Albert, that helpful and cheerful boy?" I acknowledge that it is impossible to understand the entirety of inclusion and the disabled experience unless one has lived it. Yet, I want nondisabled people like me to recognise that when we speak about any form of disability, we are speaking from a place of great privilege. Nevertheless, I understand that nondisabled people's ideas about 'what inclusion is' and 'is not' will differ, depending on a wide variety of factors.

Against this backdrop, this thesis sets out to understand the factors that have influenced the ideation and development of IE policy in Malaysia over time. Before setting the scene, section 1.1 first lays out the researcher's positioning. Subsequently, the next part (section 1.2) presents a brief introduction to IE and how it manifests in Malaysia—a middle-income country. Within this context, the definition and justification for adopting the term 'middle-income country' in this thesis are provided. Sections 1.3 and 1.4 then elaborate on the reasons for analysing Malaysian IE policies and the research aim and questions respectively. Section 1.5 states the significance of this study, while section 1.6 concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters in this thesis.

### **1.1 Researcher's positioning**

This section reveals my positionality and approach as an abled-bodied researcher within the field of IE and disability. Such disclosure is important because it interrogates how my values, life experiences, and assumptions may influence this research. The discussion centres on

one of the areas of positionality outlined by Savin-Baden and Major (2013) in the way in which *I locate myself in relation to the research subject*. In particular, this section explores some of the unsettling tensions and dilemmas I encountered as an outsider researcher who lacks membership experiences and knowledge of the community that is directly impacted by the key IE policies under investigation in this thesis—that is, people with disabilities.

As a minority Malaysian Chinese, I often perceive and locate disability and inclusion issues through the prism of race. This perspective has its advantages and its pitfalls. To begin with, I understand what education marginalisation feels like in my country, Malaysia. Yet, this understanding is filtered through the lens of race, not disability. I have never individually experienced disability, and throughout this research endeavour, I often had moments where I was confronted by my own ableism. Yet, at some point or another, almost everyone is likely to experience some form of disability, either temporary or permanent. For example, in Titchkosky's (2003) book, she shares her experience of living with two disabilities, her own dyslexia and her partner, Rod Michalko's, blindness. Beyond her own disability, Titchkosky (2003) acknowledges that she is aware of the experiences that blind people go through. As such, she argues that perception of disability experience and disabled identity can be relational (Titchkosky, 2003). Growing up with a family member with autism, I am acutely aware of the experiences my niece and I have observed and felt in a nondisabled or temporarily-abled society. On a broader spectrum, I too recognise my own privilege and abled position in this research. In positioning myself in this research, I identify as temporarily-abled. On the one hand, this stance acknowledges my own entanglements in disability and the possibility that disability may enter my own bodily condition. On the other hand, I realise that the term 'temporarily-abled' can be problematic, as I may never be recognised as being disabled. Nonetheless, I have decided to foreground this possibility to disrupt any perception that being abled is a certain and fixed condition.

I have suggested employing the use of critical realist discourse analysis for this research, which I will elaborate on later in my thesis. Briefly, one of the salient features of this form of analysis is that the researcher comes with histories, experiences, values, and purposes of their own when examining elements of biasness in policy texts. Therefore, it is argued that

critical realist discourse analysis can potentially shed light on obscured and undetected structural mechanisms of power inscribed in policy discourse (van Dijk, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). As Wetherell et al. (2001) aptly put it, critical discourse analysts are encouraged to

take an explicit socio-political stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large. Although not in each stage of theory formation and analysis, their work is admittedly and ultimately political. (p. 383)

Given that critical realist discourse analysis can be a politically contentious activity, I have ensured that my analytical perspective, if possible, is that of those who suffer most from dominance and inequality. While I may understand a certain degree of oppression based upon my identity as a temporarily-abled Malaysian Chinese, this understanding has raised certain questions and tensions in the way I analyse and interpret data on disability issues. For example, while my research works to provide critical explanations of the workings of invisible structures and power in influencing IE policy development in Malaysia, as a nondisabled outsider I can never truly ascertain what education oppression looks like (Castrodale, 2017). The absence of the necessary insider knowledge, in turn, makes it more challenging to offer counternarratives that challenge the ways people with disabilities are often pathologised, labelled, and treated through biomedical understandings of disability in IE policies (Kitchin, 2000). For this reason, there is a likelihood for my research to unintentionally (re)produce marginalisation, exclusion, and discrimination, as issues of disability-related education policy discourses are identified, constructed, and addressed from an able-bodied perspective (Barnes, 2012; Chin et al., 2022; Goodley, 2013).

Alongside the possibility of (re)producing ableist assumptions, a further source of tension in navigating the complex terrain of critical disability studies is that the act of speaking for others can be problematic and unethical (Alcoff, 2009). Alcoff argues that the practice of “speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (p. 7). As such, I recognise that in the critical analysis of IE policy discourse I may also be displaying a form of symbolic oppression. In this way, I may be engaging in the act of misrepresenting people with

disabilities' needs, goals, circumstances, and thus, their identity. Acknowledging that it may not be possible for me to speak for others raises another question that Alcoff (2009) encourages researchers to ask themselves: "if I don't speak for those less privileged than myself, am I abandoning my political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of my privilege?" (p. 119). To negotiate this dilemma of being an outsider, I fall back on the words of Spivak (1990) who argues that "Who should speak?" is less crucial than "Who will listen?" (p. 59). Within this perspective, I ask myself two questions: "Will national policymakers listen to what has been analysed and found?" and importantly, and "Will the practice of representing and speaking for others through my research enable the empowerment of people with disabilities?" It is intended that by responding "I hope so" to these concerns that this research could serve as a way to somewhat resolve these disconcerting tensions around conducting disability and IE research as an outsider.

## **1.2 Setting the scene: A brief introduction to IE and Malaysia**

Increasing emphasis on enhancing access to equitable and quality education has seen growing interest in IE worldwide (Ainscow et al., 2006; Shevlin, 2019; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). Despite this widespread interest, Shevlin (2019) notes that the term IE is difficult to define and is underpinned by a diverse ideological *mélange* as a result of its historical complexities. Before the 1990s, the term 'inclusion' in education was once associated with 'mainstreaming' and 'integration' to describe the movement of children with various kinds of disabilities from homes or from special schools into regular schools (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). While access was provided to participate in the classroom, these children were often excluded from the learning process and therefore often either had to adapt to the school's values, environment, rules, curriculum, and teaching methods—or fail (Ainscow et al., 2006). Consequently, the term 'inclusive education' was adopted and particularly enshrined in the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on SEN to ensure that the needs of learners with disabilities were recognised and responded to appropriately and adequately by the education system (UNESCO, 1994). Over time, a redefinition occurred to shift IE from its focus on disabilities and the subsequent broadening of its definition to cover all barriers to

education such as gender, language, geographical location, and many others (Shaeffer, 2019). Yet several studies have contended that it is still difficult to arrive at a generally accepted definition for IE because the concept of inclusion might be context-dependent (Kamenopoulou, 2018a; Shevlin, 2019). Although it is acknowledged in this thesis that the current term of IE tends to be understood in a wider project in which there are social, economic, political, and pedagogical implications for all children, the main focus of IE in this present research context, Malaysia, has been on children with disabilities. Therefore, the term IE in this thesis is used to mean the rights of children identified as having disabilities or SEN to equitable and quality education.

Malaysia's complex historical conditions and diverse sociocultural background provide a fascinating context to examine the development of IE policy. Located in Southeast Asia, Malaysia (then Malaya) was first colonised by the Portuguese (1511–1641), followed by the Dutch (1641–1824) and the British (1824–1942; 1945–1957). In 1957, the country declared its independence from the British and is currently a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Due to a long history of colonisation under the British, Malaysia inherited a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy and a well-established federal structure (Sheridan & Groves, 1987). Today, Malaysia is made up of two main regions, namely Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, which are separated by the South China Sea. It consists of 13 states and three federal territories with Kuala Lumpur being the nation's capital. Bordered by Thailand, Brunei, and Indonesia, Malaysia has a total area of 329,613 square kilometres and an estimated population of about 32.6 million people. It is a multiethnic society, comprising 69.3% *Bumiputera* (Malays and other indigenous groups), 22.8% Chinese, 6.9 % Indians, and 1.0% other ethnicities (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019). Bahasa Malaysia is the country's national language, followed by other languages such as Chinese (Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese), Tamil, Iban, Dusun, and several indigenous languages. English is widely spoken and used as a second language. Although Islam is the official religion in Malaysia, other religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism are practised in peace and harmony (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019).

Within its social and cultural settings, a UNICEF Malaysia (2017) report indicates that

Malaysia's previous national IE policies (i.e., the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations) did not sit well with the disabled community to which they are applied. This lack of sensitivity can be observed in the policy discourse around disability where the most commonly used term for people with disabilities in the initial conception of the IE policy is *cacat*<sup>2</sup>, a derogatory Malay term to mean handicapped or defect (UNICEF Malaysia, 2017). The report's quantitative data suggest that such persisting stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities might have seeped into its subsequent IE policy documents (i.e., the Education [Amended] Act 1996, the 2013 Special Education Regulations and the 2018 Zero Reject policy). For example, although the majority of people (77%) acknowledge that causes of disabilities are attributed to congenital and genetic factors or effects of accidents or disease, a large minority (16%) believe that disability is linked to the will of God, parents' fault, or fate/karma (UNICEF Malaysia, 2017). These beliefs may have resulted in the exclusion and continuous segregation of certain groups of children with disabilities in mainstream education settings. This segregation could likely be embedded in certain cultural contexts that perceive disability as a state of abnormality and a form of weakness (Amar-Singh et al., 2018; UNICEF Malaysia, 2017). Further evidence indicates that such histories and cultural beliefs about disabilities are compounded by the country's economic and political disadvantages as a middle-income country (MIC) (UNICEF Malaysia, 2019). Chapter 2 will further unpack the specific complexities inherent in the Malaysian context and within its education system in greater depth. Before justifying the importance of examining the development of IE policy in an MIC like Malaysia in the next section, it is essential to draw attention to the intentional decision to use the term MIC in this study.

The World Bank (2019) defines MICs through estimates of gross national income (GNI) per capita, with lower middle income being gross national income (GNI) per capita of US\$1,026-US\$3,995 and upper middle income being GNI per capita of US\$3,996-US\$12,275. In the

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<sup>2</sup> *Cacat* is a *Bahasa Malaysia* term which is taken generally to refer to physical disability such as being 'crippled' or 'handicapped' and mental disability that is typically associated with 'insanity' and being 'spastic'. This term is used in the 1996 Education Act and the 1997 Special Education Regulations prior to the introduction of a new *Bahasa Malaysia* term *orang kurang upaya* to convey 'people with disabilities' in 2001 (Norazit, 2010).

case of this study, Malaysia stands as an MIC with a GNI per capita of US\$10,209, as of the year 2020. Grech (2015) aptly describes MICs as a “complex and hybrid space” because nations within this bloc are layered by political and economic inequalities globally and nationally on top of their local cultural and social specificities (p. 11). Although the terms ‘global North’ and ‘global South’ are widely used in IE literature (Grech & Soldatic, 2015; Kamenopoulou, 2018b), these terms are problematic because they imply that geographic locations define the GNI of a country (Dodds, 2008). Given that southern hemisphere countries such as Australia and New Zealand resemble ‘Northern’ characteristics, and that those such as Uzbekistan and Mongolia in the northern hemisphere display ‘Southern’ characteristics, the use of such categorisations does not adequately represent the middle-income status of a country such as Malaysia. Along the same lines, alternative terms like ‘developing country’ or ‘developing world’ have been heavily criticised (Escobar, 2012). The problem with such alternatives is that there are underlying assumptions that developing countries at the bottom end of a development continuum should follow a similar path and progress forged by ‘developed’ nations, thus resulting in the failure to recognise internal diversity within countries. It is for this reason that the term MIC has been used in this thesis to capture and reinforce the scale of potential educational inequality in monetary terms, rather than in terms of a geographical location or a position on a subjectively measured development continuum.

### **1.3 Introducing the case: Why Malaysian IE policy analysis?**

Whilst IE policyscapes embody a range of agendas, actors, and interests, an MIC setting like Malaysia presents a particular breadth (Kalyanpur, 2014; Kamenopoulou, 2018a; McDonald & Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014). To argue the importance of examining the Malaysian IE policy, it makes sense to begin by considering the complex terrain of IE policymaking in the MIC context from the outset of this thesis.

Malaysia is an interesting case study because it represents a complicated sociopolitical environment with a fairly recent history of IE policymaking. It is also an MIC that assimilates IE policies from other, frequently high-income and dominating contexts to a large degree. Such practice is characterised by activities of ‘policy borrowing’, usually culminating in IE

policies being uncritically introduced in the policy context without taking into account the local peculiarities (Kamenopoulou, 2020; Portnoi, 2016). Additionally, inherent tensions and struggles in IE are also 'borrowed' when education policies are uncritically 'imported' and assimilated within an entirely unprepared historical context with a rushed educational policymaking tradition (Chong, 2016; Liasidou, 2017). It is necessary to point out that policy borrowing is not unique to the Malaysian context. Levin (1998) describes this process as an international trend and refers to it as a 'policy epidemic'. From this perspective, Levin (1998) argues that global education policies tend to be transmitted either in unregulated ways or by organised networks of dissemination. This epidemic of education policy can be observed when local policymakers conveniently replicate common educational methods and procedures without reflecting on the lessons learnt and their plausible ramifications, something which could further compound the issues of policy borrowing.

Nevertheless, IE policy borrowing does not necessarily result in policy homogeneity between various MICs. International IE policy borrowing is likely attributed to underlying political impulses (Portnoi, 2016). Politically motivated policy borrowing may then result in perceived assumptions among national policy actors about the need to enact educational changes to respond to the rights to education of children with disabilities (Liasidou, 2012). In the same way, Dale (1999) extends this perspective by addressing the overarching influence of globalisation on national policymaking decisions. When a country is in search of an education policy that is benchmarked against other global and international standards, it is evident, according to Dale (1999), that "the effects of globalisation are mediated in both directions and complex ways by existing national patterns and structures" (p. 3). The IE policy discourse is thus understandably infiltrated and reshaped according to the agendas, interests, values, and beliefs of the national policy actors and according to the local historical, economic, sociocultural, and political exigencies. In other words, the dialectic process at work between national actors and contexts of policy borrowing has possibly resulted in IE policies' being "modified, and in some cases, transformed" (Arnove, 2003, p. 3). Educational policy analysis therefore can trace how international discourse of IE has been translated and recontextualised through policy borrowing within the Malaysian context and how it is implicated within the local policymaking agenda.

In research areas related to policy analysis scholarship, Bowe et al. (1992) suggest that considerations should be given to two contexts of policy, namely the 'context of influence' and the 'context of policy text production'. They define the context of influence in terms of where the intended policy is developed and implemented. In this context, key concepts are formulated and established to "acquire currency and credence and provide a discourse and lexicon for policy initiation" (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 20). It is at this stage some policy discourses that are also adopted by what is happening nationally and internationally are articulated and legitimised by powerful actors operating within the governmental terrain. While the context of text production might be assumed to be the direct result of the context of influence, this is often not the case. As Levin (1998) argues, "most peoples' and all political systems' belief systems embody a range of ideas, all firmly held, but only some of which will be acted upon depending on circumstances" (p. 134). For this reason, these two contexts are contended to have an "uneasy relationship" (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 20). As different ideological beliefs are merged into a formal policy, this relationship would likely have resulted in contradictions and inconsistencies inscribed in policy texts.

In this sense, the context of text production can be characterised as an ensemble of divergent agendas, values, positionalities, and power relations. Within this context, educational policies, which are imbued by certain principles, are responsible for steering the educational system for a period of time before policy change occurs. This change of policy takes place when sociocultural, economic, and political agendas within the policymaking process ascend. The emergence of these agendas is the product of political demands partly stemming from dominant international imperatives that call for the evaluation and change of the existing state of affairs. Therefore, Foucault (1980) argues that the nature of policy reformation can, by no means, be viewed as a result of historical development alone. Rather, it can also be described as a site of struggle between "opposing forces in the quest for control and domination" (Marshall, 1990, p. 19). In this thesis, consideration is therefore given to the fluidity of the role that culture, economics, politics, and key actors play in the IE policy formation processes within the Malaysian landscape.

The complex processes inherent in policymaking illustrate that the (re)production of policy discourses is not only affected by key policy actors, but also through the structural

conditions in which policy actors are situated (Ball, 1994). In this context, policy analysis involves an in-depth investigation of how power circulates and is embedded in agency and structure that promote, sustain or transform certain discourses within an institution. As Ozga (2000) contends,

The broad definition (of educational policy analysis) requires that we understand it in its political, social and economic contexts, so that they also require study because of the ways in which they shape education policy... One way of approaching this is to look at the history of education policymaking and its accompanying narrative of explanation of education policy that is provided by policy research. (p. 114)

Ultimately, it is through institutional structures that the powerful actors can enact their form of agency, and exert in unobtrusive ways their discourse, to establish certain policies. Thus, it is crucial to examine the interactive relationship between agency and structure, namely the interaction of ideologies, interests, and historical conjunctures with political, economic, and cultural structures within the context of IE policymaking. Based on this premise, the current research attempts to investigate the relationship between structural and agential dynamics that have influenced Malaysia's IE policies since their official inception in 1996. In particular, this thesis employs a historical case study to examine the cultural, economic, and political structures entrenched in educational inclusion changes in Malaysia and the ensuing struggles that are implicated within the cycles of policymaking. The aim of this research will be to explicate the different discourses that coexist and shape the discursive policy mosaic of Malaysia's IE policymaking over time from 1996 to 2018.

To examine the shaping and reshaping of IE policy in Malaysia, it is important to begin by first examining the micro-technological power of language and then by investigating the wider discourses and intertextual relations inscribed within policy documents that serve as impediments to educational change. Within this layered analysis, it is also necessary to consider the parameters surrounding the nature of policymaking, namely the historical, political, economic, and cultural influences embedded in these processes. This layered analysis can be achieved with the use of a critical realist discourse analysis framework which

combines the use of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) and the strategic-relational approach (SRA) as analytic frameworks (Jessop, 2005). In this way, this conceptual and analytical framework enables the researcher to adopt both historical and sociological perspectives to identify the political, economic, and cultural factors, as well as the inherent power relations which have had a significant influence on consecutive IE policies. The focus is to establish and examine how local, and potentially transnational, contextual circumstances have infiltrated each time phase, thus illuminating the context of IE policy text production and the subsequent IE policymaking practices. This study does so by investigating the gradual turning away from the segregation policies dating from 1996 (i.e., Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations) to the integrative policies of 2013 (i.e., the Education [Amendment] Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations). Emphasis is also given to critically examining the current policy context since 2018 (i.e., the 2018 Zero Reject policy) whereby Malaysia is experiencing a change towards a more inclusive educational system.

#### **1.4 Research aim and questions**

This thesis aims to examine historically the invisible structures that influence the development of IE policy in Malaysia. The research seeks to achieve this aim by considering the following overarching research question:

- What are the factors that have shaped the Malaysian inclusive education policy over time from 1996 to 2018?

The answer to this overarching question will be found through the investigation of sub questions formulated on the basis of Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) DHA's three levels of analysis. Chapter 3 justifies the use of Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) DHA and explains how each of these questions informs the layered analysis of the policy under investigation. These questions are as follows:

1. How has inclusive education been conceptualised in policy documents over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia?

2. How have the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships governed the conceptualisation of inclusive education in policy documents over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia?
3. To what extent have the economic, political, and cultural factors influenced key policy actors' decisionmaking in the development of IE policy over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia?

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

Given Malaysia's layered historical, political, economic, and cultural composition, previous studies in Malaysia have not given much consideration to how international IE agendas are translated at the national level (Khairuddin & Miles, 2020). Relatedly, while the introduction of the new Malaysian IE policy—the 2018 Zero Reject policy—signals a historical shift towards a more inclusive educational environment, little focus has been directed to tracing the policy shifts in the conceptualisation of IE in this country (Chin, 2020). Therefore, this research seeks to respond to these gaps by engaging in a critical examination of the invisible structures that influence the development of IE policy in Malaysia from 1996 to 2018. In doing so, it is anticipated that the study will generate a greater understanding of the conceptualisation of IE, the wider discourses and intertextual references used, and the relationships of structural and agential forces that influence its development over time in Malaysia. This scholarship is intended to bring new insight to the field of IE and to make a unique contribution to the body of knowledge by examining Malaysia's education policy within this context.

In terms of theoretical and methodological contributions, the use of critical realist discourse analysis that fuses Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) DHA and Jessop's (2005) SRA as a means to examine policy will be of great interest to academics and critical policy analysts alike and raises important questions such as:

- Is this framework a seamless fusion for the task of revealing and commenting on the social and material tensions the term inclusion raises?
- Will the use of this framework enable other local and international researchers to work towards an in-depth understanding of how the power of language, socio

cultural, economic, and political elements in the field of IE operate to either include or exclude those who are seen as 'different-to-normal'?

In this way, it is envisioned that this study will be able to contribute to the establishment and extension of arguments related to the aforementioned conceptual and analytical framework for undertaking education policy analysis in similar contextual settings.

Finally, this study is intended to bring a critical voice to policy assumptions that have governed the development of an inclusive and equitable education system in Malaysia. In so doing, it is believed that this research will expose the pervasiveness of power enshrined in the interplay between agency and structure through which IE policymaking is contextualised and contested. By examining the production of dominant discourses within policy texts in this way, the findings of this thesis are considered to be of interest to policymakers in Malaysia as well as other low- and middle-income countries which attempt to undertake inclusion in education to ensure education for all is meant for all. More fundamentally, by engaging in a debate about educational inequalities reproduced through policies, it is envisaged that insight from this research will put forward some recommendations for policy and practice that may contribute to the improved quality and lives of all children in Malaysia. As discussed in chapter 9, these recommendations concern various key stakeholders including researchers, policymakers, schools, and teachers. This critical engagement with the key IE policy in Malaysia, in turn, is intended to help inform future IE policymaking decisions.

## **1.6 Overview of chapters**

Following this introduction to this thesis, chapter 2 establishes a literary foundation for this research by introducing the notion of educational inclusion and examining how this concept has different understandings and manifestations in various contexts. With this broader theoretical understanding, the focus of chapter 2 then shifts to exploring the MICs and Malaysian contexts, as well as examining how political, economic, and sociocultural agendas of a state influence the IE policymaking processes.

Chapter 3 lays the ontological and epistemological foundation for this study by arguing that

critical realism and critical theory help shed light on the nature of social reality and the ways of learning about social reality. Thus, this chapter rejects the notion of neutrality in policy discourse and attempts to argue that cultural, political, and economic structures in the Malaysian context influence how IE policy is conceptualised and conceived. Chapter 3 then justifies the use of critical realist discourse analysis through the pairing of Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) DHA and Jessop's (2005) SRA as a conceptual and methodological framework to guide the analysis of data in this study. This chapter begins by introducing Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) DHA and argues that it provides appropriate tools to delve into the linguistic micro-technologies of power that are entrenched within the policy texts. Finally, Jessop's (2005) strategic-relational approach is explored to demonstrate how an investigation of the interplay between structure and agency can be used within the DHA to examine the development of IE policy through a critical realist lens. Following the introduction of the conceptual and analytical framework this study hinges on, chapter 4 outlines the historical case study methodology. Document analysis and online semistructured interviews are explained and justified as the methods that guided the collection and analysis of data in this research.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 draw on critical realist discourse analysis to facilitate the analysis of the development of the key IE policy documents in Malaysia at three distinctive levels. Each chapter focuses on different levels of analysis with a diachronic relevance (across time) to report on the findings of the analysis. Chapter 5 begins with a textual analysis where the discursive strategies are examined. Using the textual analysis of the discourse-historical approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009), it examines how IE is conceptualised discursively following the strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification or mitigation. It demonstrates how policymakers strategically utilised language to establish the legitimacy of certain IE practices within the policy documents of interest. Chapter 6 examines the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between the key IE policy documents of interest and other texts and discourses from different levels (i.e., international, local). This chapter reveals that the notion of IE in Malaysia is conceptualised by the fluid interplays of the medical, lay, charity, neoliberal, and rights discourses that display struggles, amalgamations, and competition with each other. The chapter additionally shows that these discourses have direct and indirect intertextual relations with

varied local and international official documents related to the provision of IE. The understandings gained from chapters 5 and 6 provide a gateway to examine the extra-discursive variables at the third level of analysis. Chapter 7 builds on the findings of the previous chapters (i.e., chapter 5's textual analysis and chapter 6's interdiscursive and intertextual analyses) to explore the extra-discursive variables within the third level of analysis. This chapter investigates how contextual structures influence policymakers' decisionmaking in the formative processes of IE policy document creation. It also shows how key policymakers employ strategies in response to their local historical, economic, political, and social-cultural contexts.

Following the third level of analysis, chapter 8 draws together the key findings to discuss the factors that have influenced the development of the Malaysian IE policy from 1996 to 2018. This chapter puts forward the argument that the development of IE policy in Malaysia was shaped over time by colonial histories and the geopolitical positioning of high-income nations and global development institutions. It argues that the bureaucratic approach to IE in policy documents has also been utilised to control and regulate the disabled population. It further demonstrates how the rise of neoliberalism and neocolonialism have continually aided the subtle policy shifts in the conceptualisation of IE away from othering to selective inclusion. Chapter 9 concludes this thesis by proposing recommendations for policy and practice, presenting research limitations, and exploring possible directions for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Providing access to IE in MICs has been both debated and advocated by political, educational, and economic stakeholders (Braslavsky, 2005; Schleicher, 2009; UNESCO, 2005b, 2014, 2020). Claimed as a hallmark of educational inclusion, the concept of Education for All (EFA) has been advocated as a fix for widespread educational inequalities (Mukhopadhyay, 2015; Walton, 2018). Yet sitting beneath the surface of this ambitious aim rest narratives of assumption, which critics argue conceal notions of power and control that hide underlying neoliberal and neocolonial agendas (Grech & Soldatic, 2015; Kamenopoulou, 2018b; Walton, 2018). This chapter begins with a discussion on the historical development of inclusion and IE. It then focuses on the dimensions of policy borrowing and establishes how policy borrowing has restructured the views and approaches to IE in different parts of the world. Attention is drawn to the complexities of IE policymaking in MICs before zeroing in on the complex sociocultural, economic, and political conditions of the Malaysian context. The discussion finally draws attention to the limited research that has critically explored IE policy development in the MIC context and concludes by arguing that there is a pressing need to critically understand how and why IE policy is borrowed and has developed in Malaysia.

### **2.1 The quest for inclusion**

IE has gained prominence through national education systems worldwide in the past decade as an internationally mandated policy phenomenon (Liasidou, 2012, 2017; Thomas & Vaughan, 2004). In order to understand how the concept of educational inclusion has evolved, this section draws attention to the historical perspectives informing the development of inclusion.

The period of institutionalisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe witnessed the removal of persons with disabilities (PWDs) from participating in society (Sharma & Mahapatra, 2007). Within this period, PWDs were viewed as a social menace (Shevlin, 2019) or as Kisanji (1999) puts it “contaminat[ing] an otherwise pure human species” (p. 4). In many cases, people with disabilities were reported to be killed and used as objects of entertainment (Sharma & Mahapatra, 2007). As such, it has been argued

that society needed to be safeguarded from PWDs and vice versa, as the latter needed to be protected from society. It is for this reason that Western philanthropists found it imperative that some PWDs, in particular persons with physical and intellectual impairments, should be given custodial care through placement and treatment in asylums and hospitals (Bender, 1970). However, these actions were seen by political activists and disability champions as violating the human rights of those who were placed in these segregated settings (Banks et al., 2018; Kisanji, 1999). It was not until the early 1950s in Northern Europe that deinstitutionalisation and the return of PWDs to the community were encouraged through the concept of normalisation, a term that originated in Scandinavian countries (Bank-Mikkelsen, 1980). Normalisation is defined as “making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream of society” (Nirje, 1969, p. 181). Subsequently, after a series of movements, government reports and research, the efficacy of practices of institutionalisation was questioned (Biklen, 2004). In Norway, for example, a public committee from the Ministry of Education and Research employed a living conditions perspective and concluded that the conditions of such institutions were “humanly, culturally and socially unacceptable” (Norwegian Public Committee Reports, 1985, no. 34, p. 12). Later public Norwegian policy documents emphasised similar arguments such as the goal of full deinstitutionalisation to give “living conditions in keeping with what one expects for all citizens” (Melding, 1989, p. 4). Subsequently, the ‘normalisation’ principle underpinnings of the return to community movement were echoed in the 1971 UN Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons and the 1975 Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons to integrate PWDs in terms of education, economy, health, and the social life of mainstream society (Wiesel & Bigby, 2015).

Like normalisation, the concept of special schools emerged in a similar era. There students with disabilities were placed in segregated educational settings to receive special education (Kisanji, 1999, p. 2). According to Shevlin (2019), the philosophy and principles of the European Enlightenment encouraged the development of special education for PWDs in the middle of the eighteenth century. The humanitarian philosophy of the European Enlightenment was shaped by beliefs in the equality of all persons and the human

responsibility to care for others within society. As a result, innovative pedagogies for deaf, blind, and intellectually disabled people were developed; these initiatives first appeared in France, then spread across continental Europe, the United Kingdom, and North America. Despite national variances, special educational initiatives tended to follow a similar pattern. Educational interventions include consulting medical professionals to draw up a list of medical problems encompassing particular bodily or psychological issues that prevented children from attending mainstream schools (Tomlinson, 1985). Encompassed in the medical categories are various scientific definitions, types, and degrees of defects and abnormalities. As a result of this chain of events, special education teachers were trained and accommodations were made for children with disabilities. To accommodate the educational needs of PWDs, pioneering educators devised a range of strategies, including sign language for the deaf, a raised print approach for the blind, and an appropriate pedagogy for those with intellectual disabilities (Kisanji, 1999; Shevlin, 2019).

As deinstitutionalisation became a reality, children with disabilities who would have entered institutions stayed in their community and entered an expanding special school system (Kisanji, 1999; Sharma & Mahapatra, 2007; Shevlin, 2009). While this initiative initially enabled schooling to occur for students with disabilities, special schools are considered to be problematic on several levels. It has been argued that they encourage the idea of a deficit model of disability, the labelling of young people, academic exclusion from their mainstream schools, and mainstream school teachers relinquishing teaching responsibilities for students with disabilities (Ainscow, 1991; Jenkinson, 1997; Sebba et al., 1993). Discourses that circulate around a special education system concerning disabilities, diagnosis, assessments, and interventions tend to be deeply rooted in the medical model, lay, and charity discourses (Fulcher, 1989).

As a brief background, the starting point in a medical discourse on disability is a clinical gaze on the physical body, and thus the individual (Fulcher, 1989), which looks at the biological realities of disabilities through a scientific lens (Albrecht et al., 2001). This model places a strong focus on “preventing” and “treating” the functional limitations that come with a disability, whether mental or physical (Chong, 2016, p. 605). Another discourse that shares a similar feature of the medical discourse is the lay perceptions of disability. Such perceptions

are generally impacted by fear and prejudice towards people with disabilities (Fulcher, 1989). In particular, the lay discourse typically portrayed individuals with disabilities as inferior, reliant, weak, secluded, and marginalised. A final discourse that is said to sit well with the lay and medical discourse is the charity discourse. The charity ethic is usually part of the discourse deployed in government institutions which tended to organise services outside the limited provision of what the educational system offers (Islam, 2015). People with disabilities are seen as in need of help (Llewellyn, 1983), as an object of pity (Borsay, 1986), and as personally tragic (Oliver, 1986) and therefore in need of charity and hand-outs. As such, this approach tends to treat them as dependents who are always in need of assistance, which society will provide as and when it sees fit. Collectively, these dominant discourses work often in unison to inform the principles of special education.

Within a special education arrangement, children with disabilities are classified and categorised into disability categories and functional stages using specific screening assessments and guidelines to facilitate appropriate intervention processes. As a result, children are more likely to be routinely characterised by their impairments as opposed to their potential (Len Barton, 1997; Corbett, 1996). In countries like the United States of America (USA) and certain parts of Europe like Germany and the Netherlands, the continuation of segregated education settings invited protests from activists and parents of children with disabilities for children to be included in regular classrooms (Dyson & Forlin, 1999). It is anticipated that by including children with disabilities in the mainstream education system, this group of children might benefit from the same educational model as their typically developing peers (Walton, 2018).

Unlike the medical, lay, and charitable models, the social model gained traction in the late 1960s as recognition of the unequal division and marginalisation of PWDs in society arose (Fulcher, 1989). The political philosophy of the disability movement, which aimed to change the oppressive and disabling culture in favour of inclusion, has had an impact on the social model of disability (Barnes, 2012). This movement initiated extensive political advocacy activities focused on the rights agenda and called for an understanding that environmental factors have increasingly reduced the capabilities and life opportunities of PWDs (Hodkinson, 2015). The disability rights movements in the USA and the United Kingdom (UK)

in particular marked the beginning of the shift towards dismantling segregated schools and advocating for continuum of services as a reasonable arrangement. Through the introduction of policies such as 1975 Public Law 94-142 or the Education of the Handicapped Act enacted in the USA and the 1978 Warnock Report in the UK, children with disabilities were able to be 'integrated' or 'mainstreamed' into their local schools (Biklen, 2004). The rationale was to ensure that students with disabilities could participate fully in either special schools or the mainstream educational system (Shevlin, 2019). While many reports highlight the positive effects of integration practices (Juvonen & Bear, 1992; Kalambouka et al., 2007; Shevlin & O'Moore, 2000), some studies have revealed a shift from segregation between schools to segregation within schools (Hagarty, 1993). This within-school segregation tends to be seen as the placement of students with disabilities in special classrooms within mainstream schools without sufficient support, thus making it a largely unsuccessful process (Shevlin, 2019). Due to the inadequacies of integration, inclusion is seen as a new paradigm to address how children with disabilities can be fully included in mainstream settings (Hegarty, 1993). The next two sections address this concept in more detail.

## **2.2 Diverse conceptualisations of IE**

Given the centrality of IE to this study, this section focuses on some of the theoretical debates and policy interpretations of IE and examines their influence on the approaches to IE. It is said that the term inclusion was introduced in the educational contexts of Toronto, Canada in 1988 to replace the terms mainstreaming and integration (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004). Since then, a variety of views of this term emerged throughout the 1990s and 2000s, each taking a slightly different emphasis (Florian, 2014). Currently, there is no clear and/or universally accepted definition of IE, which signals the complexities and multiple facets embodied in the current usage of the term (Shevlin, 2019). Mitchell (2005) attributes the debates surrounding the term to the understandings of inclusion to be continually being juxtaposed, contested, and reshaped in key international documents and perspectives. These different conceptualisations are summarised in Table 2.1 and discussed below.

**Table 2.1** *Different Conceptualisations of IE*

No	Definitions	Key Documents / Perspectives
1	“Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.”	Education for All Declaration (UNESCO, 1990, Article 1, p. 7)
2	“...inclusion is about the quality of a child’s experience and providing access to the high-quality education which enables them to progress with their learning and participate fully in the activities of their school and community.”	Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (UK), (2001, Sec. 28, p. 14)
3	“1. All children have the right to learn and play together; 2. Children should not be devalued or discriminated against by being excluded or sent away because of their disability or learning difficulty; There are no legitimate reasons to separate children for the duration of their schooling.”	Centre of Studies on Inclusive Education (2002, p. 1)
4	“...entails a transformation in culture, policy, and practice in all educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements...together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility”	Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN, 2006, Article 24, para. 11, p. 4)
5	“Inclusive practice requires significant changes to be made to the content, delivery, and organisation of mainstream programmes and is a whole school endeavour which aims to accommodate the learning needs of all students.”	Ainscow, Booth & Dyson (UK), (2006, p. 2)
6	“IE is...that includes the celebration and valuing of difference and diversity.”	Hornby (New Zealand), (2015, p. 235)
7	“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals 4 (UN, 2015, p. 21)

Within the literature referred to in Table 2.1, the field of IE has been dominated by different theoretical camps holding differing views of IE. Significant conventions and documents such as the Jomtien Conference on EFA (UNESCO, 1990) and the Centre for Studies on IE (2002) for example define IE from a rights-based perspective to ensure physical placement and participation of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. While Jarvis (2002) and Greenstein (2014) find that initial effort to physically include children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and/or separate classrooms in regular schools can be viewed as promoting inclusion, these children are unable to meet the intended learning outcomes. Critics point out that these two cases demonstrate that children's participation and engagement in lessons and school activities are not necessarily guaranteed by simply attending mainstream schools (Ainscow et al., 2006; Salend, 2015).

At a later stage, a more comprehensive version of IE provision that focuses on school transformation can be seen in Article 24 of the CRPD (UN, 2006) and in Ainscow et al.'s (2006) and Hornby's (2015) definitions. Proponents of full inclusion call for a significant shift in assigning responsibility to embrace a wider variety of learning needs onto school and education authorities rather than onto children with disabilities and their families. Parallel with the debates around the social model of disability, this variation of IE concentrates on the 'organisational paradigm' of inquiry to improve settings, policies, cultures, and structures by reducing material and ideological barriers to participation and the educational development of children in school and the community (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). By facilitating responses to recognise and value diversity, mainstream schools are believed to be able to provide the best opportunities for all children to learn (Clark et al., 2011). Subsequently, the debates on IE revolved around the efficacy discourse of providing optimal educational arrangements that address the needs of students identified as having SEN. While the inclusive framework emanating from the social model of disability discouraged the use of the term SEN, which conjures up the idea of individual deficits (Slee, 2001), it is proposed that what is more critical is children's right to learning regardless of where and how learning might take place (Department for Education and Skills - Great Britain, 2001; Farrell, 2010). Inclusion is therefore conceptualised in terms of the engagement of students with the processes and progressions of their learning that can be either in special or mainstream settings (Liasidou, 2012).

While IE appears to embody principles in these areas i.e., physical placement; the rights to participation and learning (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 2002); organisational transformation to remove educational barriers (Ainscow et al., 2006; UN, 2006); and optimal educational arrangements (Hornby, 2015), Shevlin (2019) argues that it is still difficult to arrive at a generally accepted definition for IE. The lack of consensus around inclusion has led to IE being theorised in a number of ways, which has significant implications for local policy constitutions (Lee, 2010). The different versions of IE, Liasidou (2012) argues, are further filtered through a host of contextual political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics which have affected the ways in which IE policy is created and defined in many countries. This argument implies that the concept of and approaches to inclusion may be context-dependent. In the same way, Brown (1995) indicates that “when the term [inclusion] crosses over into the use of other cultures, it is no surprise that it is interpreted and applied in more different and, sometimes, contradictory ways” (p. 255). For this reason, global education agendas about human rights, disability, and IE within the original statements can become lost in translation in the various policies that have been implemented around the world (Kamenopoulou, 2020), as we shall see section 2.4.

### **2.3 International agenda to improve education for all**

The past decade has seen widespread interest in IE in the international scene (Grech & Soldatic, 2015; Hornby, 2015; Kamenopoulou, 2020; Salend, 2015; Shevlin, 2019). This section builds on the previous timeline in section 2.1 by tracing the development of IE within existing literature from 1990 onwards. In the paragraphs that follow, this section first considers the movements of key international policy initiatives such as the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA), the 1994 Salamanca Statement, the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2006 Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), and, more recently, the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) advocated by the EFA convenor, United Nations (UN) in their commitment to a more inclusive approach to education.

In 1990, leaders from 155 countries and representatives from 160 governments, international organisations, educators, and development professionals gathered at the first

World Conference on EFA in Jomtien, Thailand. The Declaration's (Article 3.1) assertion that "Basic education should be provided to all children... To this end, basic education services of quality should be expanded, and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities" (UNESCO, 1990, p. 3) underpinned the adoption of the notion of IE for many signatory nations. While six key education goals were identified to provide universal basic education for all children, youth, and adults by 2015, there was also an understanding that the special needs agenda should be considered an important part of the EFA effort (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Within the subcategories of the goals, the EFA aims to replace the concept of integration with a shift towards inclusive schooling and education, specifically to improve access to education. Whereas integration calls for additional measures to accommodate disabled students within a system of schooling that is substantially unaltered, inclusion seeks to restructure schools to respond to and meet the learning needs of all students (Ainscow, 1991). On the one hand, this shift suggests that integration necessitates distinct arrangements in the mainstream school for children with disabilities—primarily those who have been traditionally labelled as disabled—such as withdrawal, remedial education, and/or mainstreaming. On the other hand, IE acknowledges that specific learning needs can come from social, psychological, economic, linguistic, cultural, as well as physical (or disability) causes, which is why the term 'children with special needs/special educational needs' is used rather than 'children with disabilities'. Second, IE recognises that any child can have short-term or long-term learning difficulties at any point throughout their schooling experience and that the school must constantly review itself to fulfil the educational needs of its students.

In further support of the EFA, the year 1994 witnessed Anglo-American collaborations for inclusive schooling; these led to the signing of the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action by 92 nations and 25 international organisations (Kamenopoulou, 2020; Kisanji, 1999; Walton, 2018). Under the auspices of UNESCO, the Salamanca Statement was guided by the EFA initiatives (Shevlin, 2019). This Framework is still generally recognised as a historical milestone for students with disabilities because it states unequivocally that "those with special educational needs (SEN) must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 3). In response to global demand to improve the participation of children

with disabilities in mainstream schools, a significant number of countries began introducing policies that place greater emphasis on IE, in line with the Salamanca Statement (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004). Although the 1994 Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education was primarily in support of the educational needs of students with disabilities, this group of students was still largely overlooked. While some countries have been much more progressive in embracing IE than others, schooling opportunities for students with disabilities have been relegated to a segregated system of education and/or to their exclusion from the mainstream education system in many nations like Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and India (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Sheehy & Budiyanto, 2014; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014; Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2014). In other words, the lack of more widespread initiatives, especially in nations that fall under the MIC bracket, to fully include students with disabilities within the existing educational framework continues to be a barrier for students with disabilities to mainstream education.

Ten years after Jomtien, the world leaders came together again in Dakar, Senegal to review their progress and set new goals for 2015 because progress towards achieving the objectives of the EFA had been spasmodic (UNESCO, 2005b, 2014). The International Development Targets in the Dakar Framework for Action reinforced Jomtien's vision on EFA and covered a broad spectrum of education, including early childhood care, primary, secondary, and adult learning (UNESCO, 2000). Later that same year, the International Development Targets, with some revision, were confirmed as UN MDGs following the Millennium Summit of 2000 (King, 2007). However, such global efforts were restricted to concentrating primarily on primary school enrolment rates and gender equality in education.

By 2006, Article 24 of the CRPD was introduced to reaffirm the fundamental rights of learners with disabilities to IE, holding more state parties accountable (UN, 2006). However, as Mittler (2000) points out, conflicted discourses of inclusion and fragmented policies in many countries led to the lack of progress towards EFA for children with disabilities. The claims made in the Salamanca Statement about how the philosophy of inclusion could translate in mainstream schools as being the most effective settings for students with

disabilities have been critiqued as simplistic (Clough & Corbett, 2000). In reality, for example, little work has been done to address the challenges to an all-inclusive model that relates to the different economic conditions of a country (Clough & Corbett, 2000). This approach includes looking at the availability and adequacy of the resources and support needed to ensure that these children are genuinely included in learning. Furthermore, the academic achievements of targeted children were not assessed in terms of the degree of assistance they had received, nor were recommendations made to enhance this specialised support (Peters & Chimedza, 2000).

Despite these international initiatives for IE, there were mixed reports on the EFA 2000-2015 globally (UNESCO, 2014). On the one hand, there has been a significant increase in the primary school enrolment rate. On the other, the number of children who are enrolled but not learning within the system remains high due to inadequate learning support. The data further revealed that children living with disabilities are at a higher risk for educational exclusion and low academic achievement (UNESCO, 2014). Despite significant conventions and enactment of legislation at the global level, the EFA policy documents and MDGs have not yet resulted in improved equity in education in the manner planned for children with disabilities (Sandland, 2017). In particular, Sandland (2017) emphasises that the MDGs have magnified the inherent educational disparity and inequalities within society. Fehling et al. (2013) and King (2007) suggest that these might be attributable to the MDGs' being created by only a few stakeholders and without adequate involvement from low- and middle-income countries, thus overlooking different national needs.

Subsequently, the SDGs were introduced to address the shortcomings of the MDGs by "taking into account various national realities different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities" (UN, 2015, p. 3). The principal goal of the EFA to transform the education systems and learning environments towards inclusion is reiterated in the 2030 Agenda for SDGs that calls for "inclusive and equitable quality education" (UN, 2015, p. 19). This agenda sets renewed global targets for inclusive practices. This concept of IE has also expanded to include all learners, as succinctly articulated in the SDG 4 (UN, 2015). Although traditionally synonymous with children with

disabilities, the perspective of IE has now come to mean “lifelong learning opportunities for all” (p. 19). A notable example is that target 4.1 requires that all children complete primary and secondary education of sufficient quality to ensure that they have “relevant and effective learning outcomes” (p. 20). Additionally, target 4.5 aims to provide “equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations” (p. 21). In other words, the Education 2030 Framework for Action aims to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for all learners through a holistic approach in developing learners’ cognitive, social, and emotional domains. This initiative has created space for positive synergies between efforts in addressing social inequalities and catering to SEN while at the same time pursuing general educational goals (Hornby, 2015). On the whole, the SGD4 is an ambitious goal, given the complexities involved in including all learners and ensuring that each individual has equal and personalised opportunities for educational development. While SGD4 reflects an international commitment to a rights-based educational agenda, little focus has been directed to tackling the complexities of the contested notion of inclusion and IE policy development in different countries (Khairuddin & Miles, 2020). When applied to education and policy development, it is important to understand that inclusion interacts with numerous social, political, and economic principles and to consider how this relationship has influenced policy development in the field of IE (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004). This is a central argument in this thesis that will be revisited and discussed in greater depth in the remainder of this chapter.

## **2.4 Debates of IE**

### ***2.4.1 Policy borrowing and IE in a globalised world***

This section explores the concept of policy borrowing and its influence on education policymaking in the field of inclusive education (IE), given its transferability across countries. According to S. Liu and Feng (2015), globalisation has played a significant role in shaping the strategic direction and development of IE policies. Globalisation can be described as time-space compression, promoting global communication and facilitating the sharing of ideas, policies, and experiences worldwide (Held & McGrew, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As a result, scholars argue that globalisation has increased its influence in shaping national laws and policies through policy borrowing (Mitchell, 2005).

Policy borrowing involves the deliberate appropriation and tailoring of a policy previously enacted in one country to the local context of a borrowing country (Portnoi, 2016). Dale (1999) describes several mechanisms associated with policy borrowing or transfer, including a) borrowing: the borrowing of political ideologies or principles through imitation, copying or emulation; b) learning: the process of learning from other organisations, their programmes, and policies to make informed decisions on policymaking; c) imposition: international organisations (as well as powerful states) imposing their policy preferences on particular countries; d) harmonisation: countries coming to an agreement on the implementation of common policies in a specific policy domain; e) standardisation: global governance being established through adherence to a set of policy principles and standards that frame the policy decisions of particular countries; f) dissemination: a suasion approach that works through promoting examples of best practice; and g) interdependence which arises when countries choose to work together to achieve common goals to solve problems that require international collaboration. Maggetti and Gilardi (2016) later added competition as another mechanism that arises when countries compete to gain international reputation or attract resources. Through policy borrowing, education policymakers can incorporate successful policies and practices from other countries into their own education systems. By borrowing policies, policymakers hope to learn from others' successes, avoid their mistakes, and adapt policies to their own context. As a result, the phenomenon of policy borrowing has been a useful tool for countries seeking to improve their education systems. However, scholars have also pointed out that policy borrowing can sometimes result in unintended consequences, such as the failure to adapt policies to local contexts or the uncritical adoption of policies that may not be suitable for the borrowing country (Portnoi, 2016). Therefore, policymakers must exercise caution when borrowing policies and ensure that the policies they adopt are appropriate for their local contexts.

As indicated in the discussion above, IE in many countries, including Malaysia, is a borrowed policy from the international arena through various policy transfer mechanisms to provide all children with access to quality education. However, when a single-minded vision on inclusion is to be transferred and adapted to multiple contexts, the imported discourse of inclusion is subjected to the “distorting effects of policy borrowing” (Liasidou, 2012, p. 141).

Further, Booth and Ainscow (2002) caution against policy borrowing, because educational reforms that have travelled far from their place of origin tend to appear foreign upon their arrival in receiving countries.

There is mounting evidence that this foreignness is in large part due to the absence of common understandings of the key terms and concepts related to inclusion (Clark et al., 2011; Kamenopoulou, 2018a; Shevlin, 2019; UNESCO, 2020). Although there are relatively sophisticated indicator systems of IE that are currently gaining global compliance, Hallinger (2010) echoes Ainscow and Booth's (2002) call for IE policymaking to be treated with considerable caution. King (2007) also noted that the final version of the EFA framework adopted by the World Education Forum in Dakar was less prescriptive: "the scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time" (UNESCO, 2000, p. 75). It could be the case that the lack of prescriptive measures in UNESCO's (2000) provisional definition of inclusion has resulted in inconsistent global perspectives on inclusion (Armstrong et al., 2010). When international frameworks that promote inclusive agendas are "more provisional" and "not as prescriptive" (King, 2007, p. 380), these factors might likely leave room for multiple interpretations and misunderstandings by key policy actors in the local contexts (Chin, 2020). This complexity is further compounded by different contextual factors such as the economic, political, cultural, and historical settings of a country (Kamenopoulou, 2018a). Portnoi (2016), for example, argues that policy borrowing is not impartial and that there are underlying political impulses. Politically motivated policy borrowing such as the need to be aligned with international conventions may then result in perceived assumptions about the need to enact educational changes to respond to the rights of children with disabilities to education (Liasidou, 2012). In certain contexts, some educational models and approaches are copied without considering their cultural and contextual appropriateness. As indicated earlier in chapter 1, Levin (1998) refers to this form of imitation as an "epidemic of education policy" (p. 131) in which key national policy actors replicate international policies and practices in a haphazard manner without proper reflection on their possible implications.

Indeed, education policy borrowing has produced several kinds of reactions ranging from

apparent convergence to distinctive peculiarities. Given that ideas can be imported, replicated, and changed by key policy actors as a matter of policy borrowing (Ball, 1998), policies from various countries may be identical in concept and purpose but divergent in practice and lead to different outcomes altogether. Policy analysis can then track how international and national discourses have merged through the process of IE key policy actors' policy formulation in response to both historical and contemporary political, cultural, and economic circumstances. In doing so, it is intended that this knowledge will be helpful in interpreting the strategic responses to certain global and local powers and pressures that shape the development of IE policy in the Malaysian context, thus drawing attention to the complexities of this policymaking process. In order to analyse IE policymaking in such a way, chapter 3 introduces Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) DHA and Jessop's (2005) SRA as both a theoretical framework and a methodology through which to examine IE policy development in Malaysia.

#### ***2.4.2 Main policy trends and approaches to managing IE***

As pointed out in section 2.2, the complexity involved in defining IE is accentuated by different currents of beliefs and local struggles in different contexts. Consequently, policy options regarding IE vary across different countries around the world, as detailed in this subsection.

Waitoller and Thorius (2015) observe that while some countries like England are found to have gradual development of educational inclusion practices, countries like the USA have bypassed advocacy processes and radically applied IE policy to their education framework. In 1990s, Pijl and Meijer (1991) identified three broad trends of IE system (i.e., a 'one-track' policy, a 'two-track' policy and a 'multitrack' policy) although they stress that the differences are not apparent because of the ambiguities in the definition of inclusion. Italy and Portugal's 'one-track' policy, which appears to be based on the concept of 'mainstreaming', enabled children with disabilities to be educated with their typically developing peers within mainstream settings (Mitchell, 2005). Within this model, mainstream schools are considered to be able to meet and respond to the diverse learning needs of students, including children with disabilities (Pijl & Meijer, 1991). A 'twin-track' policy operates in Germany, Belgium,

and the Netherlands, with special school and mainstream school systems functioning independently. It is important to underline that national education policies as well as the humanitarian and development education sectors have increasingly promoted a twin-track approach to SEN (Inglad & Nilsson, 2012). The two-track approach entails ensuring that mainstream education approaches are inclusive of all students, while also making sure that special provisions are allocated so that specialist support can be accessed. This strategy is seen as concentrating on transforming the traditional education system and making strides in enhancing services for children with disabilities through a separate schooling system (Reiser, 2008).

However, according to Miles and Singal (2010), having a twin-track approach would undermine the role of mainstream teachers and foster more tensions between mainstream and special education system, thereby obstructing the inclusion process. Peters (2002) adds that the ambiguities in the concept of IE for children with disabilities in the global context suggest that most countries are seen as providing more than a one- or two-track approach. A 'multitrack' policy is evident in the UK, the USA, and Denmark, where flexible educational provisions and services are designed to correspond with the educational needs of children with disabilities (Norwich, 2008). Nevertheless, irrespective of initiatives adopted in national policies, prioritising the ability of parents and guardians to choose the school and services for children with disabilities is key to ensuring that education is inclusive and equitable. This priority is postulated in the Salamanca Statement: "within inclusive schools, children with SEN should receive whatever extra support they may require to ensure their effective education" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 12).

Although some studies have found that many countries are strongly in favour of the principles behind IE, Miles (2009) draws our attention to the "threats to equity which may exist in a particular context" for all learners (p. 22). For example, one of the indicative strategies mentioned in SDG4 is to:

Ensure that education policies and sector plans and their budgeting guarantee the principles of non-discrimination and equality in and through

education, and develop and implement targeted urgent strategies for vulnerable and excluded groups. (p. 45)

A strong commitment to IE through the gradual development of well-resourced, large-scale programmes, including strategies for curriculum reform and teacher education such as those adopted by the government in Vietnam, has been shown to produce positive outcomes (Nguyen & Mitchell, 2014). However, the curriculum revisions and development of human resources required by many children with disabilities are costly. In the event where countries have an insufficient financial budget, children from lower socioeconomic status households are less likely to receive a higher quality of education (Norwich, 2008). Other factors such as social status, gender, health conditions, and the prevalence of stigma and discrimination frequently relegate the educational needs of children with disabilities to the background, especially in MICs (Miles & Singal, 2010), which denotes that “threats to equity” are capable of determining how national IE agendas are repositioned and negotiated during the policymaking process. This issue is discussed in further detail in the subsequent section.

The views noted above suggest that inclusive practices might not look the same in every country because IE policymaking will likely be different depending on contextual elements and understandings of the key policy actors, individually or in groups (DiGiorgio, 2005; Kamenopoulou, 2018a). As Brown (1995) aptly put it, “IE is a multidimensional phenomenon, with different countries developing not only at different rates but also different directions” (p. 57). The view of IE and disability’s being “not universally understood” (Meekosha, 2011, p. 678) and criticised as “false universalism” has resulted in calls for more local research from other contexts and perspectives so as to provide more clarity on IE policymaking (Nguyen et al., 2009 p. 109). Taking this view into consideration, this thesis argues that the interactions between key international and national policy actors’ understandings of inclusion and contextual realities play critical roles in the policy ideation of IE in Malaysia.

### **2.4.3 IE in middle-income countries**

Malaysia, like many other MICs that have begun to embrace IE as a national policy following the passage of the Salamanca Statement, seems to share common struggles in defining IE due to different beliefs about inclusion (Chong, 2016; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Khairuddin & Miles, 2020). What this struggle probably implies is that, although these MICs each have policy options regarding IE, they may vary from one another. Before illustrating some of the complexities and inequalities of IE policymaking that take place in MICs in the next section, the remainder of this section describes how IE policy is being played out in several countries, with a detailed focus on the MICs context in respect of their conceptualisations of and approaches to IE. The description is based on Pijl and Meijer's (1991) categorisation of the broad trends of the IE system: one-track; two-track; and multitrack.

The one-track policy enables children with disabilities to be educated with their typically developing peers within mainstream settings (Mitchell, 2005). For example, educational policies in Botswana and Colombia seem to share similar characteristics with the one-track approach by defining IE as a system that recognises, values, and responds to the needs of all children in regular school settings (Kamenopoulou, 2020; Mangope et al., 2018). In Botswana, the inclusive movement is guided by the introduction of the Revised National Education Policy on Education of 1994 and National Development Plan 9 of 2002 at the national level, which are aimed at advancing inclusive schooling for learners with intellectual, visual, and hearing disabilities (Mangope et al., 2018). In a similar manner, Law 115 was introduced in 1994 in Colombia to mandate and make IE compulsory to ensure that mainstream educational institutions organise appropriate actions that will allow "academic and social integration" of students with "limitations or exceptional capabilities" (Article 46, as cited in Kamenopoulou, 2020, p. 1799). Within this inclusive model, mainstream schools are considered to be responsible for including, meeting, and responding to students' diverse learning needs, including those of children with disabilities (Meijer, 2003).

In contrast to the one-track approach, the twin-track policy promotes the operation of special schools and mainstream schools whereby two parallel school systems function independently (Armstrong et al., 2010). In Pacific countries like Fiji and Samoa, principles of

this approach appear to be reflected in their education frameworks (Sharma et al., 2017; Tufue-Dolgoy, 2010). Sharma et al. (2017) found that the 2016 Policy on Special and Inclusive Education in Fiji makes specific reference to the rights of children with disabilities to education according to their learning needs. This policy on the one hand works to ensure that students with disabilities are able to access mainstream education options. On the other hand, learners with more severe and complex disabilities such as learners who are required to learn sign language or braille are supported in special schools. Likewise, the Samoa-Special Needs Education Policy was drafted in 2006 with the commitment to provide appropriate education programmes to support students with special needs in Samoa (Tufue-Dolgoy, 2010). While the aforementioned policy states that “where possible all students” are to receive education in government mainstream schools, special provision is also made available to children with severe disabilities in nongovernmental organisation-run special schools. This strategy is seen as concentrating on transforming the traditional education system while enhancing services for children with disabilities with a separate schooling system (Reiser, 2012).

However, due to the ambiguities in the concept of IE for children with disabilities in the global context, certain countries are seen as providing more than one- or two-track approaches (Pijl & Meijer, 1991). It may be said that a “multitrack” policy is evident in China and Thailand. It is reported that multiple educational provisions and services are designed to correspond with the educational needs of children with disabilities in both countries in a bid to meet the Salamanca Statement and more recently the SDG4 (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2015; Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2014; Xu & Filler, 2008). For example, the 2017 Regulation on the Education of Persons with Disabilities is a government policy in China that conceptualises IE as a rights-based approach to education for all children with disabilities such as learners with visual, hearing, physical, and learning disabilities (Xu & Filler, 2008). Therefore, alongside mainstreaming, this policy promotes special schools and home-based education or distance education as alternative educational settings to address the educational needs of children with disabilities. In Thailand, the Education Provision for People with Disabilities Act was enacted in 2008. It aims to move towards a more inclusive system (Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2014). In this context, practices of IE in Thailand are defined as providing persons with disabilities with access to education at any level and in various

settings (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2015). These include seven education placement options for students with disabilities in regular classrooms, special schools, home schools, community or private organisations, hospitals, special education centres, and informal education centres.

As exemplified above, the fulfilment of educational rights to achieve inclusion can be variously interpreted based on the location of educational provision for children with disabilities in different MICs, which may consequently affect the type of instruction and the level of interaction between students with a disability and their peers (Florian, 2014). As denoted in the previous section, this situation suggests that local realities in MICs are potentially capable of determining how national IE agendas are framed, a topic which the next section addresses in detail.

#### ***2.4.4 Complexities of IE policymaking in the MICs context***

IE policymaking can be described as an interactive process and evidently there are often tensions and contradictions in this particular area, as a multitude of ideological forces are at work (Liasidou, 2012). The complexity of the local IE policymaking process appears to be further accentuated by a number of local peculiarities across countries in the MIC bracket. After looking at several policies in MICs, this section now turns its attention to exploring possible issues that might emerge from IE policymaking within the same context. The conflicting ideas and perceptions that underpin IE policymaking have been influenced to some extent by various worldviews (Kamenopoulou, 2020) as well as by a given society's social structures (Len Barton, 1997). As Barton and Tomlinson (1984) maintain, the interactive framework in which the IE policy is entrenched might be affected by wider social structures such as cultural, economic, and political factors that could be linked to the needs of the society, the education system, and relevant stakeholders that are working within the organisation rather than to the needs of individual children. These social structures may then result in struggles to realise IE in both conceptual and practical terms (Len Barton, 1997).

It needs to be noted however that this study is informed by critical realism. While this section touches on critical realism, chapter 3 provides a full walkthrough of this ontology.

The critical realist ontological foundation acknowledges that the social world is composed of structures that possess “generative mechanisms” or causal powers that are able to create possibilities for and/or put constraints upon “events” (Bhaskar, 1978, p. 187). Archer (1996) further extends this view and asserts that human actors that face these pre-existing structures of power, individually or collectively depending on their capacity, will either reproduce hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations. In the case of this study, Bhaskar and Danermark (2006) point out that generative mechanisms usually reside and are entangled in economic, political, and cultural structures within the field of disability research, and Bhaskar’s ‘event’ refers to the process of IE policymaking. In this regard, the social structures embedded within the MICs context can influence the ways in which local IE policy is created and defined that might enhance or undermine the initiatives made to promote an inclusive discourse in the education arena (Kamenopoulou, 2020). As Hindess (1998) maintains, social structures and the discourses that arise from them are believed to have profound implications on IE policymaking. Such structural conditions may either enable or impede key policy actors as they engage in rational decisionmaking within organisations in response to the wider cultural, political, and economic conditions (Archer, 1996). It is through identifying the structures in the MICs context that this research can begin to trace possible generative mechanisms at work and then explicate their overarching influence on IE policies in Malaysia in chapter 4. Thus, the following subsections consider the interactions of the potential economic, political, and cultural conditions that are implicated within the IE policymaking process in the MICs context by drawing on literature from several countries that share similar contextual backgrounds to Malaysia.

#### **2.4.4.1 Economic conditions**

A nation’s level of economic wealth or economic structure, according to Mitchell (2005), has a crucial impact in defining policy approaches to IE within the MICs context. These include (a) recognising that providing special schools throughout a country is not economically viable; (b) adopting a human capital policy of developing all individuals primarily as a means of enhancing the economy; and (c) an attitude that people with disabilities are economic liabilities and thus of low priority. This argument draws attention to two pertinent points. The first concerns the idea that some MICs such as Botswana and Colombia (Mitchell &

Desai, 2005) are more likely to take a pragmatic, cost-effective approach to IE, recognising that special schools would be impractical to establish across the country and that residential schools in national or regional centres would be prohibitively expensive to operate. Similarly, Artiles and Dyson (2005) emphasise this point, stating that mainstream schools were the only economically feasible option for providing marginalised students with any form of educational assistance. The idea that IE is both cost-efficient and cost-effective is also propelling efforts to legitimise the administration of special and mainstream education (Peters, 2002).

The second point highlights how neoliberalism works to influence the actions of key policy actors within the field of IE policymaking (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). While neoliberalism was first intended as an economic strategy to increase the effectiveness of the free market by minimising the involvement of the state in economic governance (Kiiza, 2001; Klees, 2008; Mayo, 2015; Olssen, 2004), neoliberalism has recently come to be recognised as an ideology that has guided the restructuring of modern society's social and political structure (Giroux, 2004; Mayo, 2015). Consequently, neoliberalism “extends beyond the realm of economic policy making by encroaching into the domains of individual and social life” (Mayo, 2015, p. 3). Consequently, neoliberalism effectively serves as an organising principle for social, political, and economic decisionmaking (Giroux, 2004).

Education plays a critical role in advancing neoliberal ideologies in the preparation of pupils for life as economically productive citizens. This neoliberal push for economic viability is undergirded by the idea that students are human capital (Apple, 2006; Harrison, 2010; Mayo, 2015). In this instance, neoliberalism is taken generally to refer to the concept of valuing current standards-driven, highly accountable postwelfare society with its aim of developing individuals as a means of developing the economy (Goodley, 2013; van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019). Human capital discourse has increasingly underpinned educational policy initiatives as governments have endeavoured to enhance economic productivity based on the belief that education will produce economically viable citizens. As future members of the workforce in the knowledge economy, it is considered essential that students possess the traits and abilities needed to compete successfully and effectively in order to provide profitable outcomes for the knowledge society (Apple, 2006; Hargreaves, 2003). This stance

highlights the neoliberal ideology's fundamental socialising purpose and demonstrates how neoliberalism is both a social and an economic endeavour.

However, Artiles and Dyson (2005) argue that the neoliberal value of education might not be congruent with students who may never become economically productive in MICs, specifically students with disabilities. In some MICs, this problem is cured by putting a low priority on children with disabilities' schooling access and opportunities (Kalyanpur, 2014; Mitchell & Desai, 2005). According to Kalyanpur (2014), Cambodia (as a case in point), focuses on increasing the educational performance of all students, assessing these performances through high-stakes international testing such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Such assessments, in turn, hold schools to more stringent levels of accountability and regard individuals with disabilities as “non-marketable commodities” (Blackmore, 2000, p. 381). Fletcher and Artiles (2005) similarly note that an often-stated argument in most Latin American countries is: “How can we afford to invest in social services for the small population of people with disabilities when size-able segments of our non-disabled populations still have such deep basic needs?” (p. 210). While educational policies for students with disabilities have significant undertow of social equality and individual rights, MICs share profound cultural norms that favour individual productivity, competition, and social competency in order to sustain economic expansions (Chong, 2013; Kalyanpur, 2014). Slee (2001) considers that such an economic-driven quest for “excellence” may have created tensions and dilemmas on the ways that IE policy is manifested in Malaysia. These transformative qualities of neoliberalism demonstrate its capacity to influence and shape the choices and actions of policy actors within the field of IE. This thesis' primary tenet—that neoliberalism is an organising principle for social, political, and economic decisionmaking—is revisited in chapters 6, 7, and 8 through the analysis of IE policy documents in Malaysia.

#### **2.4.4.2 Political conditions**

In conjunction with the economic structure, political considerations have additional implications for shaping the meanings of inclusion in local education policies in some MICs (Kamenopoulou, 2018a; Mitchell, 2005). Robertson and Dale (2015) highlight that politics in

education operates in various ways—“from whose knowledge counts to how the sector is governed” (p. 6). Within the political sphere of IE policymaking, the governmentality point of view has much to do with exercising power and the imperative of controlling docile bodies with what Campbell (2003) terms a “‘double bind’ of individualisation and totalisation” (p. 337). Employing exclusion and division strategies in dividing the subject from others (i.e., individualisation) renders the group of individuals to be governable by the state (i.e., totalisation). In Thailand and Vietnam, for example, medical categorisation of children with disabilities is institutionalised in public education. The emergence of such modern technologies of governance shows that educational practices have the ability to construct disability as inherently negative (Nguyen, 2015; Vorapanya & Dunlap, 2014). When situated in a neoliberal condition, institutions tend to reconstruct IE policies that reproduce inequalities by unintentionally excluding children with disabilities according to their individual educational needs through segregated educational placements.

Equally important, Alatas (2000), Dale (1999), and Verger (2014) hold the view that policy scholarship dependency on disability and educational inclusion of certain countries within the MICs context are likely to derive from dependency on investment from powerful international organisations or high-income countries. These researchers maintain that dependence on aid and investments plays a significant role in designing the policy architecture in managing IE. Duke et al. (2016) examine the ways in which global initiatives and assistance organisations have had a significant impact on IE policy development in Samoa and Fiji. International organisations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development are considered to be policy influencers that provide guiding philosophies or aspirations. Because aid funding is tied to their advice, these organisations have strong influences when it comes to IE educational policies (Phillips & Ochs, 2004). UNESCO, for example, produced its Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Childhood in 2009. It listed domains of actions for improving IE in both countries, including changing attitudes, policy development, early education care and education, curriculum, teachers and teacher education, and resources. Social structures such as institutional power are important here because they are seen to operate in and through discourse to influence choices for the inclusion of children with disabilities in schools (Sims-Schouten & Riley, 2014).

#### **2.4.4.2 Cultural conditions**

The final condition—culture—contributes in defining policies related to IE that are being implemented in a given locale (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). While culture is considered as one of the most complex constructs in the English language, culture in this thesis foregrounds the examination of links between individual and the collective dimensions of social practice (Gallego et al., 2001). Second, this viewpoint assumes that human thought processes are shaped by the demands of the practical activities in which people are regularly engaged (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). The third premise of this cultural stream is that engagement in social practice is impacted by the enablers and constraints of the conceptual and material tools available (Gallego et al., 2001). As such, and within the national IE policymaking contour, culture can create tensions while aiding key policymakers to interpret structural realities through their values, beliefs, knowledge, and emotions and to consider their strategic responses in relation to the culture in which they are located.

As IE has been taken up as a policy prescription for the education system around the world, concern has been expressed about it being a Western ideology, dominated by Western scholars, and uncritically taken up in MICs. Walton (2018) argues that the reinforcement of Western pedagogical models in MICs is a clear example of neocolonialism in action. Neocolonialism works to enable colonising nations to maintain control and influence in their former territories by indirectly ensuring that the interests of the West are achieved through the continuation of historic colonial practices (Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Crozier, 1964; Woddis, 1967). Such an agenda is commonly achieved by means of economic dependence, as discussed in the previous subsection (Alatas, 2000). By way of illustration, neocolonialism is advanced through the prevalence of Western paradigms that shape and influence IE systems and thinking in MICs. In this case, Nguyen et al. (2009) drew attention to “educational neo-colonialism” (p. 109) which is described as the continuation of the colonial encounter through the transfer of knowledge. Much research from MICs like that of Walton (2018) in South Africa, Nguyen (2015) in Vietnam, and Mukhophadyay (2015) in Botswana explores the ways in which IE is critiqued as a neocolonial project and represented by the hegemony of Eurocentric and Western philosophies. While IE is presented as a neutral, value-free, and technical phenomenon, Grech (2015) maintains that its political and

ideological agenda remains largely hidden. He claims that IE has been funded and marketed as a prescription by aid agencies proclaiming to mitigate economic, political, and social challenges experienced by MICs. He observes that IE is justified in neutral, benevolent, and apolitical language such as the promise of addressing system failure and individual disadvantages (Grech, 2015). This discourse carries assumptions that Western knowledge is “the only one capable of achieving a universal consciousness, and [dismisses] non-Western knowledge as particularistic and, thus, unable to achieve universality” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 214). It is argued that in policy and IE scholarship, local, indigenous, and culturally relevant knowledges are to be minimised, if not ignored. Therefore, it is essential to consider the cultural impact in addition to the historical, political, and economic constellations that trigger the policy development processes of IE in Malaysia.

Taken together, the review of the contemporary issues of IE policymaking across different MICs supports Kamenopoulou’s (2018) claim that both international and local realities have the power to mediate the ideation of IE policy development. These realities will vary according to geographical contexts. Although research available into IE policy in MICs is expanding, little attention has been paid to the amalgam of influences (economic, political, and cultural) in the trajectory of IE policy development in Malaysia (Barton, 1997; Grech, 2015; Kamenopoulou, 2018a, 2018b, 2020; Kozleski et al., 2011; Walton, 2018). Therefore, this research aims to contribute to closing this gap by examining how power layers within/through the actions and responses of multiple stakeholders when enabling and/or constraining possibilities for the inclusion of children with SEN in Malaysia are materialised. Having presented the complexities of IE policymaking in MICs, this study now shifts the lens on to Malaysia’s shores.



## **2.5 A snapshot of Malaysia**

Malaysia's intricate historical, sociocultural, economic, and political conditions provide a fascinating context in which to examine its development of IE policies over the past 30 years. Before engaging with methodology and analysis, this section is dedicated to a crucial part of the DHA—a detailed overview of the Malaysian context which frames my analysis. While chapter 1 has provided a snippet of information on Malaysia, this section aims to expand on this earlier introduction. It begins with a brief overview of Malaysia and then moves on to the presentation of its cultural, political economic, and educational contexts. The section concludes by arguing that there is a pressing need to critically understand how and why IE policy is borrowed and has developed in Malaysia.

### **2.5.1 The sociocultural context**

The variegated ethnic composition in Malaysia outlined in chapter 1 has created a diversification in culture, belief, and custom (Khairuddin & Miles, 2020). As noted previously, there is some evidence to suggest that the cultural milieu of a country has significant implications for how disability and IE are conceptualised and thus might mediate the nature and development of IE policies in Malaysia (Artiles et al., 2011). According to the World Health Organization and the World Bank (2019) reports, around 15% of the world's population may experience some form of disability. However, according to a recent statistical report conducted by the Department of Social Welfare in Malaysia, approximately only 1.7% (560,000) of the population in Malaysia are registered as PWDs or *Orang Kurang Upaya* (OKU) (GoM, 2008). One of the main contributing factors for this discrepancy Ang (2012) argues may be attributed to the stigma associated with having a PWD card and being labelled as 'disabled'; such 'disabled' children are therefore believed to be at higher risk of further marginalisation and discrimination. Educational review reports show that the roots of stigma and discrimination at the community level associated with disabilities are probably embedded in certain cultural contexts in Malaysia that perceive disability as a state of abnormality (UNICEF Malaysia, 2017, 2019). This view can be observed in the language around disability where the most commonly used term for people with disabilities is *cacat*, a derogatory Malay term meaning defect or flaw (UNICEF Malaysia, 2017). For this reason, parents of children with disabilities who experience a heightened sense of shame are

reported to keep their children hidden from the community and unregistered. This shame, in turn, has resulted in the lack of accurate statistical data to assist with planning, procurement, service provision, and evidence in policymaking (Amar-Singh et al., 2018).

Closely related to the social stigma of disability is the charity-based approach in a number of policies in Malaysia (Islam, 2015). While social welfare policies such as the National Welfare Policy in 1990 and the National Social Policy in 2003 were introduced to ensure that PWDs enjoy equal rights and full participation in Malaysian society, the charity approach adopted by these social policies has come under severe criticism from PWDs (UNICEF Malaysia, 2019). Under this approach, PWDs tend to be viewed as an object of pity and as being dependent on social welfare due to individual deficits (Fulcher, 1989). Consequently, Islam (2015) asserts that services that are provided within a culture where they are perceived as an act of charity rather than being a right or entitlement can be poorer in quality, regulation, availability, and underfunded with respect to educational policies for children with disabilities. For example, Lee and Low (2013) found that facilities and support for children with disabilities in Malaysian mainstream schools are nonexistent, thereby potentially obstructing the process of inclusion. Evidence also indicates that children with disabilities from rural areas and living with caregivers with lower education, lower socioeconomic status, and single status continue to experience decreased quality of life and education (UNICEF Malaysia, 2017). As Burch (2018) observes, “policy designs and behaviour are connected to larger social and cultural beliefs”, which probably explains why IE policies are developed in different ways in different contexts (p. 84). In other words, sociocultural assumptions about disability can potentially influence the structuring of educational inclusion and exclusion as they continue to dominate policy practices in Malaysia.

Along with its complex and nuanced sociocultural condition, the education systems in postcolonial societies such as Malaysia are further shaped by colonial histories (Andreotti 2011; Coloma 2009). The remnants of British colonialism, the reconstruction of postcolonial curricula and educational infrastructures, and the national cultural politics continue to exert complex push-and-pull demands on governance and IE systems. Chin (2020) highlights that

neocolonial ideologies might continue to shape access to educational opportunities in different ways for different children with disabilities. She maintains that there is a need for neocolonialism to be understood within the local context of Malaysia in limiting or enabling the capacity of this country to determine its own IE agendas. In order to do so, culture as a social practice needs to be examined. Such examination requires an investigation of the strategies key policy actors use to relocate the politics of inclusion within the social, cultural, historical, and political conditions in which this research was conducted.

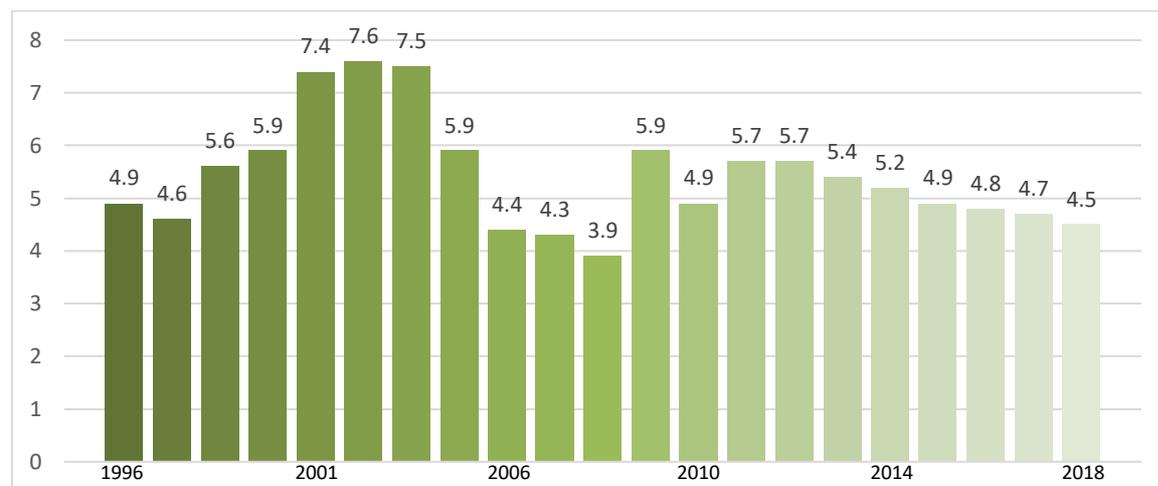
### **2.5.2 *The political-economic context***

As explained in chapter 1, Malaysia stands as an MIC. The World Bank (2019) reported its average rate of economic growth at 4.46% per annum between 2000 and 2020. Since Malaysia gained independence in 1957, modernisation and development have been crucial priorities for this middle-income nation. This focus has strongly shaped Malaysia's political and economic structures, ultimately impacting its education policies and system. This is a concept that holds resonance in later analysis in chapters 7 and 8. This nation has effectively diversified its economy from one that was originally based on agriculture and commodities to one that is now hosting manufacturing and service sectors that have driven Malaysia to become one of the leading exporters of electronic appliances and components (Mahroum & Al-Saleh, 2016). To fully realise its human capital and fulfil the country's aspiration of achieving high-income status, Malaysia has identified key priority investment areas to improve structural conditions in education, health and nutrition, and social protection outcomes (World Bank, 2019).

As far as education is concerned, the Malaysian government devotes a significant portion of its gross domestic product (GDP) to the education sector through its 5-year national development plans to produce skilled human capital for economic growth (Wan et al., 2018). The total education expenditure as a share of GDP reached 7.6% in 2002 but dropped dramatically to 4.5% in 2018 due to economic constraints, as indicated in Figure 2.1 (World Bank, 2019). Within education, funds are allocated to cover emolument operating expenditure (e.g., salaries, supplies, services, asset maintenance, awards), nonemolument operating expenditure (e.g., specific programmes and education management expenses),

and development expenditure (e.g., upgrade/repair of school facilities). Over the past decades, the MMoE has also included investments in programmes for students with disabilities. For example, with the growing awareness of the importance of remedial services to curb the widening student achievement gap (Economic Planning Unit, 1996), resources for educational support programmes in the Seventh Malaysia Plan 1996-2000 have increased 34.3%. In 2006, 29,169 students with visual, hearing, and physical impairments were given access to disabled student allowances totalling up to RM7.8 million (US\$1.89 million) to support their primary schooling (MMoE, 2008b). Additionally, it is reported that RM23 million (US\$8.51 million) has been allocated in the recent 2020 Budget (GoM, 2019) for schools to build facilities for students with disabilities to ensure fair education opportunities for all.

**Figure 2.1 Public Spending on Education: Total (% of GDP)**



**Years 1996-2018**

*Note.* Source: World Bank (2020)

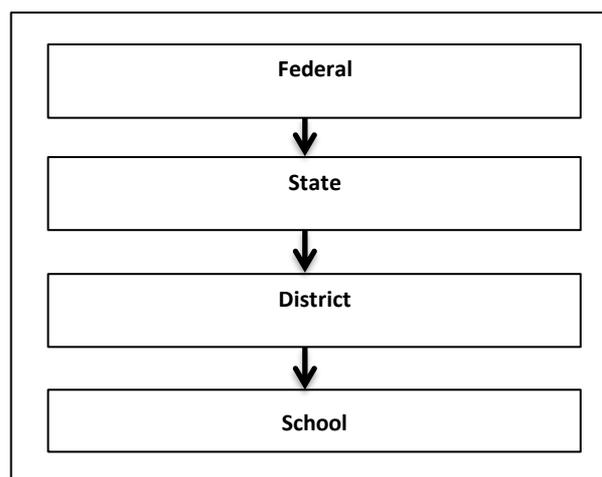
Nevertheless, education funding tilts heavily towards investing in schools that show high academic achievement through new accountability-based policies such as the New Deal and High Performing Schools (Sani, 2011). An earlier UN Development Programme (2005) report found that special schools, underperforming schools, and mainstream schools in rural and hard-to-reach localities still lack the basic amenities, qualified teachers, and appropriate

resources to provide quality education. These polarities are said to have not been managed in an equitable manner as schools with better student outcomes benefit more from the system in terms of funding and rewards (MMoE, 2010). In other words, it is possible that unequal resource distribution that may deepen existing educational and social inequities can influence how inclusive agendas are defined and reproduced in policies.

### **2.5.3 Educational governance and schooling structure**

After the Second World War (1941–1946), the British worked hand in hand with local education authorities to structure a centralised education system—a system that continues to the present day (Chong, 2013; Sheridan & Groves, 1987). The federal educational administration in Malaysia follows a four-tiered structure that is centrally controlled and managed to coordinate with all other government policies (Musa, 2003). Policy guidelines, which must be strictly adhered to by the state education departments, district education offices, and schools, are formulated by the MMoE (see Figure 2.2). The structure reflects characteristics of a developmental state which are widespread in MICs where macro planning is mostly centralised (Grewal, 2008; Leftwich, 1995; Wong, 2004).

**Figure 2.2** *Management Structure of Education in Malaysia*



*Note.* Source: MMOE (2013)

Within this educational structure, the MMoE has made primary education compulsory for all children aged 6+ effective from 1 January 2003. This requirement is stipulated in the

## Education Amendment Act 2002:

Every parent who is a Malaysian citizen residing in Malaysia shall ensure that if his child has attained the age of six years on the first day of January of the current school year that child is enrolled as a pupil in a primary school in that year and remains a pupil in a primary school for the duration of the compulsory education. (GoM, 2002, Article 29[2])

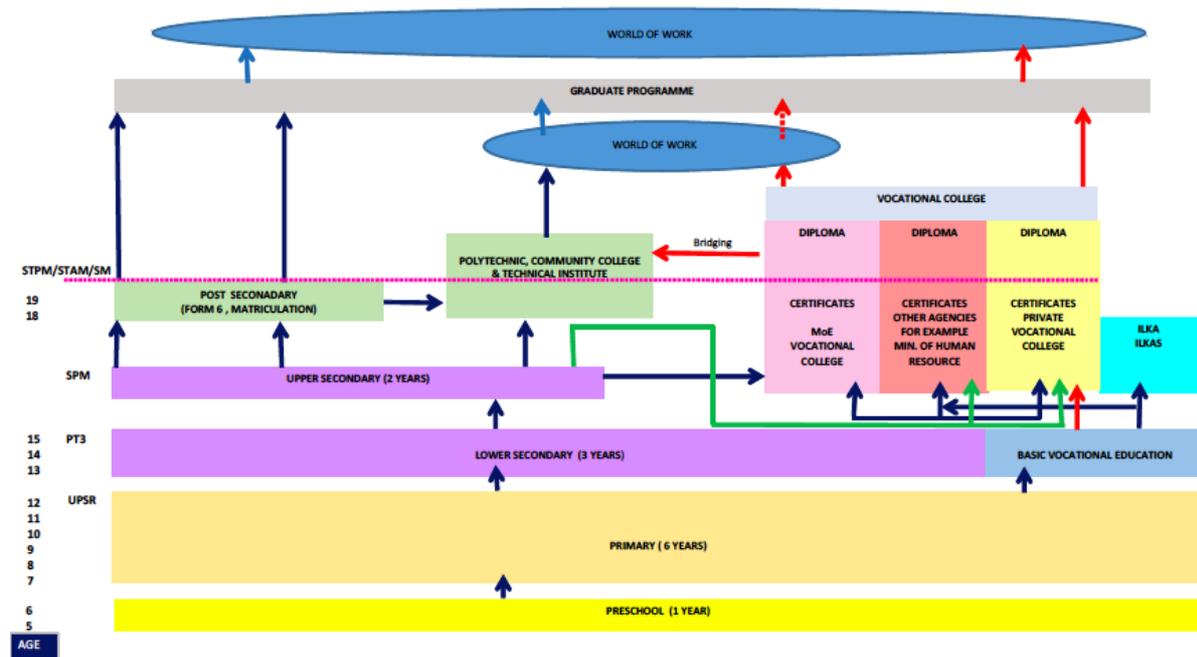
The MMoE further provides an additional 5 years of free, noncompulsory basic education in secondary schools spread out in two phases: 3 years for lower secondary school and 2 years for upper secondary school (MMoE, 2000; Ong 2010; Veloo Pillay, 2009). While the lower secondary level for Form 1 to 3 students (13-15 years old) emphasises general education or basic vocational education, the upper secondary level for Form 4 to 5 students (16-17 years old) is streamed according to subject areas, namely the arts, sciences, technical, and vocational streams (Seng, 2007). Teachers who serve in Malaysian schools are subject-based and are commonly known as academic teachers in primary and secondary educational institutions. Upon completion of secondary education, students can either enter the labour market or opt to enrol in Form 6, preuniversity foundation, matriculation, diploma or vocational programmes offered by the government or in private education institutions in Malaysia from which they can proceed to undergraduate programmes in universities (Mohd Noor & Symaco, 2017).

In terms of assessment structure, the students are assessed through public examinations offered at the end of each level of education (see Figure 2.3 for an overview of the education and assessment structure in Malaysia). These include:

- the Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR) at the end of Year 6;
- the Lower Secondary Assessment (PT3) at the end of Form 3;
- the Malaysia Certificate of Examination (SPM), equivalent to General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-Level at the end of Form 5; and
- the Malaysia Higher School Certificate Examination (STPM), equivalent to GCE A-Level, or the Malaysia Higher Certificate for Religious Education (STAM) at the end of Form 6.

In general, students experience a clear schooling pathway as discussed above, whereas children with disabilities are more likely to face complex institutional barriers which could significantly reduce opportunities and access to education. This issue is discussed in further detail in 2.5.5.

**Figure 2.3** Education and Assessment Structure in Malaysia



Note. Source: MMoE (2013b)

### 2.5.4 The purpose of education

Educational undertakings by the MMoE are based on the national ideology (*Rukun Negara*) proclaimed in 1969 and the National Education Philosophy (NEP) written in 1988 and revised in 1996 (MMoE, 2013b). The goal of this philosophy is to further develop the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious. The NEP states that:

Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to

God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large. (MMoE, 2013, p. 2-2)

While elements of performativity and competition are not evident in the NEP, Chong (2013) suggests that the initial economic development policy—the National Development Policy (NDP)—introduced in 1991 had created a strong orientation on human resource development for national economic stability. The NDP was eventually succeeded by the National Vision Policy (NVP) in 2001 and the National Transformation Policy (NTP) in 2010, which had a similar emphasis on developing human resources for the national economy. The revelation in the New Economic Model report in 2010 was a concern for policymakers regarding national development, as it showed that nearly 80% of the Malaysian job market is made up of unskilled workers. For this reason, a rich discourse of ‘education for the economy’ underlay the NDP, NVP, and NTP with the aim of harnessing education as a tool to make Malaysia an industrialised country with an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Chong, 2013).

As a result of the spillover impacts on education from the economic policies in Malaysia, there was a renewed emphasis on connecting education closely to industry and human resource development. To a significant degree these impacts are a result of the drive in the present Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 to produce competitive individuals. Introduced in 2013, the Blueprint aims to “provide the Malaysian youth with the necessary skills to be able to compete in the modern labour market” by outlining the five aspirations for the Malaysian education system, namely access, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency (MMoE, 2013, p. 6). It is believed that through quality education, every child in Malaysia can acquire six key attributes i.e., knowledge, thinking skills, leadership skills, bilingual proficiency, ethics and spirituality, and national identity to be globally competitive. Within these aspirations, the MMoE also places an emphasis on empowering inclusion by raising the quality of provision that will enable more children with disabilities to move towards the IE Programme. As spelled out in the second iteration of the Blueprint, the MMoE aims to

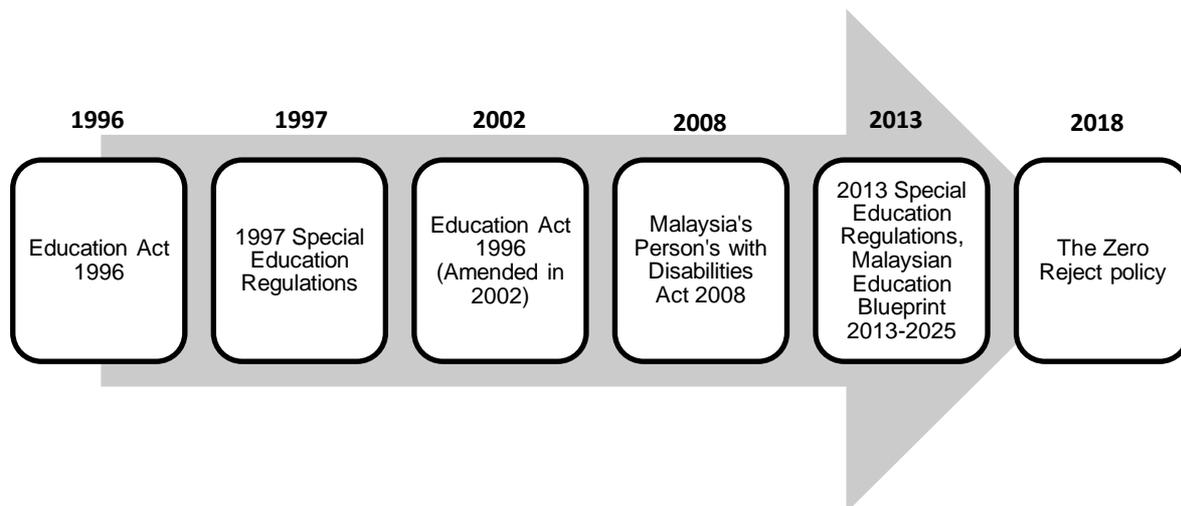
enhance programmes and increase funding provisions for physical and teaching resources for students with disabilities. This progressive move towards inclusion appears to be tied to Malaysia's Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, which affirms that special needs children are to be given the necessary support to facilitate their "full and equal participation in education" (GoM, 2008, Article 28). While these aspirations can be seen as building blocks to realise the inclusion of students with disabilities in education, the Blueprint makes no explicit mention of supporting the entry and progression of PWDs in the global workforce.

Taken together, these different policy considerations from the economic and education sectors may have resulted in tensions that are reflected within the micro level of educational settings in Malaysia, namely schools and classrooms (Jelas & Ali, 2012; Lee & Low, 2013). While it might be implicit that the same purpose of education is applied to students with disabilities through more provisions for IE, Chong (2013), for example, draws attention to the dilemmas that key policymakers face concerning their commitment to the principles of inclusion and the stringent demands for excellence that are imposed by the competitive education system in Malaysia. The notion of competition, ushered in by the education for economic discourse as discussed above, is generally measured by the standards in classrooms that benefit students who have the potential to uplift schools' academic achievements (Chong, 2013). As such, this discourse raises questions about the synergy of different policy considerations in Malaysia and, in doing so, identifies policymaking tensions and complexities as regards the realisation of an inclusive discourse. This political-economic condition is significant to this study and will be analysed in chapters 7 and 8 where it is considered in relation to the key Malaysian IE policies.

### ***2.5.5 Development of IE policy in Malaysia***

Given the centrality of IE in this research, this section provides a brief historical sketch of IE and its policies in Malaysia leading up to the current introduction of the Zero Reject policy. Figure 2.4 provides a chronological outline of the major legislative documents and policies leading to the new IE policy intended to support IE in Malaysia.

**Figure 2.4** Historical Development of Inclusive Education Policy in Malaysia



In IE the years 1926, 1946, and 1954 are important as they witnessed the development of interest in the idea of IE as religious missionaries and nongovernmental organisations established schools for students with visual and hearing impairments in Malaysia (Khairuddin & Miles, 2020). The disability movement, which sprang from the activism by the disability community of the USA and the UK in the 1960s, had created awareness among early Malaysian educational policymakers concerning the education rights of children with disabilities (Jelas & Ali, 2012). In the first few decades after gaining independence from the UK in 1957, IE movements in Malaysia were generally influenced through policy borrowing of ideas from the UK and various international contexts (Chong, 2016). As shown in Figure 2.4, the year 1996 marked the beginning of a clearer emphasis on IE in Malaysia through the country's becoming a signatory nation to the EFA in 1990 (UNESCO, 1990) and the Salamanca Statement in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement is still generally recognised as a milestone in the history of Malaysia because it brought IE into the foreground of conversations and policy ideals for the first time. This understanding of inclusion influenced policy in Malaysia, with the term IE appearing in the Education Act 1996 (GoM, 1996) and the 1997 Special Education Regulations (MMoE, 1997).

While the Salamanca Statement aims to provide quality education for “all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties” (UNESCO, 1994, p. 4), earlier integration practices to include children who were considered ‘educable’ in the UK and the USA also

significantly framed the Education Act 1996 in Malaysia (Chong, 2016). The MMoE (2017) defined 'educable' as those who are able "to manage themselves without help" and this assessment was made by a panel consisting of medical and government officials. On the one hand, children who were considered educable were provided with early intervention and were "eligible to attend the special education programme" (GoM, 1998, p. 341). On the other hand, children with severe physical disabilities, severe and profound intellectual disabilities, and multiple disabilities were referred to community-based rehabilitation centres to receive skills training provided by the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (GoM, 1998; Jelas & Ali, 2014).

Thereafter, Malaysia became a signatory nation of the CRPD in 2008 with the aim of addressing issues of segregation and discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities (Clark et al., 2011). The commitment was an impetus to Malaysia's Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 which was designed to ensure that persons and children with disabilities:

...shall not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disabilities... (GoM 2008, Article 28[1])

and

...[are] provide[d] reasonable accommodation suitable with the requirements of persons and children with disabilities in terms of, among others, infrastructure, equipment and teaching materials, teaching methods, curricula and other forms of support that meet the diverse needs of persons or children with disabilities. (GoM 2008, Article 28[2])

However, this Act has had little impact on national education policies and legal documents. It was not until 2013 that the newly amended 2013 Special Education Regulations in conjunction with the Education (Amended) Act 1996 in 2015 redefined IE as "an educational programme for a pupil with special educational needs which is attended by a pupil with special educational needs together with other pupils in the same class ..." (MMoE 2013a, paragraph 3). This form of inclusion seemed to be closely tied to the procedures of

screening, certification, intervention, placement, and a probation period to ensure children with SEN receive the best possible education based on their capabilities (MMoE, 2013a). Then, in 2019, the Zero Reject policy was introduced to enhance the previous IE policy (Azmi, 2018; Sani, 2018). The timing of the introduction was significant in that it was commissioned by the MMoE under a new government—*Pakatan Harapan* (the Alliance of Hope)—following the fall of Barisan Nasional (the National Front), the incumbent government that had ruled Malaysia for the previous 44 years (Chin, 2020; Othman & Matore, 2020). As the elected government took office, a new Minister of Education was appointed. Maszlee Malik (the then appointed Minister of Education under *Pakatan Harapan*) addressed the parliament stating that the Zero Reject policy symbolised "a new future and hope to children with special educational needs (SEN) as well as to their parents" (GoM, 2018, p. 19). Strongly influenced by SDG's fourth goal calling for inclusive and equitable education (UN, 2015), the Zero Reject policy took a dramatic turn towards rebranding the term IE through a greater inclusive framing: "2019 will be a year of great change for children with disabilities where all types of disabilities can be placed in schools" (MMoE, 2018b). In support of the new IE policy, the MMoE has outlined three main objectives: to provide disabled-friendly facilities in schools, to implement a comprehensive Special Educational Needs Programme (Holistic Model), and to offer continuous professional development courses for teachers (MMoE, 2018b).

Since 1996, despite the positive advance in policy for children with disabilities in Malaysia, there have been longstanding concerns about the reproduction of inequalities in policy when attempting to include students with disabilities in the country's educational contexts. Several studies have found that ambiguous policies with vague understandings of IE and SEN (Chong, 2016; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Kamenopoulou, 2018a), lack of funding and resources (Ibrahim, 2012; Jelas, 2010; Tie, 2011), misalignment with cultural traditions (Bailey et al., 2014; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Lee, 2010), large class sizes (Bailey et al., 2014; Lee & Low, 2013), and inadequate teacher education and in-service training in IE (Ibrahim, 2012; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Tie, 2011) may all have contributed to this situation. These challenges demonstrate inherent dilemmas, tensions, and complexities associated with IE policymaking in Malaysia.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

With IE becoming a central aspect of a broader education reform agenda across the MIC context, assumptions have been made that IE is characterised by its universal approach to policymaking across countries (Nguyen et al., 2009). As pointed out earlier, literature suggests that policies around disability and IE in Malaysia, as elsewhere, are mediated by local realities (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Kamenopoulou, 2018a). Yet, Khairuddin and Miles (2020) note that there are relatively few studies of IE policies in Malaysia that have given consideration to the complex histories, economic, political, and sociocultural dimensions on inclusive agendas that have been advanced and reproduced in policies by the Malaysian government. Three reasons account for this situation. First, these studies do not systematically investigate how IE policy moves across levels from the global to the local context. Second, they do not investigate the extent to which mechanisms of external influence interact with endogenous factors, and third, they have not examined how policy actor decisions have shaped the development of IE policy over time in Malaysia. Without such research, it may be difficult to determine whether IE policies in Malaysia challenge or reproduce educational inequalities. With concern being raised about attaining the ideals of IE in Malaysia, there is an urgent need to explicitly and systematically address the historical sediments of power that are layered within the organisation and system levels of IE policymaking. It is for this reason that this research seeks to critically examine IE policies over the past 30 years in a way that takes into account the amalgamated forces of history, politics, economy, and culture that might influence IE policymaking in Malaysia.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the metatheories and the methodological frameworks that inform this study. The chapter begins with a justification for adopting critical realism and critical theory and shows how these ontological and epistemological foundations help shed light on the nature of social reality and the ways of learning about social reality. Building on these foundations, the next section then justifies why the DHA provides a conceptual and analytical framework that is especially appropriate for examining the IE policy in Malaysia. It does so by putting forth the argument that the DHA, among the various strands in critical discourse analysis, provides appropriate tools to understand the influence of sociocultural, political, and economic agendas on the development of IE policy over time in Malaysia. Finally, the discussion in this chapter concludes by introducing the SRA and demonstrating how this approach allows an investigation of educational policymakers' strategic responses within nuances of the local context that influence how IE policy is conceived.

### **3.1 Critical realism**

Critical realism, as generally understood, is a comprehensive philosophy of knowledge that bridges the divide between positivist and constructivist paradigms in the field of disability and IE (Stylianou & Zembylas, 2020; Watson & Vehmas, 2019). The critical realist paradigm attempts to explain social events and how they have come to be by exploring the interplay between structure and agency (Bhaskar, 2008; A. J. Fletcher, 2016). In this regard, critical realism allows a deeper analysis of the relationship between the wider political, economic, and sociocultural structures (structure) and relevant education policymakers (agency) in the development of IE policy in Malaysia. This section therefore discusses critical realism's version of structure and agency before relating its importance to this research.

A key argument of critical realism is that there are structures at work in generating certain events, discourses, and individual actions (Danermark et al., 2002; Sayer, 2000). Bhaskar, the founder of critical realism, explains that these structures, which may not be directly observable or experienced, are embedded in a different realm of reality (Bhaskar, 1978, 1998). This ontological assumption is grounded in the overarching concept of stratified

reality (Liphie, 2012). Drawing on this concept, Bhaskar further stratifies reality into three different layers: the *empirical*, the *actual*, and the *real* (Bhaskar, 1978; Danermark et al., 2002; Sayer, 1992).

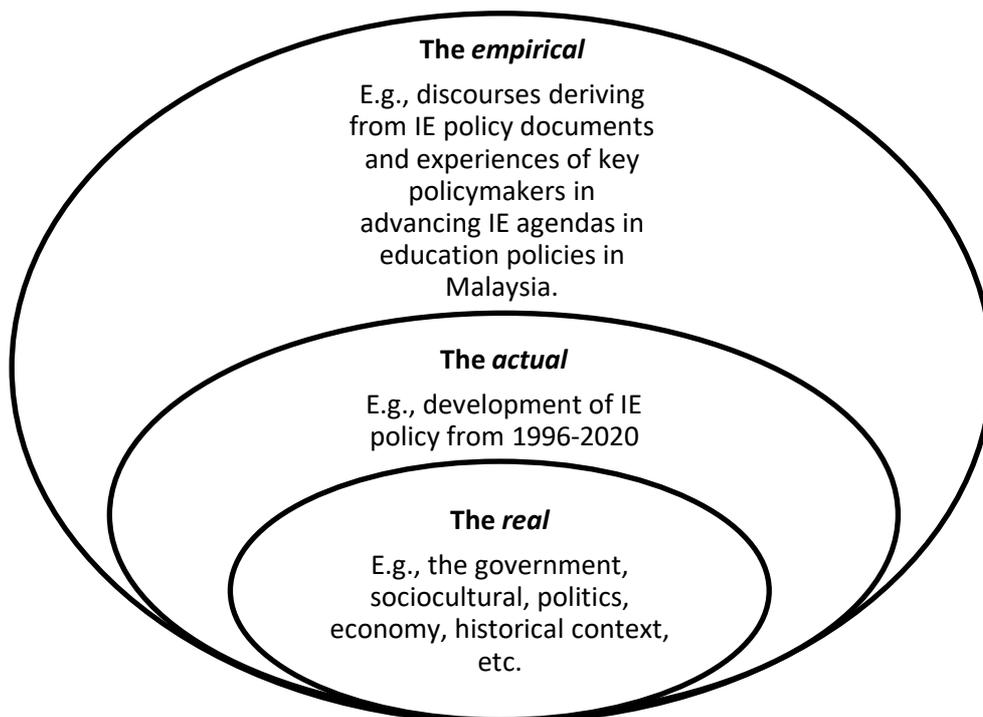
The first layer of the stratified reality is held to be the *empirical*, which constitutes humans' observations and experiences of events (Sayer, 2000). According to Danermark et al. (2002), this is the most accessible layer of reality and is often mediated through the lens of human experience and conceptions held about the human experience as discourse. In the case of this research, the *empirical* consists of discourses deriving from IE policy documents and experiences of key policymakers relevant in advancing IE agendas in education policies in Malaysia. It is knowledge at this layer that constructivists rely on when they explain reality. Critical realists reject this reliance on only the *empirical*, as it does not account for the reality that exists independently of human knowledge of it (Bhaskar, 1978). The second layer of reality—the *actual*—consists of what is happening. Danermark et al. (2002) refer to this layer as events that objectively occur independently of subjective perceptions. Positivists rely on knowledge derived at this layer of reality whereby the world is positioned as a constant conjunction of events (Bhaskar, 2008). One example of an event under investigation in my research is the development of IE policy in Malaysia from 1996 to 2018.

For critical realists, working with data and facts at the *empirical* and *actual* levels alone generates inconstant and unreliable knowledge which they refer to as *transitive* dimensions of knowledge (Bhaskar, 1978). As Sayer (2000) argues, knowledge at these layers such as human conceptions and events of the world frequently changes and is influenced by structures or powers of objects. In light of this argument, critical realists hold the view that *empirical* and *actual* knowledge can be explored further to uncover what is responsible for people's experiences and observations of the world. Because events at the *actual* are generated by the complex interaction of structures and mechanisms that are activated at the *real*, a deeper explanation of how specific events unfold needs to be sought by accessing the deepest layer of reality—the *real* (Bhaskar, 1978).

Knowledge at the *real* level is seen as relatively stable; hence Bhaskar (1978) refers to this

domain as the *intransitive* dimension of knowledge. As discussed briefly in chapter 2, this layer contains structures that possess “generative mechanisms” (Bhaskar, 1978, p. 2) or “causal powers” (Sayer, 2000, p. 14) that either constrain or enable events and experiences at the *actual* and *empirical* (Carter & New, 2004; Houston, 2010; Sayer, 2000). While what constitutes this layer might be hard to pin down, it is this layer of reality that this study attempts to access, because the causal powers in the *real* have the potential to influence events and experiences of IE policymaking in the *actual* and the *empirical* realms. There are various lists of what constitutes such structures. As for some critical realists, Parker’s (1992, pp. 38-39) list of structures includes “physical coercion, material organisation of space, subject positioning, and the habitual and physical orientation of individual to discourse” (p. 38-39), Willig (1999) includes biochemical, economic, and social structures, and Cromby and Nightingale (1999) include material, embodiment, and institutional power. In the context of this research, its list includes the wider political, economic, and cultural structures as evidenced in studies from various MICs relevant to the Malaysian context inherent in the IE policy space explored in chapter 2. Figure 3.1 represents a summary of the three layers of reality as interpreted by this study.

**Figure 3.1** *The Three Layers of Reality Adapted from Bhaskar (1978)*



Alongside the belief that structures have an influence on the actions of individuals, critical realists recognise the unique powers of human agency to (re)shape social structures (see also Houston, 2001). This idea is drawn from Archer's (1996) analytical dualism, and developed within the framework of Bhaskar's critical realism, which acknowledges that both structure and agency have their own unique properties and power to be mutually influential. In Archer's (1996) thinking, agency refers to the reflexive, creative, innovative, and purposeful actions of people. As such, critical realism draws attention to the social structures and their relationship to agency as a way of explaining choices people make in their daily lives through individuals' or groups' engagement in practices, discourses, and institutions to either reproduce or transform the current structures (Archer, 1996). It should be stressed that people are considered reflexive actors even if structures are capable of constraining or enabling their actions (Archer, 1996). For this reason, critical realists argue that social emancipation is dependent on the attempts to transform structures, thus emphasising the integral role of human agency in the emancipation of society (López & Potter, 2001; Manicas, 2003).

Based on these premises, Bhaskar and Danermark (2006) argument is that critical realism is particularly well-suited to education policy and disability research because it supports an emancipatory move within the process of research. Critical realism provides a way to identify hidden generative mechanisms or causal powers, how they operate, and the conditions under which they are activated in influencing IE policy formulation. Qu's (2019) work demonstrates how critical realism has been employed to identify deep causes of resistance to inclusion in the reinterpretations of IE in policies in China, thus informing prospective policies that can develop effective solutions to bring about authentic change. Adding to this element, critical realism enables researchers to consider the structural and agential mechanisms entrenched in policy spaces from a context-sensitive perspective. Archer (1996) insists that the elements of structure and agency in real life are intertwined and inseparable from context. In parallel with Archer's work, Qu (2020), Alenaizi (2017), and Mboyo (2019) demonstrate the value of applying critical realism in different MICs contexts in the field of policy studies, thus bringing greater contextual understanding to education policymaking processes. In terms of this research, critical realism highlights the potential for exploring relevant key policymakers' discourses and policy texts in Malaysia concerning the

educational inclusion of children with disabilities—issues which are invariably entangled with their context (Corcoran et al., 2019). It is this reinterpretation of the idea of IE in policy texts in specific contexts that makes critical realism particularly relevant to the field of policy and disability research.

Nevertheless, the challenge of engaging in an inquiry that draws on a critical realist approach lies in ensuring that the inquiry is informed by a systematic method that can potentially distinguish the structures and causal mechanisms that are at work (Danermark et al., 2002; Sayer, 2000). As Bhaskar (1978) puts it, “structures are not spontaneously apparent in the observable pattern of events; they can only be identified through the practical and theoretical work of the social sciences” (p. 2). To address this methodological gap, this research brings in Reisigl and Wodak’s (2009) DHA to serve as both a conceptual and an analytical tool for IE policy analysis in Malaysia. Before describing the analytical and theoretical concepts of the DHA, the next section first explores its epistemological foundation, which adheres to the sociophilosophical orientation of critical theory.

### **3.2 Critical theory**

Critical theory is broadly viewed as a German-based interdisciplinary research programme that has fused philosophical and social scientific reflection with emancipatory research intentions (Vandenbergh, 2021; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Historically, critical theory can be traced back to the influence of the Frankfurt School and Jürgen Habermas (Forchtner, 2021; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; van Dijk, 2011). The core concept of critical theory follows from Horkheimer’s (1937) (the leader of the Frankfurt School) definition, which recognises that social power relations and interests are embedded in society and reinforced through the production of knowledge. Thus, as with critical realism, it attempts to critique and change society by examining the structures of domination and oppression that impede the realisation of a just society (Klikauer, 2016). For these reasons, critical theory offers a multidisciplinary approach for social theory which combines perspectives drawn from political economy, sociology, cultural theory, philosophy, anthropology, and history to serve as an instrument for social transformation (Kellner, 1990). By adopting critical theory as an epistemological framework, this research can be potentially emancipatory, as it attempts to

identify and challenge hidden assumptions and dominant ideologies of existing forms of institutional arrangement that have governed the development of IE in Malaysia through critique. This section first discusses the central tenets of critical theory before aligning its significance to the DHA and this research.

As noted previously, an important insight from critical theory is the role of critique in the research process. Critique essentially is a method that seeks to generate and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of social domination by “revealing the contradictions of claim and context” (Antonio, 1981, p. 59; Reisigl, 2018). Simply put, such a theory aims not only to describe and explain, but also to question assumptions (Bohman, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). What makes the concept of critique of particular interest to this study is the researcher’s positioning and the acknowledgement that a critique can by no means draw on a disinterested and outside position on the part of the researcher. As a shift from positivism which frames social research as being value-free, critical theory highlights the fact that the researcher and research system are socially and historically embedded (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).

Consequently, researchers who are motivated by critical theory have to be aware that their work is guided by social, economic, and political motives just as any other academic work is. Similarly, critical theorists reject the constructivist paradigm. Because of the paradigm’s firm belief in multiple realities of social construction (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011), critical theorists assert that interpretivism fails to identify worldviews and underlying power structures that influence them (Horkheimer, 1982). This assertion suggests that both positivism and constructivism have a tendency to disregard the value of modified subjectivity i.e., that the researcher and society are influenced by their own perceptions and experiences which are manipulated by power structures such as economy, culture, politics, ability, and others (Bronner, 2011; Howell, 2013). Critical theory therefore underscores this importance of improving understanding of how things have come to be and it attempts to seek truth beyond surface appearances to offer a more nuanced critique of the area under investigation (Bronner, 2011; Howell, 2013).

In exploring the alignment of the critical theory to the DHA, the term “critical” in critical

theory was first used to describe an approach called critical linguistics, which has a common association to the Habermasian epistemology of critical theory (Fowler et al., 1979; Kress & Hodge, 1979). Scholars who adopted the Habermasian stance argued, among other ideas, that the usage of language could contribute to a mystification of social events that could be elucidated by a systematic analysis. A missing phrase and/or word, for example, can be used as a means to conceal reference to an agent (Chilton, 2004). One of the most important principles of critical linguistics, and which contributed to the DHA of critical discourse analysis (CDA), is the analysis of both opaque and transparent structural relationships of domination, inequality, power, and control in language usage. It is important to acknowledge that the CDA is often rooted in Foucauldian concepts. Foucault's ideas on power, discourse, and knowledge are central to the development of CDA, and many CDA scholars draw heavily on his works to analyse the discursive practices of power and dominance in various social contexts (Foucault, 1980). Thus, CDA can be seen as a branch of critical theory that is influenced by Foucault's ideas, and serves as a way of operationalizing and applying his concepts in the analysis of language and communication (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In other words, the DHA of CDA, which works from a critical theory perspective, attempts to critically examine social inequality as manifested in spoken and/or written language (or discourse). This approach thus echoes critical theorists' and Habermas' claim in particular that "language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. Insofar as the legitimizations of power relations ... are not articulated, language is also ideological" (Habermas, 1967, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 52). In the context of this research, the critical approach of the DHA enables an understanding of how IE policy language works in the constitution and dissemination of knowledge, in the organisation of social structures or in the exercise of power.

It is equally crucial to justify why this research is consistent with the critical theory epistemology. Critical theory—a further congruence with critical realism—holds that the research process must be treated within its specific sociohistorical context (Harvey, 1990). This research aims to interrogate how existing structural relations embedded in the Malaysian context may influence the development of IE policy in Malaysia from a historical dimension. Second, critical theorists attempt to reveal and demystify power structures that affect "those who suffer" (Wetherell et al., 2001, p. 383). This research demonstrates this

position in the way that it seeks to make visible the invisible oppressive structures that may create unequal educational and social outcomes concerning children with disabilities. Finally, critical theorists assert that it is necessary for researchers to make their research interests, values, and position as transparent as possible (van Leeuwen, 2007). In agreement with critical theory, the researcher's own positionality was articulated in chapter 1, which detailed the intent to adopt a critical stance in examining the development of IE policy in Malaysia. This research locates its analysis within the paradigm of critical theory, as it seeks to root out hidden assumptions, ideologies, and power relations that shape the development of IE policies in Malaysia for emancipatory purposes.

### **3.3 Discourse-Historical Approach**

The DHA is one of several relatively consolidated conceptual and methodological streams that have emerged since the early 1990s within the CDA community (see Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018). As a point of departure from other approaches to CDA, the DHA is distinguished by its commitment to "transcend[ing] the pure linguistic dimension and to include more or less systematically the historical, political, sociological and/or psychological dimensions in the analysis and interpretation of a specific discursive occasion" (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 23). In particular, this approach pays attention to the influence of the historical dimension on discursive practices by situating specific discourses within their sociohistorical context. Thus, the DHA enables analysts to better explore the ways in which specific discourses have been subject to diachronic change (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). As such, the DHA appears to represent the most appropriate method for achieving the research study's objective to interrogate how the conceptualisation of IE in Malaysia has been reconceptualised and evolved over the past 30 years in policy texts. To understand how the DHA works, it is necessary for this section to define the concept of discourse before exploring the analytical concepts of the DHA.

Within the DHA, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) define discourse as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world" (p. 12), while Foucault (1972) also includes the idea of the invisible such as what is "never-said" and "not-said" (p. 43) as other forms of discourse. Discourse can be expressed through "a set of meanings, metaphors,

representations, images, stories, statements, and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events” (Burr, 2015, pp. 75-76). As such, and not just in words, different discourses will construct and portray a particular phenomenon in different lights. In addition, Jäger (2001) notes that discourse can be viewed as “the flow of knowledge – and/or all societal knowledge stored throughout time which determines individual and collective doing and/or formative action that shapes society, thus exercising power” (p. 34). Similarly, Gee (2004) sees discourse as plural and embedded in personal, institutional, and cultural practices. Collectively, these understandings ensure that discourse should never be seen as neutral but as always reflecting underlying ideologies and assumptions about “our world, identities and social relations” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 12). It is this role of discourse in the (re)production of discrimination and inequalities and the way discourse obscures such power relations that forms the interest of the DHA (Forchtner, 2011). That said, it is held that the distinction between the discursive and the extra-discursive is analytical and, as such, cannot be demonstrated through empirical analysis of texts (Sims-Schouten & Riley, 2014). Indeed, this understanding of the ideational-material interaction makes the DHA's epistemological position compatible with that of critical realism.

In the field of policy studies, a policy is considered as a textually mediated nexus of social practices, and close textual analysis is therefore of considerable importance to any analysis of policy. The toolkit offered by the DHA has been employed successfully in policy analysis on several previous occasions (Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2010; Savski, 2016; Unger, 2013; Wodak & Fairclough, 2010). Along with policy studies, it has been applied in areas such as IE (Dumenden & English, 2013) and disability studies (Grue, 2019). By basing its critique on a foundational notion of emancipation, the DHA seeks to reveal possible power structures that may perpetuate broader social marginalisation for certain groups (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Although not unique to the DHA, its core orientation as a socially transformative force is echoed in critical theory and critical realism. For the DHA, policy language is not powerful on its own, but rather is a way of acquiring and maintaining power by "powerful" individuals. The DHA therefore critiques those with the means and opportunities to initiate or support positive change in society (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 88).

As noted earlier, the ways in which a policy is constructed and understood, within a temporal context (at this moment in time), require a clear understanding of the influence of the policy's diachronic relevance (across time). Bourdieu (1991) argues that any attempts to analyse political discourse by relying on utterances alone without taking into consideration the sociopolitical contexts under which the discourse is produced would have been meaningless. Effective analysis of political discourse requires the researcher to move beyond pure linguistic analysis and to systematically include the historical, economic, political, and social-cultural conditions to the interpretation of specific discourse events. Thus, this study employs Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) DHA because it includes the analysis of the temporal context within which the IE policies have been developed. The DHA considers the analysis of context at three levels, as summarised below:

- 1) Text analysis: The immediate language and cotextual aspects, including discursive strategies, are examined;
- 2) Intertextual and interdiscursive analyses: The intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between texts and discourses are analysed; and
- 3) Extra-discursive analysis: The extra-linguistic social variables (sociopolitical and historical context) and institutional frames of specific "context of situation" are explored.

The following subsections aim to present a coherent analytical framework of the DHA to support the discussion of data analysis in the next chapter. They provide a detailed overview of the key analytical concepts underlying each of the three levels presented above and offer examples where necessary.

### **3.3.1 Text analysis**

Texts are seen as concrete representations of abstract forms of knowledge (discourse) in which they can serve as mediational means (Lemke, 1995; Scollon, 2008). In other words, social actors may utilise semiotic resources such as language or images as means to perform specific social activities. Texts are produced as a result of this process and are therefore key evidence of social actions and practices. Policy texts, for example, can mediate several types of social actions such as specifying guidelines (Fairclough, 1995), amending (Savski, 2016) or controlling behaviour (Sandby-Thomas, 2011). In this sense, policy texts become meaningful

only when used as mediational means. Without an associated social action, a text is only an artefact, a series of markings on paper or in digital form, which may be said to be representations of ideas at most (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The ultimate focus of textual analysis in this study is therefore to examine how policy texts function as mediational means (Lemke, 1995; Scollon, 2008).

In order to access an understanding of the particular types of social activities carried out, the textual analysis seeks to analyse the discursive strategies employed in individual policy texts. For Wodak and Meyer (2009), a strategy is defined as a “more or less intentional plan of social and/or discursive practices employed to accomplish a certain social, political, psychological, or linguistic aim” (p. 70). More specifically, discursive strategies in texts can be understood as “systematic ways of using languages” to achieve a particular goal (Wodak & Meyer, p. 207). At this level of detailed analysis, this study pays particular attention to the use of five discursive strategies outlined by Reisigl and Wodak (2009, p. 94) to identify instances of accessible linguistic means used as part of wider strategies (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1** *A Selection of Discursive Strategies*

<b>Strategy type</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
Nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/events, and processes/actions
Predication	Discursive qualification attributed to social actors, objects/phenomena/events, and processes/actions
Intensification or mitigation	Modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the illocutionary force
Argumentation	Justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness
Perspectivisation	Positioning a speaker’s or writer’s point of view and expressing involvement or distance

*Note.* Adapted from *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2nd ed., p. 94) by Reisigl and Wodak, Sage. Copyright 2009 Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak.

As Table 3.1 indicates, whereas nomination investigates how persons, objects, phenomena, events, processes, and actions are referred to linguistically, the predication strategy explores the negative and positive qualities that are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena, events, and processes (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The many nominations and predications as discovered in the data in chapters 5, 6, and 7, in addition to other instances, are in many cases key points of ideologies. As an example, a sentence usually contains semantic roles (Schirmer et al., 2012). Semantic roles are defined as the actual role that a participant performs in a particular context expressed through the arguments of a verb in a text (Priyanti, 2018). Through this identification, one can determine the given semantic roles such as agent and patient assigned to the participants. Agent refers to the “doer” or the instigator in a sentence initiating an action. The patient, on the other hand, is the participant who experiences the effect of the action typically carried out by the agent. Another notable example is when an IE policy text refers to students as ‘normal pupils’ or labels certain individuals in terms of their disabilities. This choice of language might thus invoke the discourse of othering by using categorisation as a means to differentiate the in groups and out groups (Dervin, 2016). Corker (1999) considers this kind of removal of personhood as dehumanising. He maintains that the construction of people with disabilities’ identity through the removal of personhood and the act of placing a central focus on the disability could perpetuate cultural oppression and marginalisation as well as discrimination (Corker, 1999; Peters, 1999). Such categorisation would then often be considered as a basis for different treatment in terms of education access and services.

In addition to nomination and predication, intensification strategies are identified when the illocutionary force of statements is strengthened (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). These may take the form of modal expressions or grammatical discourse markers such as “must” in “We *must* do this” or can be reflected through nominations or predications such as the use of the term “compulsory education”. Mitigation, on the other hand, is a strategy that is used to reduce the strength of statements (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Mitigation of statements is usually expressed through the use of modality, discourse markers, or in certain cases, the insertion of various conditional constructions such as “*Where possible* all students’ needs *should* be met in normal school” (Tufue-Dolgoy, 2010, p. 67). Furthermore, the implicit or

explicit use of particular terms can also indicate perspectivisation or the presence of different and competing voices within a policy text. An illustrative example can be taken from the current Zero Reject policy in Malaysia; there the allusion to an inclusive philosophy such as the “Zero Reject” and references to previous laws and policies that emanate from a special education framework might be a representation of a plural voice in education planning which has dominated IE policy in Malaysia for the past 30 years.

These different perspectives also become evident when argumentation strategies are investigated. Argumentation is a process used to justify political inclusion or exclusion and is reflected in certain “topoi” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Wodak states that the term topoi has come to be used to refer to "recurrent argument schemes which are intended to make the audience draw a particular inference" (Wodak, 2006, p. 136). In this sense, Wodak considers topoi to be implicit rules of conclusion that allow a logical shift from the argument to the conclusion or claim (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Such analysis entails identifying a particular claim behind a text and identifying the presupposed assumption or knowledge—the topos—that is needed to explain certain social actions, ideas, and declarations within the policy texts.

Further, Reyes (2011) argues that argumentation is enacted through the process of legitimation and that there is a need to analyse the legitimation strategies used to justify particular viewpoints put forward in the selected policy texts. It is for this reason that this research uses van Leeuwen’s (2007) typology of discursive forms alongside the analysis of argumentation strategies. van Leeuwen (2007) views legitimation as a mechanism by which policies are justified through attachment to dominant norms and principles to their audience and are therefore closely related to the establishment of warrants. Warrants can be understood as the justification, authority, or reasonable grounds established for some action to either obtain or maintain power, to achieve social acceptance, to improve community relationships, to gain popularity, or others (Reyes, 2011). This establishment of warrant, van Leeuwen (2007, p. 92) further proposes, can be achieved discursively through four modes of legitimation, as listed below:

- 1) Authorisation: legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, and

- law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested;
- 2) Moral evaluation: legitimation by reference to value systems;
  - 3) Rationalisation: legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalised social action, and to the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity; and
  - 4) Mythopoesis: legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish nonlegitimate actions.

Such forms of legitimacy may be instantiated individually or in combination to not only legitimise, but also to delegitimise and critique. Thus, such typology is an invaluable guide for this study to consider the ways in which the legitimation of IE policy is advanced through one or more of these strategies.

### **3.3.2 *Intertextual and interdiscursive analyses***

Building on the textual analysis, the second level of analysis deals with external texts and discourses that are linked to the actual texts under investigation. In Wodak's (2001) work, the DHA considers intertextual and interdiscursive analyses of relationships between texts and discourses based on the extra-linguistic variables, the history of an institution, and the situational frames that surround them. By adopting these forms of analyses, this study signals the need to explore how texts and discourses change in relation to sociopolitical change.

According to Reisigl and Wodak (2009), intertextuality refers to how texts relate to other texts, both in the past and in the present. Fairclough (1992) echoes this idea when he states that "intertextuality is basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth" (p. 84). Policy texts have distinctive technocratic language and intertextuality often comes into play through implicit or direct reference to other texts (McKenna & Graham, 2000). The implication is therefore that policy texts are not suddenly produced (or might be), but are always a response to existing texts in history. Such intertextual borrowing in policy discourse works by referring to a topic, event, catch phrases, or a main actor, allusions or evocations, transferring main arguments from one text

to the next, and so on (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). As such, while making these references, discourses from older texts are recontextualised and reconceptualised to construct legitimacy for contemporary policy debate. This mosaic of policy knowledge and meaning may then influence the construction of a policy (Grewal, 2008). In the context of this research, such analysis can potentially elucidate the dynamic processes of recontextualisation and reconceptualisation of different texts within the selected IE policy texts (McCormick, 2012). This process, in turn, could account for the ways in which IE policy texts are produced in relation to specific social and discursive practices drawn from the international and local contexts.

On the other hand, interdiscursivity is primarily concerned with the relationships between discourses. The interdiscursivity of a text, according to Fairclough (2001), is “a question of which discourses it draws upon, and how it works into particular articulations” (p. 124). Within a policy text, the process in the DHA involves: (1) identifying the key themes of a text, and (2) identifying the point of view from which they are expressed (Fairclough, 2001). In other words, if interdiscursivity is conceived of as primarily topic-related (e.g., discourse on human rights), it is possible to observe that discourse on IE can be linked to topics or subtopics of other discourses such as rights or medical discourses (see Fulcher, 1989; Thapaliya, 2018). Such connections are established in different ways through the use of academic literature and theories, scientific knowledge, other policy documents, narratives, jargon, catch phrases, and others, which are issues of interest addressed in policy documents (Grewal, 2008). As policy texts are polemical in nature, they aim to persuade their audience to adopt a particular set of views or to attract their attention towards a particular set of issues (Bacchi, 2000). In so doing, policy documents attempt to incorporate and articulate a combination of different discourses found in individual texts (Pinto, 2011; van Aswegen, 2020). By adopting interdiscursivity in its analysis, this research can potentially reveal the entanglement of different discourses which are drawn upon within the policy discourse in advancing an agenda for IE in Malaysia.

It is important to point out that discourse, as with text, is open, thus likely enabling the presence of different voices produced by different actors at many points within policy

discourses (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 89). This research therefore pays equal attention to and attempts to describe the prominence of the voices of different actors through intertextual and interdiscursive analyses and the ideologies that are voiced through them.

### **3.3.3 *Extra-discursive analysis***

While the first two levels of the DHA are primarily concerned with the discursive factors, the third highlights the influential aspects of extra-discursive factors. Sayer (2000) treats “the material dimensions of social life” as having extra-discursive ontology (p. 18), an idea that resonates with Bhaskar’s (1978) critical realist notion of structure. In his view, social structures in our contexts engender generative mechanisms or causal powers to impact discursive practices. In this study, the extra-discursive analysis is an important step in the DHA, as it explicitly acknowledges and explains the relationship between policy texts and their social structural context. Rooting out these invisible mechanisms of influence and social structures requires the researcher to rely on two central reasoning tools commonly used in critical-realist informed research—abduction and retroduction.

Abductive reasoning refers to the process of “identifying and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one’s results” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). It is a form of inference in that the researcher seeks to develop as broadly as possible an understanding of what potential mechanisms and structures could be relevant from the literature, and then to iteratively test these against new information (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006). Through abductive reasoning, the study’s analysis begins by referring to the review of the Malaysian context and previous research in the MICs context for indications of extra-discursive elements (see chapter 2). This process is important because this study seeks to explore as broadly as possible the factors that might be relevant in shaping the discursive practices in the selected policy texts (Winslade, 2005). In the context of this research, these elements include the historical, political, economic, and sociocultural contexts within which IE policy texts in Malaysia are embedded (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999; Willig, 1999).

By re-evaluating these possible extra-discursive mechanisms in the light of the new information gathered, the researcher proceeds to employ retroduction. Retroductive

reasoning is a complementary tool of analysis that 'moves backwards' from the knowledge of one thing to knowledge of something else. It involves advancing from empirical observation to a conceptualisation of the transfactual conditions (i.e., to clarify the basic prerequisites or conditions for events). In other words, thinking about "what makes X possible?" is done by asking of observed phenomena the transcendental question "what must be true for this to be the case?" (Bhaskar, 1989). This pattern of thinking moves between theory and practice to "rely on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one's results" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Doing so requires returning to the earlier step of abduction for indications of extra-discursive variables, for example, to the potential transnational and local structures and mechanisms that influenced IE policy formation processes to find the "best fit" explanation to account for that particular phenomenon.

Although the DHA provides researchers with an overall understanding of the historical and sociopolitical influence on policy formulation, it does have a notable limitation. Importantly, the DHA, as with some CDA, is geared towards a more structuralist analysis of discourse. In other words, the DHA makes no ontological distinction between agency and structure, thus allowing room for researchers to neglect aspects of agency (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Knops, 2014; Shannon, 2019). This lack of concern about the agential mechanism may then result in making the enactment of agential powers and their choices impossible to analyse. Researchers need to be aware of such a limitation and it is therefore advocated that the DHA follows the principle of methodological triangulation, enabling the combination of one or more methods of analysis in one study (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Sandby-Thomas, 2011; Savski, 2016). As discussed above, policy is an array of spaces where various key actors, social practices, discourses, and ideologies meet. This array necessitates a broader view, one which is able not only to acknowledge the power of language, but also to give primacy to researching the substance of the relationship between agency and structure. It is for this reason that this research draws on the SRA within a critical realist ontology alongside the DHA to ensure that questions of discourse, structure, and agency are properly attended to. The remainder of this chapter therefore introduces the conceptual and analytical tools of the SRA that further facilitate the analysis of the research data that is detailed in the next chapter.

### 3.4 Strategic-Relational Approach

The SRA represents one of a number of attempts to explain the relations between structure and agency in critical discourse and policy studies (Jessop, 2005; Knops, 2014; Sandby-Thomas, 2011; Shannon, 2019). The influence of the critical realist ontology is reflected in the SRA's distinctive understanding of structure and agency in that it seeks to move from a dichotomy between examining structures, on the one hand, and the free will of agents, on the other, to a dialectic relationship between agency and structures (Hay, 2002; Jessop, 2005). In other words, SRA offers an analytic framework that allows both structure and agency to be analysed separately while also recognising the effects of structures on people's actions and the role of human agency in the reproduction and transformation of social structures (Hay, 2002; Houston, 2010; Jessop, 2005; Knops, 2014; Lopes Cardozo & Shah, 2016; Shannon, 2019).

Within the SRA, agency is conceptualised in terms of "strategic actors" that are both conscious and reflexive, in that they are able to act strategically within their "structural selectivity" to pursue a particular agenda (Jessop, 2005). Strategies, as Hay (2002) notes, represent "intentional conduct[s]" even if these intentions are not always readily identified, and actors have a partial understanding of the structures within which their strategies are formulated (p. 128). In consequence, an actor will make a strategic assessment of the possible courses of action to either maintain or transform the current structures (Tikly, 2015). An important added dimension to this assessment is the structures or contexts in which actions will take place. Hay (2002) points out that "to act strategically ... is to project the likely consequences of different courses of action and, in turn, to judge the contours of the terrain" (p. 132). In assessing the contours of the terrain, Hay (2002) maintains that structures are strategically selective in that they will encourage or discourage actors to perform certain strategies over others in order to allow a given set of intentions to be realised. Hence, while people are considered as reflexive actors, it is suggested that structures are capable of constraining or enabling their actions (Bhaskar, 1978; Sayer, 2000). It is also necessary to highlight that different actors confronted by the same strategically selective context may not necessarily opt for the same strategy (Knops, 2014). In this sense, the same structure is considered as both objective and at the same time subjective, as it can be perceived, enacted, and experienced differently by different agents. Their choices and

the effects of their actions will depend on the specific societal positions that they hold in the system, the resources they control, and their capacity to monitor what they are doing and its effects (Jessop, 2005). In this study, the SRA offers a useful way to engage in active reflection of the key policymakers' desired courses of action (agency) within their enablers/constraints (structure).

What is particularly distinctive about SRA is the concept of "discursive selectivity", which acknowledges the role of policy discourse in influencing strategies (Hay, 2002). In a similar manner to that of structural selectivity, discursive selectivity refers to the constraints and opportunities inscribed in particular forms of discourse (Hay, 2002). In this way, researchers can observe how discourse draws on social, cultural, political, and economic imaginaries in the pursuit of strategic selectivity to give coherence to policy visions and goals (Jessop & Sum, 2016). This thesis puts forward the argument that relevant policymakers' selection of strategies is "discursively selective", whereby policy formulations are shaped depending on their agendas. However, as with strategy, context does not determine which particular ideas an actor chooses to hold (Sandby-Thomas, 2011; Savski, 2016). Rather, reflexive and strategic actors can assess the efficacy of particular ideas that enable them to best realise their intentions. This point of analysis further strengthens the ability for researchers to uncover underlying agendas about the IE policy under investigation and the capacity which the strategic actors have, collectively or individually, to either reproduce or transform hegemonic interests with respect to IE. Thus, adopting the SRA in this study allows for consideration of the interactions between discursive selectivity and agency which, in turn, enables examination of how the privileging of some political strategies over others is articulated and translated into policy discourses to achieve certain outcomes or objectives (Shannon, 2019). Such enactment of agency can be identified and investigated through research methods such as elite interviewing and document analysis, an area which this study returns to in chapter 4.

In the context of this research, the pairing of the DHA and SRA conceptual and analytical frameworks opens up the possibility for an examination of the strategies employed by key policymakers in relation to the wider historical, economic, political, and social-cultural

structures that influence the development of IE policy in the Malaysian context. Again, these processes fit with the abductive and retroductive reasonings outlined in the previous section. When SRA is used concurrently with the DHA at the extra-discursive level of analysis, stratified inferences of possible economic, sociocultural, and political influences that either enable or constrain the choices key policymakers have to enact their agency can be made through retroductive reasoning. The use of SRA also enables the DHA to facilitate a greater understanding of the complex relationship between the historical dimension, hegemonic interests, and agential mechanisms (Jessop, 2005). This combination also allows the explanation of time and space for actors to strategically navigate around emergent structures from the past so that strategies can be reformulated to overcome structural constraints. In doing so, such processes can account for how contextual realities in the local context influence the strategic actions of education policymakers over time and thus they enable the identification of “powerful, even hegemonic discourse(s)” within the context of this study (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 15).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the metatheoretical foundations and the methodological frameworks that underpin this study. The ontological and epistemological foundations that inform this research included an examination of critical realism and critical theory. The DHA was introduced as both a conceptual and analytic tool to conduct policy analysis that takes into account the linguistic and sociohistorical contexts within which IE policy texts are embedded. Finally, this chapter concluded by exploring the SRA which aims to examine the interplay between structure and agency within the policymaking process. It was argued that an analysis of agency would provide an understanding of the educational policymakers’ strategic responses within nuances of the local context in relation to the educational inclusion of children with disabilities in Malaysia. Therefore, this chapter has outlined both the epistemological and ontological foundations of this study and the conceptual and analytical frameworks used to guide the analysis of the processes and motivations behind IE policy articulations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

This chapter aims to outline the methodology and methods that guided the collection and analysis of data in this research. The first section begins with a justification for employing a historical case study design and how such a methodological framework provides a rich and detailed description of the processes, changes, and development of IE policy in Malaysia from 1996 to 2018. Building on this research design, the subsequent sections detail the use of documents research and online semistructured interviews as methods to obtain data before justifying the selection of document sources and research participants for this study. This chapter then moves on to demonstrate how data sources are managed and analysed in this study. Finally, this chapter concludes by discussing the ethical considerations of this research.

### **4.1 Historical case study**

Chapter 1 provided a brief introduction to the research by indicating that an examination of the historical shifts in the development of IE policy in Malaysia makes a valuable case study for the future of IE policymaking in the country. This section builds on the aforementioned introduction by justifying why a historical case study design is a particularly well-suited methodological framework for examining this complex phenomenon.

Case studies with a historical orientation, commonly known as historical case studies, encourage researchers to investigate what, why, and how certain phenomena such as events, programmes or organisations have transformed over a period of time (Gerring, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Beyond producing a chronological listing of events, this research design focuses on describing the shifts and changes to a phenomenon between specific time periods (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Hence, historical case studies can be highly valuable when examining studies related to change, process, continuity or development (Widdersheim, 2018). In contrast with a synchronic case study, which is primarily concerned with snapshot-like studies that are limited to singular moments such as the present, a historical case study adopts both a historical and contemporary view to provide a rich, detailed, and “thick description” (Stake, 2006, p. 450) of a complex phenomenon (Bryman, 2016). It does so by compartmentalising a single phenomenon into separate timelines, thus

enabling researchers to study particularities specific to each phase (Sabido, 2019). In the research area related to policy discourse and IE, historical case studies are common. For example, some available historical analyses focusing on international IE policy for individuals with disabilities posit an explanation for “how” IE policy came into being, “why” IE policy developed when it did, and “what” changes have occurred in the policy over time (Peter, 2007; Shevlin, 2019). Thus, in this study, a historical case study appears to be a suitable way to provide thick descriptions of the development of IE policy in Malaysia through three time periods determined according to its significant shifts. Such a compartmentalised and systematic investigation was deemed necessary to thoroughly examine the intricate and complex processes of inclusion and education policymaking over the past 30 years.

Another feature of a historical case study design that makes it especially useful to this research is that such a design engages in an in-depth inquiry into a phenomenon within its contextual realities (Widdersheim, 2018; Yin, 2009). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue that historical case studies that consider the influence of contextual realities are often key to understanding the historical shifts of a phenomenon. Through this process, the researcher is urged to identify, analyse, and explain possible contextual factors that have influenced or have been influenced by such shifts between determined time periods (Widdersheim, 2018; Yin, 2009). Without a clear understanding of, for example, the influence and nuances of the sociocultural, political, and economic contexts, Hyatt (2013) argues that analysis of any texts of policy documents can only be partial. By situating the analysis of policy texts within their context, the researcher can therefore provide contextualised explanations in a way that throws light on the formation and reproduction of policy. In the context of this study, a historical case study considered the historical context and sociopolitical processes in relation to the development of IE policy in Malaysia. This contextualisation provided opportunities for contextual issues surrounding IE policy’s change and development to be carefully explored, thus illuminating a greater understanding of the subtle complexities of sociocultural specificities, decisionmaking, and financing strategies in the local context.

In exploring the alignment of historical case studies to critical realism, critical realists suggest the use of either intensive or extensive approaches in research (Sayer, 1992, 2000).

While extensive research describes certain phenomena and patterns found in large-scale studies, an intensive case study focuses on the “what”, “why”, and “how” of things that happen in small cases, as noted previously (Sayer, 2000). Primarily, a historical analysis within the scope of a case study has a central focus on intensively investigating a smaller number of cases of a single case to understand the processes in depth (Sayer, 1992, 2000; Widdersheim, 2018). As suggested by Sayer (1992, p. 21), an intensive approach to historical case studies is useful for elucidating such questions as “How does a process work in a particular case over time?” or “What did the agents actually do?”. While this approach can be time-consuming (Merriam, 2009), some researchers, notably Bryman (2016), Denscombe (2007), and Stake (2006), argue that an intensive analysis of a single case may lead to rich interpretations. In keeping with the general premise argued by critical realism, such analysis, particularly in the field of educational policy research, can result in identifying the causal mechanisms and facilitate understanding of how these mechanisms justify the production and reproduction of certain policies (Yin, 2009). The rich and thick description of these causal mechanisms was necessary for this research, as it enabled the researcher to disentangle the contested relationship between ideologies, discourse, and unequal power relations that have shaped the development of IE policy. It is for these reasons that the scope of the current research sits firmly within a historical case study design to provide a descriptive understanding of the historical and current development of the complexity in IE policymaking in Malaysia.

Considering that this research is an account of a historical examination of IE policy development in Malaysia, document research and online semistructured interviews were used as research tools to obtain data. Having considered of the study’s decision to employ the historical case study design set out above, the chapter now shifts its attention to exploring the aforementioned tools and detailing the criteria used to select document sources and research participants for interviews in this study.

## **4.2 Document research**

This section aims to explore the nature of document research by justifying the importance of documents sources, drawing attention to the selection criteria, and detailing the types of

documents included for analysis in this study. This section argues that documents provide valuable information about IE policy within the historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts potentially capable of influencing and shaping the development of IE policy in Malaysia. This section also puts forth the argument that documents are valuable for understanding the extent to which they work as active agents within the field of IE policymaking to serve wider political agendas of the state.

There has been growing interest in using document research as a method in social science disciplines. The term “document” itself can be referred to as “the sedimentations of social practices” (May, 2011, p. 191) produced by individuals or groups to meet “their immediate practical needs” (Scott, 1990, p. 12). As such, May (2011) explains that the researcher can examine the processes and motivations behind these social practices inscribed in documentary sources against their social contexts. Tight (2019) goes on to suggest that such investigation can reveal hidden mechanisms embedded within the political, economic, and sociocultural contexts that have the potential to inform contemporary social practices. Documents, as Scott (1990) also points out, are “artefacts” (p. 5) that can tell researchers about the significance of social practices, relationships, and events at a time when we were not yet present. It is for these reasons that documents can be considered as essential for examining the development of education policy from a historical and contemporary perspective. Collectively in this way, documentary research enables the researcher to develop knowledge and understanding of traditions that are incorporated in and transmitted from previous education policy to the next (McCulloch, 2011). This approach, in turn, Cohen et al. (2018) argue, allows room for the examination of how history relates to contemporary education policies and problems that are inherent in the cultural, political, and economic contexts. Thus, as discussed earlier in 4.1, in addressing the historical development of education policy by linking the past to the present, documents research is particularly well-suited to a historical case study design such as that employed in this study. This research therefore intends to draw on the DHA in order to determine how documents act as “artefacts” (Scott, 1990, p. 5) and to offer historical and contextual insights on the evolution of IE policy in Malaysia since its official inception in 1996.

Prior (2003, 2008, 2011) adds another layer of interpretation to documentary research. He points out that documents are traditionally believed to enter and leave a research study discreetly, as documentary sources used to be regarded merely as “containers for words, images, information, instructions and so forth” (Prior, 2011, p. 417). However, Prior (2008) argues that documents can be conceptualised as actors that can “do things as well as contain things” (p. 822). He therefore encourages researchers to view documents as active agents that may be capable of influencing “episodes of social interaction and schemes of social organisation” (p. 822) within its network. What this suggests is that documents can act as “props, allies, rule-makers, calculators, decision-makers, experts, and illustrators” (Prior, 2008, p. 828). As such, it is suggested that documents can direct the action of human actors as well as being manipulated by others (Prior, 2008). In the realm of education policy research, McCulloch (2004) argues that archival records such as policy documents, meeting minutes, and education plans can encourage certain actions to influence the (re)production or transformation of subsequent policies. Documents, in this manner, can be considered as active agents in influencing the action of human actors in addition to being manipulated in organised settings for many different purposes.

For this reason, documents should never be seen as neutral but as always reflecting underlying ideologies and assumptions about “the world, identities and social relations” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 12). As such, Hyatt (2013) draws attention to the importance of examining documents in studies that employ critical approaches to education policy analysis. He places the spotlight on the examination of the origins, suppositions, and ideological underpinnings behind policy articulations through systematic analysis of the language. More importantly, Codd (1988) argues that documents can illuminate the “text’s ideological ambiguities, distortions and absences” (p. 246) which may be able to expose the inherent tensions and contradictions underlying governmental policies. Such an analysis that relies upon document research tends to suggest a plurality of meanings ascribed to the text among different categories of readers (Hyatt, 2013). According to Codd (1988), this exposure can help ascertain the actual and potential effects of the text upon its readers and thus their possible influence on subsequent policymaking decisions. By examining the construction and deconstruction of dominant discourses inscribed in IE policy documents in

Malaysia, document research makes it possible for the current study to root out ideologies and manipulative discursive elements in relation to the contexts that have shaped them.

Based on these premises, document research can achieve a deeper contextual understanding of IE policy. This research method provides both historical and sociological insights to identify and explain the structural dynamics reproduced by actors to either constrain or better support policymaking over time. Reisigl and Wodak (2009) argue that it is important to examine documents to reveal and understand how these structures operate in and through discourse. Such an examination offers a powerful means of explaining structural mechanisms behind IE policymaking that often remain hidden from view. From this perspective, documents provide a useful and informative source of evidence that assists the critical analysis of IE policy in this research.

#### **4.2.1 Evaluation and selection criteria of document sources**

This section aims to outline the criteria for evaluating document sources before detailing the selection of the data sources included in this study. Scott (1990, p. 6) encourages researchers to ask four sets of questions about any piece of documentary data before it can be used in an analysis. These include:

- *Authenticity*: Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
- *Credibility*: Is the evidence free from error and distortion?
- *Representativeness*: Is the evidence typical of its kind and, if not, is the extent of its untypicality known?
- *Meaning*: Is the evidence clear and comprehensible?

These evaluation criteria provide a valuable way to assess the suitability of documentary sources. However, it is important to highlight that official records relating to educational policy documents often contain a state's underlying agenda. In Liasidou's (2017, p. 334) work, for instance, "an interest of [a] certain kind" contained in the IE policy document in Cyprus has been "masked" and "legitimated" as a rationale for a choice of action. Nonetheless, certain interests or biases are of considerable importance in 'unmasking' the underlying agendas within education policies. In the case of this study, Scott's (1990)

evaluation criteria for documents were used to determine the suitability of such documents for inclusion in this study. In addition to the authenticity, representativeness, and meaning of the documents, official documents relating to the IE policy in Malaysia throughout its development between 1996 and 2018—but that may not always be free from error and distortion—are of great interest in this selection process. The analysis of such documents therefore enabled a thorough understanding of how underlying agendas of the state influence the development of IE policy in Malaysia.

It is also necessary to note that the Internet was used as the main research tool to collect documents in this study. The Internet has created a new kind of document, virtual sources, and has transformed the process involved in doing documents research over the past decades (McCulloch, 2011). The emergence of virtual sources has possibly promoted new opportunities for document research, while at the same time giving rise to unique challenges of which researchers need to be aware. McCulloch (2011), for example, notes that the extraordinary potential of the Internet has created unprecedented access for researchers to large amounts of information on a global scale. While it would be possible for researchers to gain access to public domain materials that have already been published for free, documents that are intended to be included in social research should be evaluated to ensure the reliability of information (Stein, 2014). In order to evaluate the reliability of documents deriving from Internet sources, Stein (2014) brings in these additional criteria for consideration:

- *Authorship*: Does the page provide information on the author of the document or the compiler of the page?
- *Authority of the author*: What are the qualifications of the author relative to the document that is provided?
- *Authority of the material*: How does the document compare with the information that is provided on the same subject from print sources?
- *Authority of the site/organisation*: What institution/website publishes this document?
- *Currency*: Is the document updated?

In this study, Stein's (2014) evaluation criteria were used to ensure the reliability of the included documents. These documents were obtained mainly by navigating four official websites:

- i. MMOE's official website (<https://www.moe.gov.my>);
- ii. Attorney General's Chamber's official portal (<http://www.agc.gov.my>);
- iii. Parliament of Malaysia's official portal (<https://www.parlimen.gov.my>); and
- iv. Human Rights Commission of Malaysia's official portal (<http://www.suhakam.org.my>).

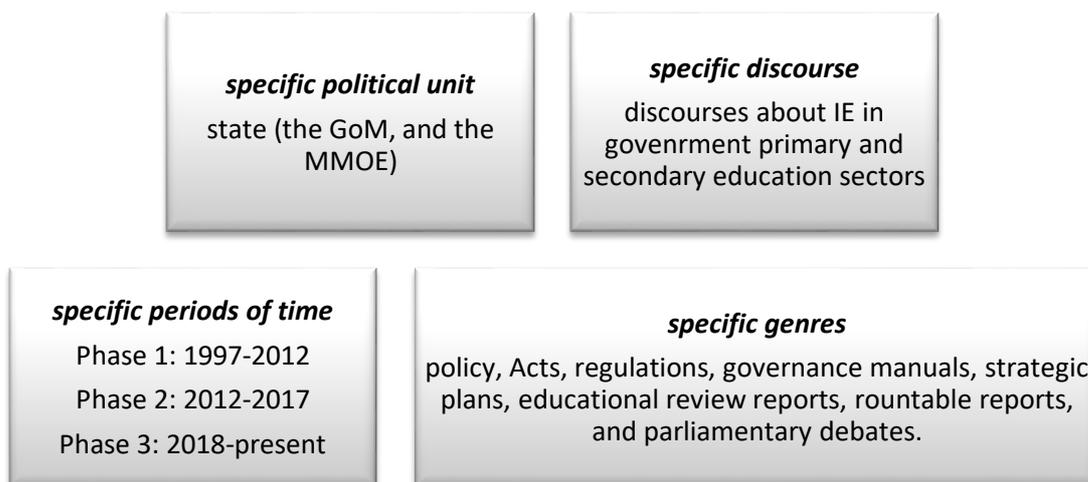
The authorship and the authority of the author, material, and the site/organisation criteria were fulfilled. While the final evaluation criteria, currency, is mentioned as important to provide information on "current affairs, technical developments, products, and the like" (Stein, 2014, p. 51), older documents were also included to address the purposes of this research. As explained in the previous section, the use of document research in this study provided a means to examine the development of IE policy that extends from the relatively distant past (the 1990s) up to the present-day.

However, several drawbacks arose from using the MMOE and Attorney General's Chamber's official websites to source documents. The availability of records before 2000 was either relatively scarce or older versions of documents were replaced with updated versions of the same documents. While the availability and accessibility of documents became publicly available on these websites after 2000, due to advancements in modern technology, documents dating before 2000 were more difficult to locate. Access to these documents however was obtained after submitting a written request to the Director of the MMOE and the Attorney General's Chamber indicating the reasons for seeking access to them. It is for this reason that digital copies of the official documents pertaining to IE policy from 1997–2000 within the federal archive were requested through email correspondence. While retrieving these documents took more time, access was eventually granted without any considerable problems. In terms of the reliability of the documents received, the documents fulfilled Scott's (1990) and Stein's (2014) evaluation criteria. This scenario draws attention to

the limitations of documents made available on the Internet and the likelihood that some older documents have a limited virtual lifespan.

Following this collection of documents that were available and accessible, relevant criteria to select specific data/documents for analysis were adapted from Reisigl and Wodak’s (2009, p. 98) framework. Figure 4.1 presents an overview of the data/documents selection criteria for inclusion in line with the focus of this study. It is pertinent to point out that the selection criteria below were also used to determine the selection of research participants for online semistructured interviews, a topic which will be explored in a later section. Based on the *selection of specific political units* shown in Figure 4.1, documents that would provide a representation of the MMOE’s official voice were selected, since this study is concerned with *specific discourses* surrounding the development of IE policy in Malaysia. Documents relating to the governmental primary school sector were selected for the focus of this inquiry, while documents relating to government preschool, secondary education, tertiary education, as well as private education sectors were excluded. These documents were then purposefully selected from three *specific periods of time* relating to important discursive events.

**Figure 4.1** Data/Documents Selection Criteria for Inclusion



Note. Reisigl and Wodak (2009)

Carvalho (2008, p. 166) refers to such periods as “critical discourse moments” and they involve specific events which may challenge the established discursive positions. Thus,

documents for these periods (from 1997 to 2012; 2012 to 2017; and 2018 to the present day) were selected in line with significant turns of political and discursive shifts of IE policy in Malaysia. While there were documents relating to education provisions for students with SEN from the early 1960s, the year 1997 was still generally recognised as a milestone in the history in Malaysia because IE was brought, for the first time, into the foreground of conversations and policy ideals (Chin, 2020). Therefore, official documents dating prior to 1996 were excluded from selection.

Finally, consideration was also given to the selection of *specific genres* to be analysed within this research. Official documents deriving from the state that bear connection with IE in Malaysia such as policies, Acts, and regulations were selected for the main analysis of this inquiry. The state refers to any political organisation under a government (Bryman, 2016). Within the scope of this study, the MME is the Ministry of the Government of Malaysia that is responsible for steering the direction of IE in Malaysia. Therefore, any IE policy-related document produced by the MME was categorised as an official document. As pointed out in the previous chapter, in order to minimise the potential risk of being too subjective, proponents of the DHA suggest triangulation among different types of document sources when examining the development of government policy (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The triangulation procedure is the process of analysing findings from multiple perspectives and document sources to reduce the risk of bias (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). However, triangulation entails analysing a large amount of potential data. Thus, the concept of 'saturation' was used to determine the number of documents that were used for the study. Saturation refers to the point when similar themes keep emerging and nothing novel appears to be adding more material to the data already gathered (Charmaz, 2014). In this instance, other state-derived official documents such as education strategic plans, review reports, roundtable reports, and parliamentary debates were carefully selected to corroborate findings. In addition to the efforts of triangulation, these additional documents provided the wider political, economic, and sociocultural contexts by supporting and giving meaning to the texts to be examined. Subsection 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 respectively detail the type of official documents deriving from the state for main analysis and triangulation purposes.

#### **4.2.1.1 Official documents deriving from the state for main analysis**

Before giving specific considerations to other policy-related documents for the purpose of triangulation, this section begins by exploring Acts, regulations, and governance manuals produced by the MMoE that were used for the main analysis in this study. The term ‘policy’ is generally associated with a written plan of action (or inaction) relating to intended goals and values or resource distribution produced by the government (Hyatt, 2013). Simply put, a policy is, at its core, about the exercise of political power through the use of language to (re)produce a particular regime of governance for a specific period of time (Foucault, 1994). What is of particular interest to this study however is the focus on policy as a process. Consequently, by utilising critical discourse analysis as an analytical framework in this study, policy texts can be critically examined in order to understand not only the intentions of policymakers, but also the underlying ideological positions in the making of policy (Bowe et al., 1992). This research therefore intends to critically analyse policy documents from three time periods in order to expose the underlying agendas and ideologies about IE within its historical and national contexts.

As presented in chapter 3, intertextuality observes how policy texts may make explicit or implicit reference to “assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth” with other texts (Fairclough, 1992, p. 84). This description suggests that policy documents do not exist in isolation but work hand in hand with an ensemble of other official documents to legitimate certain educational ideologies and processes (Bacchi, 2016, p. 84). According to Ahmad et al. (2020), documents such as Acts, regulations, and governance manuals are important policy instruments in Malaysia to ensure that the development of any policy is in line with the government’s objectives. In other words, these documents may work collectively as active agents to initialise required changes and manoeuvre the education system into the intended direction of IE based on the state’s development agendas (Ahmad et al., 2020). The concern with analysing policy therefore includes examining Malaysia’s Education Act, special education regulations, and the governance manuals of IE programmes, in order to explore the role of policy documents in constructing legitimacy for specific ideas or processes about IE. Table 4.1 provides an overview of these official documents deriving from the state for the main analysis of this study.

**Table 4.1** Overview of Official Documents Deriving from the State for the Main Analysis

Types of documents	Description	Title of document	Time periods		
			Phase 1 (1997–2011)	Phase 2 (2012–2017)	Phase 3 (2018–present)
Acts of Parliament	Acts relevant to education for persons with disabilities enacted after 1990 and statutes that were revised by the Commissioner of Law Revision under the authority of the Revision of Act 1968	Education Act 1996 (2002)	√		
		Education Act 1996 (2012)		√	
		Zero Reject Policy (MMoE, 2019)			√
Regulations	Guidelines and directives enforced by law concerning inclusive education in Malaysia since 1997	1997 Special Education Regulations	√		
		2013 Special Education Regulations		√	

#### **4.2.1.2 Official documents deriving from the state for triangulation**

As highlighted in subsection 4.2.1, it is acknowledged that it would be impossible to reach complete objectivity through the analysis of policy, Acts, regulations, and governance manuals alone in this study. It is for this reason that triangulation of data sources from other policy-related documents such as educational strategic plans, educational review reports, roundtable minutes, and parliamentary statements produced by the state have been included to examine the consistency of data sources. Where there are inconsistencies within documents, these can help to identify what further research is required to address the research questions of this study.

Policy-related documents such as strategic plans and review reports, as McCulloch (2011) points out, are often a valuable way to observe specific problems as well as their intended solutions. In this way, these documents offer insight into future government visions and plans. He further argues that strategic plans and reports can reveal the kinds of assumptions underpinning policy reform (McCulloch, 2011). In this sense, governmental manuals, plans, and reports generally provide a convenient means for policymakers to legitimate possible changes in educational policies and practices, thus offering significant insight into the policy shifts that have occurred (Bacchi, 2016). This study examined three government manuals that include guidelines for implementing IE and managing SEN from 2013 to 2018, three national education strategic plans from 2001 to 2025, and five national educational review reports from 2006 to 2015, which have evaluated existing IE policies and outlined future implementation practices in Malaysia. Additionally, roundtable minutes and parliamentary statements were of particular interest to this research. These documents are widely used to record issues raised, different viewpoints, and proposed actions to be taken to resolve specific issues. However, noted actions and potential solutions in roundtable minutes and parliamentary statements may not necessarily be realised (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, Bryman (2016) cautions against relying on such documents without checking against other sources as they might not represent reality. This research examined two meeting minutes from the Human Rights of Commission of Malaysia in 2004 and seven parliamentary statements on IE policy from 1997 to 2019 to understand the reported activities of formulating, introducing, controlling, and reviewing of policies and rules that guide the

management practices of IE over the past thirty years. Table 4.2 provides an overview of these documents for the purpose of triangulation.

**Table 4.2** Overview of Official Documents Deriving from the State for Triangulation

Types of documents	Description	Title of document	Time periods		
			Phase 1 (1997-2012)	Phase 2 (2012-2017)	Phase 3 (2018-present)
Governance Manuals	Governance manuals include documents that guide the management of inclusive education programmes at the state, district, and school levels such as organisational structure, processes, planning and reporting requirements.	2014 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (MMoE, 2014)		√	
		Guidelines for Inclusive Education Programme for Students with Special Educational Needs (MMoE, 2018a)			√
Education strategic plans	Future visions and plans for the education system that are informed by the needs of the nation based on the review by the Education Performance and Delivery Unit.	National Education Development Plan 2001-2010	√		
		Education Development Master Plan 2006-2010	√		
		Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025		√	√
Educational review reports	Education review reports include evaluative reports on the quality of education provided for all children and students in Malaysian schools.	Report on the Rights of People with Disabilities (Human Rights of Commission of Malaysia, 2006)	√		
		Malaysia Education for All mid-decade assessment report 2000–2007: reaching the unreachable (GoM, 2007)	√		
		Report of the forum on Malaysia’s Reservation to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (Human Rights	√		

		of Commission of Malaysia, 2008)			
		Malaysia national Education for All review report 2000-2015: end of decade review (GoM, 2015)		√	
		The right to education for children with learning disabilities – Focusing on primary education (Human Rights of Commission of Malaysia, 2015)		√	
Roundtable minutes	Roundtable minutes are those that the Human Rights of Commission of Malaysia have published to discuss and debate on topics related to the rights to education for children with disabilities in Malaysia. It details the challenges relating to the rights of children with disabilities and charts the way forward for inclusive education in Malaysia.	Convention on the rights of the child: Report of the Roundtable Discussion (Human Rights of Commission of Malaysia, 2004)	√		
		Roundtable Discussion on Education for Children with Disabilities (Human Rights of Commission of Malaysia, 2004)	√		
Parliament statements	Parliamentary statements are those official transcripts of debates in the Malaysia Parliament. These official records of debates include those that are related to IE policies in Malaysia since 1997.	Parliament Debates 9/3 (GoM, 2018) - 14/08/1997	√		
		Parliament Debates 12/5 (GoM, 2018) - 07/05/1997	√		
		Parliament Debates 13/4 (GoM, 2018) – 8/12/2016		√	
		Parliament Debates 13/4 (GoM, 2018) - 15/12/2016		√	

		Parliament Debates 14/1 (GoM, 2018) - 4/12/2018			√
		Parliament Debates 14/1 (GoM, 2018) – 6/12/2018			√
		Parliament Debates 14/2 (GoM, 2019) – 8/5/2019			√

### **4.3 Methods: Online Semistructured Interviews**

The use of interviews has long been a central component of qualitative research (Bryman, 2016; May, 2011). Online semistructured interviews were chosen as one of the research methods to complement document research for this study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). It is important to acknowledge that not all information about the IE policymaking process and educational initiatives can be obtained from document research alone, thus making it impossible to draw definitive conclusions from this form of research. It is for this reason that online semistructured interviews with several key actors involved in the IE policy planning and development were considered as an important means to gain deeper insight into the policy formation of IE for this study. This section aims to justify the importance of interviews as a data source by discussing the nature of semistructured and online interviews.

Semistructured interviews, according to Cohen et al. (2018), constitute a reciprocal interaction between the researcher and the research participants. For that reason, interviews "can reach the parts which other methods cannot reach" (Wellington 2000, p. 72). While it is acknowledged that it is not possible to establish any "sort of inherent truth in an educational situation", interviews have the potential to give an opportunity for interviewees to present their "thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives" (Wellington 2000, p. 71). In this light, interviews provide a useful insight into key policy actors' agentic responses to structuring conditions regarding IE and its policy in Malaysia, thus illuminating crucial parameters of the policymaking formulation dynamics. As Hanson (1972, p. 34) reiterated, "interviews can shed light on elusive but important problems such as how decisions are reached, how influence is exerted ... and how organizations are run" (as cited in McHugh 1994, p. 54). Nonetheless, Liasidou (2012) cautions that interviewing entails certain sources of bias arising from the interviewee. For example, the interviewees might tell whatever might be appropriate and generally acceptable, given the institutional, social, and discursive constraints within the contexts that are imposed on them. This is especially true in certain cases when interviewees hold key positions within the government, as by no means do they want to posit themselves as being in opposition to the current governance (Liasidou, 2017; Qu, 2020). It needs to be noted however that the biases attributed to interviewing bring great insight to this study. Such interests are valuable for pinpointing underlying agendas and

ideologies, which are central to educational policy research (Liasidou, 2012). Given the above considerations, semistructured interviews with key actors are particularly useful for this research as they offer a way to obtain context-specific information on complex issues such as local IE policymaking.

Face-to-face interviews are traditionally employed to generate data in qualitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). While this research had intended to conduct face-to-face interviews with key policy actors, meeting interview participants in person was not feasible as the researcher was unable to travel to Malaysia due to the impact of COVID-19. On this account, video conferencing software such as Zoom for semistructured interviews was identified as an alternative method for this study. Such software afforded a certain degree of flexibility in terms of interview location and convenience for the interviewee (Chen & Hinton, 1999; Hanna & Mwale, 2017). In a time of unprecedented change due to COVID-19, video conferencing can help to reduce unpredictable circumstances such as national lockdowns that would deter the researcher and participants from meeting in person (Lobe et al., 2020). The flexibility of this digital method, in turn, would eliminate the need to travel (Winiarska, 2017), save costs (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009), and “free researchers from geographic limitations” (Burkard et al., 2012, p. 88). With this in mind, Zoom was selected as a virtual platform to obtain interview data for this study.

Much work has already been done in applying video conferencing via Zoom to obtain interview data. Although some studies highlight the struggle involved in conducting video conferencing (Irani, 2019; Khalil & Cowie, 2020), most available research reports that video conferencing mirrors face-to-face interviews in gathering contextual data in addition to verbal responses such as body language and nonverbal cues (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020; Hanna & Mwale, 2017; Lo Iacono et al., 2016). As such, it is believed that there is much to gain from conducting online interviews on Zoom. This view is echoed by Gray et al. (2020, p. 1298), who conclude that not only can Zoom “aid future researchers to conduct high-quality interviews”, but that there are “several notable advantages”. While the basic account on Zoom limits the time of each interview session to 40 minutes, the upgraded plan enables unlimited time sessions for one-to-one interviews (Lobe et al., 2020). It is for this reason that

the Zoom application was accessed by the researcher through the University of Waikato's student account, thus enabling the unlimited session feature. Furthermore, Zoom has an audio recording option that is restricted to the host (the researcher), allowing access to interview recordings which were automatically rendered and saved on the host's computer after each session (Archibald et al., 2019). In comparison to other established video conferencing platforms such as Webex or Skype, Zoom does not require participants to have an account to join a Zoom meeting (Gray et al., 2020). Nonetheless, either the Zoom mobile or the desktop application was downloaded by the research participants prior to the interview, after which the Zoom meetings were reached by clicking on the invitation link. These platform characteristics therefore make Zoom a viable and accessible outlet for both the researcher and participants to participate in online interviews in this study.

Despite being an effective means for qualitative interviewing, it is important to draw attention to the precautionary steps taken in this study based on Gray et al.'s (2020) recommendations to minimise possible technical difficulties while undertaking online interviews via Zoom. After recruiting research participants for interviews (see the next section), it was necessary to test Zoom ahead of the interviews. This testing entailed using Zoom with a colleague and being prepared to resolve any common technical issues that might arise. In this instance, the storage needs for 10 30-minute interviews were considered and the audio volume and audio recording features were tested to ensure clarity. Additionally, the Zoom application on mobile phones was tried to provide potential technical assistance in the case participants chose not to use the computer version of Zoom. As such, it was essential to provide participants with specific information relating to their participation in a Zoom interview in the participant information letter (see Appendix D1 & D2) such as providing options regarding the type of device they can use Zoom on and the required audio and/or visual capabilities. Gray et al. (2020) also suggested that technical difficulties such as loss of Internet connection, freezing or other audio and video disturbances due to unreliable Internet connections cannot be avoided in some cases. To accommodate unforeseen circumstances, each participant was reminded in the participant information letter and at the start of the interview that they would be contacted for a follow-up interview if such a need arose. While there was no definitive way to prevent unreliable Internet connection, other devices that were connected to the researcher's Internet

provider were unhooked before and during each interview session to ensure uninterrupted Internet connection. These issues highlight the fragility of obtaining interview data on a digital platform, and more importantly, demonstrate the importance of incorporating precautionary practices to aid the efficiency of the interview process via Zoom.

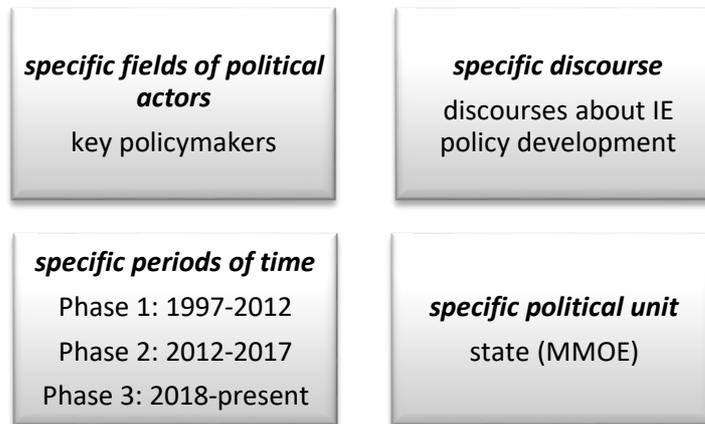
In line with the abductive nature of this study, a thorough literature review and initial readings of the key policy documents were conducted before preparing the interview questions. Interview guides tailored to three predetermined time periods relevant to the Malaysian IE policy were then developed (see Appendices F1 and F2). An interview guide tends to have a list of open-ended questions that cover specific research topics or themes (Bryman, 2016). Such a template places greater emphasis on participants' own perspectives and obtaining research-relevant information (Silverman, 2006; Subban & Sharma, 2005). In this study, the interview guides were based on identified broad themes that emerged through each policy consistent with the systematic review of the literature in chapter 2 (Sims-Schouten & Riley, 2019). Thereafter, quotes were picked out from key documents to support the identification of each theme and inform the development of questions where participants engaged in a critical reflection about policy development. These themes or key factors, which are likely to have extra-discursive influences on IE policy development in Malaysia, were critically explored to understand how social actors (re)produced or transformed certain ideologies central to IE policymaking within a particular sociopolitical and historical context. The argument put forth in this thesis proposed that the initial thematic categories identified within Malaysia's IE policy were the economic, political, and cultural factors. Through retroductive reasoning, emerging themes were explored in subsequent chapters to uncloak the ways in which IE policy in Malaysia evolves in response to its local contexts.

#### **4.3.1 Selection of research participants**

Researchers tend to give importance to the concept of purposive sampling in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). Bryman (2016) indicates that purposive sampling does not aim to sample research participants on a probable or random basis. Participants were selected strategically in a way that was able to address the research questions posed in this study. In the same way that document sources were selected, Reisigl and Wodak's (2009, p. 98) criteria

were used to select the research participants for interviews in this study. Figure 4.2 provides an overview of the selection criteria used to select research participants relevant to the inquiry of this study.

**Figure 4.2** Selection Criteria of Research Participants for Interview



Note. Reisigl and Wodak (2009)

As illustrated in Figure 4.2, the criteria to be considered in the selection of the participants include key policymakers previously and currently engaged in the development of IE policy in Malaysia during three different phases. The knowledge, experiences, and reflections of different policymakers on the policymaking processes in different time periods are of relevance as regards the particularities specific to each phase. In this study, interviewing powerful social actors or ‘elites’ is of great importance, since most studies on policy research are focused on interviews with experts who have been instrumental in the development of any policy (Berry, 2002). Elites are characterised as individuals who have the capacity to exert their influence through their “social networks, social capital and strategic position within social structures” (Harvey, 2011, p. 433). As van Dijk (1993) highlights, their close proximity to power allows these individuals “privileged access to discourse and communication” (p. 255). The use of the term “privileged access” indicates that van Dijk (1993) views elites as those who have a certain degree of freedom of control over conditions and consequences of discourses through specific communicative contexts. In other words, elite individuals such as policymakers may have access to an important part of discourse i.e., the policy. As a result, policies tend to

reflect the interests of those in power by drawing attention to particular social issues and reproducing representations that they intend to promote (Sabido, 2019). Through interviewing elite individuals, it was thus possible to identify the prevalent ideologies that constitute the power and structural dynamics that underpin Malaysia's IE policymaking process.

For this reason, some of the selected participants in this study hold distinguished positions and responsibilities that can characterise them as key policymakers within the current governmental terrain. Beyond interviewing current governmental key policymakers, it was also considered to be very important to interview elites who either still are at the forefront of government or used to be some years ago. It is believed that these people can provide useful perspectives regarding the historical and different dimensions of IE policy (Liasidou, 2012). Given their 'political detachment' from the government, they can potentially provide a diverse and less politically encumbered picture of the development of Malaysia's IE policy and the power relations that are implicated therein. They comprised powerful social actors previously and currently involved in IE policy development in the national context. Interviewing elites offered a useful means to gather specific contextual knowledge about the planning for and development of the IE policy as complementary data to documents research (Flick, 2014). Given the fact that policy is constituted within the reciprocal relation between agents and structures, a decision was taken to interview the "movers and shakers" (Cookson 1994, p. 116) of IE policy within the governmental and nongovernmental terrains. It was deemed that this move was necessary to understand how these key actors work agentially, through policy discourse, in response to their structural influence to legitimate certain ideas, actions, and IE practices.

#### **4.3.2 Recruitment of research participants**

As for recruiting elite interviewees, the key policymakers with whom the researcher had previously worked in the MMoE were approached by email. At the same time, 35 authors and participants who were listed in the many documents gathered for document analysis were contacted. However, Harvey (2011) states that gaining interview access to and the trust of elites that are in powerful positions is extremely challenging, as they might be sceptical of any

possible 'intruders' into their closed governmental and political mechanisms. Following the advice of Liu (2018), the researcher attempted to build a social rapport with potential elite individuals prior to the interview. They were contacted several times through their personal and/or official email addresses to exchange information about this research in an attempt to develop trust and rapport with these individuals. Their email addresses were obtained from the Web organisations that they are affiliated with or other social networking services such as Facebook, Academia.edu, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, and Instagram. In the event of no response, the elites' gatekeepers or personal assistants were contacted to negotiate these barriers. Despite exhaustive attempts, only six interviewees responded to the request to be interviewed.

These national-level actors include representatives of government officials who served the MME such as the Deputy Director of Schools Divisions and the Head of the Special Education Sector during phase one, the Head of Committee for International Cooperation in Higher Education and the Deputy Director of the Special Education Division from phase two, and the then Minister of Education and the current Head of the Policy Research Department in phase three. Table 4.3 lists the federal level policymakers alongside their designated roles across the reform periods of IE policy in Malaysia.

It should also be noted that some limitations resulted from interviewing elite individuals in this study. As elite individuals tend to have overloaded work schedules (Liu, 2018), careful planning of the interview was essential. To attend to their time constraints, the duration of each interview was lessened to 30 minutes. Moreover, elite individuals are believed to be highly skilled at being interviewed and adept at things such as eluding questions and speaking without telling anything, suggesting significance, avoiding insight, closure, or clarity (Liasidou, 2012). As such, considerable preparations were made to adapt to the structure of the interview according to the predilections of the individuals (Flick, 2014). In this context, a pilot interview with a Malaysian education policymaker known through previous collegial relationships was conducted. Through this pilot interview, the person provided useful suggestions to refine the interview questions and improve the researcher's interviewing technique before interviewing the research participants.

**Table 4.3** List of Policymakers Interviewed Across Three Reform Periods of IE Policy in Malaysia

Reform period	Participant Code	Unit	Previous/Current Role
Phase 1 (1996-2012)	Policy actor 1	MMoE	Deputy Director of Schools Divisions
	Policy actor 2	MMoE	Head of the Special Education Sector
Phase 2 (2012-2017)	Policy actor 3	MMoE	Head of Committee for International Cooperation in Higher Education
	Policy actor 4	MMoE	Deputy Director of the Special Education Division
Phase 3 (2018–present)	Policy actor 5	MMoE	Minister of Education
	Policy actor 6	MMoE	Head of the Policy Research Department

#### 4.4 Data management and analysis

Because the research data was intricate and multifaceted, NVivo software was employed as a management tool for the data i.e., the texts. The software enabled data sets storage, organisation, and sorting, as well as the coding and grouping of textual statements (nodes) into themes (parent nodes). It was particularly helpful in providing a visual presentation of key themes and concepts and aided in data reduction, separate analysis, and quick access. However, it was discovered that the software's function was incompatible with the critical realist discourse analysis approach used in this study, and as a result, its use was limited to data management only (Kamenarac, 2019; Zamawe, 2015). The software could not replace multiple re-readings of data, close scrutiny of textual statements, and their interpretations within the critical realist discourse analytic framework (i.e., the pairing of the DHA and SRA) developed and used in this study. This analytical framework was delineated in depth in chapter 3 (see subsections 3.3.1, 3.3.2, and 3.3.2, and section 3.4).

The first two data sets included 80 pages of five key IE policy texts and about 350 pages from 19 official documents for triangulation. The policy documents (the first data set) were loaded into NVivo and organised in different folders. At the first level of analysis, the texts were re-read and policy statements on the same issues/topics were grouped under the same theme.

The policy documents had three recurring themes, which were further examined and the analysis were substantiated with official documents for triangulation (second data set). The themes referred to 1) definitions of IE; 2) definitions of SEN; 3) SEN and schooling opportunities. These are presented and discussed in chapter 5. The analysis of the policy documents enabled a deeper insight into how IE has been conceptualised in policy documents from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia.

The third and final data set comprised 60 transcribed pages containing the individual interview transcripts with six key policymakers. The transcripts were re-read and coded. As discussed earlier, a critical reading of the individual interview data enabled the researcher to first re-read, code, and analyse the interview transcriptions separately to allow an examination of perspectives from participants and their affiliated organisations. The second level of data analysis pointed to two common discussion points across the interview transcripts in conjunction with the policy documents analysis. The first discussion point was related to intertextual relationships the IE policy documents had with other texts. The second discussion point referred to the analysis of interdiscursivity which tries to identify and compare the dominant strands of discourse relevant to IE. As they offered two angles from which to investigate the research phenomena, these two discussion points were analysed and discussed together in chapter 6. The analysis of the individual interview transcripts in conjunction with the policy and official documents enabled an extended examination of the types of intertextual and interdiscursive relationships that have influenced the conceptualisation of IE in policy documents over time in Malaysia.

At the third level of analysis, connections between and among the policy texts, official documents, and individual transcript texts were made. Dominant, complementary, and conflicting discourses and conceptualisations of IE in each data set, as well as those that overlapped between the data sets were analysed, critiqued, and problematised in relation to the extent to which contextual factors have influenced key policy actors' decisionmaking in the development of IE policy between 1996 and 2018 in Malaysia. By applying this lens in the analysis processes, the central research phenomenon was studied in two contexts: 1. IE policies and 2. from the perspectives of several key policy actors. The three levels of analyses

sought to answer the overarching research question through an examination of the central research phenomena within the wider historical, political, economic, and cultural context of the IE policymaking from 1996 to 2018.

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

One of the crucial issues in social research is the perplexing issue of ethics (Kitchener & Kitchener, 2012). The participation of human beings in any social research means that researchers must maintain sound ethical practice throughout the research endeavour (Tracy, 2010). In light of this concern, this research followed the guidelines set in the University of Waikato's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008. Ethical approval for conducting the study was granted by the Division of Education Ethics Committee from the University of Waikato (Ethics Approval – FEDU050/20, see Appendix A). Before demonstrating the procedures adopted to ensure ethical conduct in this research, this section explores the important ethical dilemmas which had to be considered.

The researcher and the research participants were inevitably implicated within the imbalance of power distributions in this research (Gelling & Munn-Giddings, 2011). The researcher was thus required to minimise the unequal power relations inherent in the research process by attending to a number of important ethical concerns. First and foremost, research participants must be made aware of the aims and purposes of the research (Tracy, 2010), and they must be informed of the potential uses of this research and the possible implications that the research might have on them and their positions within their organisational settings (Mikecz, 2012). Adhering to these ethical guidelines is especially relevant to this research because several of the participants hold prominent positions and responsibilities in their current organisations, which means that the information they provide represents not only their personal values but also the values of their political position.

That said, their participation in this study could have potential political implications if ethical concerns such as confidentiality of information and anonymity of participants are not carefully addressed (Liasidou, 2012). Given that relatively few people are involved in the IE policymaking process in Malaysia, there was a small possibility that the participants in this

study could be identified due to their roles and association with particular policies. For that reason, the participants were reassured, before, during, and after the interviewing process that their anonymity would be preserved in any publications or presentations in order to protect them from any personal and professional harm. All the participants in this research were distinguished by numbers for data coding and their designated roles (see page 115) in the study findings. Nevertheless, it was explained to them that although all precautions would be taken to protect their identities, confidentiality could never be completely guaranteed in qualitative research (Van den Hoonaard, 2002). It should be highlighted that four participants clearly specified that they did not want to be kept anonymous. They wanted greater exposure and visibility to promote the social and educational inclusion of children with disabilities. However, it was decided to preserve their anonymity to avoid potential harm and risks to these participants in the context of research on disabilities.

For participants that are currently working with the Malaysian government, informed consent was initially obtained from their employing organisation. After obtaining approval from the Division of Education Ethics Committee, official permission to access potential participants was sought via the Economic Planning Unit of Malaysia's Prime Minister's department. The application was submitted online through <http://oridb.mea.gov.my/oriDBv2/login/> and processed within 3 months. Approval for undertaking this study was granted by the MME (Approval – KPM.600-3/2/3[76], see Appendix B). Potential participants who are no longer working with the Malaysian government, but who had previously occupied key policy roles in respect of IE policy in Malaysia, were approached directly. Participants' informed consent was gained using participant information letters (see Appendix D1-D2) and informed consent forms through email correspondence (see Appendix E3-E4) in English or Bahasa Malaysia. Electronic copies of the forms were completed and signed prior to data collection. Each participant was given the opportunity to discuss or answer any questions that they might have through emails. Five participants were interviewed through the use of Zoom in the participants' preferred language (English). One participant requested an email interview in which questions were sent by email and the participant responded by way of email reply, similarly in English. Each interview lasted from 25 to 45 minutes and the interviews were recorded with the participant's permission. After each interview, the participants reviewed

their transcripts, which were shared with them via email. They were invited to edit, make comments, amend, and/or withdraw any information in the transcripts within seven days of receipt of the transcripts.

In addition to being able to review their interview transcripts, participants had a right to withdraw completely from the study and to withdraw their contribution. Participants were informed that they would be unreservedly free to withdraw from the research process at any time. If participants made the decision to withdraw their data, they had three weeks from the time they received their transcript to notify the researcher of their choice. They would not be required to give any reasons for their withdrawal. The entire study process must adhere to all research ethics principles. According to Rolph (1998), obtaining approval from the Ethics Committee to undertake research is just the beginning. During the research process, a researcher must be very considerate and thoughtful to the participants. Rolph (1998) notes that ethical concerns might occur at any point during the research process, thus a researcher should be prepared to handle them. These concerns could relate to the requirements of research participants, distressing emotions that might be connected to their past experiences, or unanticipated disclosure.

Ethical concerns should also inform documentary research, as documents might contain confidential information that should not be given away or published (L. Jørgensen & Kollerup, 2022). It is for this reason that consent needed to be sought from the Economic Planning Unit of Malaysia's Prime Minister's department in order to access the official documents deriving from the state dating from 1996 to 2000. As elaborated in detail previously, the initial process was similar to that of seeking official permission from potential participants who are currently attached to the Malaysian government. Following this initial approach, a written request (see Appendices C1 and C2) accompanied by a letter of approval issued by the MMOE was submitted to the Director of the MMOE and Attorney General's Chamber to request relevant documents required for this study.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the methodology and methods that informed the data collection and

analysis of this study. This chapter locates this study within a historical case study design in the way that it seeks to examine how certain educational policy has come about in a chronological context. The methods of inquiry that were used in this study to collect data included document research and online semistructured interviews. It was argued that documentary sources can potentially shed light on obscured and undetected structural mechanisms of power inscribed in policy discourse. Interviews were also employed not only as a complementary research tool, but also as an alternative method that could provide an opportunity to investigate how actors enact their sense of agency in the policymaking process within their sociopolitical, economic, and historical context. The focus of the thesis over the next few chapters shifts to the findings and analysis of the data detailed in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TEXT ANALYSIS

Chapter 3 drew attention to Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) prompting to examine the (re)production of ideas within policy texts in relation to the wider structural contexts from a historical dimension. Doing so requires an analytic theory that probes the linguistic structures and discursive elements as an entry point to understand how language is implicated in shaping the ways in which education for children with disabilities is envisioned and realised. This chapter seeks to examine how texts in policies function as social practices, taking place within sociocultural, economic, and political contexts, in the conceptualisation and formation of IE policy over a period of time in Malaysia. In doing so, this chapter responds to the following research question: How has inclusive education (IE) been conceptualised in policy documents over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia?

The examination draws on the first analytical layer of the DHA—text analysis—to investigate the discursive strategies employed in the key IE policy documents in Malaysia from 1996 to 2018. As outlined in Table 4.1 in chapter 4 (see page 102), five key policy documents authored by the Malaysia Ministry of Education (MMoE) make up the primary data for this study. These policy documents include: (i) the Education Act 1996; (ii) the 1997 Special Education Regulations; (iii) the Education (Amended) Act 1996; (iv) the 2013 Special Education Regulations; and (v) the Zero Reject policy. It is hoped that this analysis brings an understanding of the particular types of inclusionary and exclusionary practices carried out through the systematic ways in which language is used in IE policy texts. It does so by paying particular interest to Reisigl and Wodak (2009)'s five discursive strategies (see Table 3.1 on page 81) as tools to investigate instances of linguistic devices used in policy texts. An analysis of these discursive strategies in policy texts demonstrates how IE is conceptualised in terms of its: (a) definition of IE; (b) definition of SEN; and (c) schooling opportunities and access for pupils with disabilities in Malaysia. Further, an analysis of the discursive strategies that the policy documents have employed to conceptualise IE serves as a point of departure for understanding how different discourses operate to influence IE policy formation processes in subsequent layers of analyses, as demonstrated and discussed in chapters 6 and 7. This chapter begins by briefly introducing the key policy documents of interest that were and are currently responsible for steering the direction of the IE system in Malaysia, before engaging

in an in-depth textual analysis of the DHA in three different phases: (i) the first phase from 1996 to 2012; (ii) the second phase from 2013 to 2017; and (iii) the third phase from 2018 to the present day.

## **5.1 Phase 1: 1996–2012**

### **5.1.1 *Background to the development of the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations***

The first document, the Education Act 1996, was a set of prescribed laws enacted to provide for education and matters connected therewith in Malaysia beginning in 1996 (GoM, 1961). This Act was introduced to replace the previous Education Act 1961, which aimed to strengthen the national education system in line with the MMoE's commitment to ensure the provision of quality and world-class education (Ahmad et al., 2020; Mohamed, 2005). The Act featured continuity from the existing educational aspirations and policies in Malaysia based on the main recommendations contained in the Razak Statement 1956, which formed the foundation of the national education policy (Mat Rabi, 2016). While the Act contains 16 sections to legislate different educational foci, this research draws attention to Section 4, which covers the operation of the national education system. Within this section, chapter 8 on page 24 zeroes in on special and inclusive education provision. Alongside the first policy document, the 1997 Special Education Regulations (i.e., the second document), which is one-page long, was included to formally chart the direction of special and inclusive education for children with disabilities from the year 1996 to 2012 (GoM, 1961). This regulation was enacted in accordance with Section 41 of the Education Act 1996 that will be examined further. During this period—which will hereafter be generalised as the first phase—the introduction of both policy documents was significant in that they were starting points that led to a clearer emphasis and focus on the development of IE in Malaysia. The following two subsections analyse how IE is conceptualised and managed in the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations.

### **5.1.2 *Definitions of IE and SEN***

Building on the brief introduction of the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations, this subsection now turns to critically examine the definitions IE and SEN in these

documents. The analysis shows that segregated forms of education envisioned for pupils with disabilities are reflected in the document that outlined the definition of IE as it pertained to:

- (1) A programme which is provided in special schools for pupils with visual impairment or hearing impairment;
- (2) An integrated programme in general schools for pupils with visual impairment or hearing impairment or with learning disabilities; and
- (3) An inclusive education programme for pupils with special needs and who are able to attend normal classes together with normal pupils. (MMoE, 1997, para. 2)

As pointed out in the extract above, the analysis suggests that IE was introduced in the Act as part of a special education framework. In such a manner, inclusion is sometimes buried beneath the historical imperatives of special educational philosophy in which the “othering” image ascribed to specific groups of pupils was communicated through linguistic veneers that legitimise binary conceptions of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ (different-to-normal). Within the special education sphere, Dunne (2009) defines the othering discourse as a form of language that has a tendency to homogenise the majority of students and create a divide between the majority and a minority that was depicted as having SEN. For example, when defining the IE programme under subsection (3) as illustrated above, certain groups of pupils that are ‘normal’ were evidently seen as ‘the included’ on the one hand. On the other hand, others who deviate from being ‘normal’ and are not ‘able to attend normal classes’ were marked out as otherwise, legitimating their placement beyond mainstream schools and the education system. Further discussion on the ways in which pupils with disabilities are ‘othered’ in respect of their schooling opportunities within these policy documents is explored in the next subsection.

As a result of this definition, the findings imply that the segregation within mainstream settings in the IE programme has likely accentuated differentiation and contributed to labelling that is inclined to be negatively skewed. Even the usage of the nominalised adjective ‘special’ as in ‘special school’ or ‘special education’ might be considered as a euphemism for failure (Len Barton, 1997), and Corbett (1996) argues that such nomination is by no means a

representation of linguistic advancement related to labelling. This differentiation is further reinforced when pupils with SEN were relegated to learn in either 'special schools' or 'special classrooms' despite being enrolled in a mainstream school. In Foucauldian terminology, these labels may be viewed as categorical "grids of specification" (Foucault, 1972, p. 41). These grids define and classify pupils' identities, bodies, places, and social practices within various power and knowledge relations. When the discursive practice of conceptualising inclusion is measured against the relativity of 'normality', this practice could likely displace, and therefore disempower, pupils diagnosed with SEN in the Malaysian education system, as we shall see.

With regard to how pupils with SEN were labelled in the policy document, the analysis shows that no disability-first structure is found in the English and Malay version of the Act and in the regulation, which appears to embody a person-first language. Literature around education policies for children with disabilities argues that grammatical structure such as person-first language is often used to recognise humanity before the disability label (Haller, 2001; Linton, 1998). This person-first structure was first suggested by advocacy groups in the United States and officially adopted by the American Psychological Association (APA) (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). When referring to persons and their impairments or disabilities, such predication is a sort of linguistic prescription in English that might mitigate an apparent and subconscious dehumanisation process (Haller et al., 2006). It does so by imposing a syntactic structure that names a person first and is followed by the condition (e.g., 'people with disability', 'person with autism' or 'person who has a learning disability'). Within this perspective, disability is perceived as a secondary attribute and not a characteristic of the person's identity (Linton, 1998). Focusing on the person first then their impairments would give respect and dignity to people with disabilities (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). As mentioned earlier, the person-first structure is evident throughout the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations in the practice of naming pupils with disabilities:

"Pupils with special needs" means pupils with visual impairment or hearing impairment or with learning disabilities". (MMoE, 1997, para. 2)

and

(b) pupils with multiple disabilities or with profound physical handicap or severe mental retardation. (MMoE, 1997, para. 3)

However, it is important to point out that the usual analyses of the person-first structure that applies in the English language may not necessarily be applicable in Malay primarily because the syntax of the Malay language allows for the use of postmodifiers only and not premodifiers (Ang, 2015). As a result, people are frequently fronted in the nominal group structure as in ‘people + classifier’ (e.g., murid-murid autism [pupils with autism]) rather than ‘classifier + people’ (e.g., autistic people). This linguistic feature further implies that the lexical choice of classifiers when describing the person and the impairment has an influence on determining the discursive positivity, neutrality or negativity of given names (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The analysis indicates that the most common classifier attached to pupils with disabilities in the Malay version of both documents is *cacat*. As pointed out briefly in chapter 1, *cacat* is a Malay classifier conveying physical disability such as being ‘handicapped’, ‘blind’ or ‘deaf’ and mental disability associated with ‘retardation’, ‘insanity’, and being ‘spastic’ (Ang, 2015). Similar to the English version of the regulation, terms such as ‘handicap’ and ‘retardation’ were applied to people with disabilities. The usage of such terms can be observed in the following paragraphs of the 1997 Special Education Regulations:

Murid-murid dengan keperluan khas” ertinya murid-murid yang mempunyai **kecacatan** penglihatan atau **kecacatan** pendengaran atau yang mempunyai masalah pembelajaran. (MMoE, 1997, para. 2)

Translation:

“Pupils with special needs” means pupils with visual impairment or hearing impairment or with learning disabilities. (MMoE, 1997, para. 2)

and in:

(b) murid yang mempunyai pelbagai **kecacatan** atau yang sangat **cacat** anggotanya atau yang terencat akal yang berat. (MMoE, 1997, para. 3)

Translation:

(b) pupils with multiple disabilities or with profound physical handicap or severe mental retardation. (MMoE, 1997, para. 3)

The excerpts above thus imply that the concept of SEN may be associated with a specific type of disability that resides within the child. Such discursive qualifications seem to connote negativity and helplessness. These qualifications are not only derogatory, but also have inaccurately described experiences of disability (Leeming & Boyle, 2004; Shakespeare, 1994). For this reason, the practice of labelling found in these documents can also be a form of identity invasion. Identity invasion occurs as a result of labelling practices and dominant language usage that are damaging to the images of those who are labelled (Peters, 1999). These practices may then shift towards an emphasis on disability by removing personhood. In other words, such referral potentially “subjugates people and presents them only in terms of their disability, rather than multidimensional people” (Haller et al., 2006, p. 70), contributing to the subtle framing of people with disabilities as inadequate and incapable. Such deep-seated beliefs about one’s presumed potential might have affected how children with disabilities were systematically included and/or excluded from the Malaysian education system.

### ***5.1.3 SEN and schooling opportunities***

The findings demonstrate that the definitions of IE and SEN in the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations may have interfered with the rights and opportunities of pupils with disabilities to education in different ways in Malaysia. According to Section 29A(1) of the Education Act 1996, “The Minister [of Education] may, by order published in the Gazette, prescribe primary education to be compulsory education” (p. 33). To support this enactment of compulsory primary education for all children including those with disabilities, sections 40 and 41 of the Education Act 1996 were hailed as a ‘new era’ in the Malaysian education system, because, for the first time, the MMoE was required by the legislation to provide education for pupils with disabilities (Ahmad et al., 2020; Mohamed, 2005). However, the analysis demonstrates that certain sections of the documents were riddled with ‘clauses of

conditionality'. According to Slee (1996), these clauses are generally taken to refer to provisional statements that are concomitantly inserted to deny the rights of certain groups of children to be educated in their local schools as a result of unequal power relations. For example, the Act appears to conspire with a conditionality where it provided the Minister with the power to determine the "expedien[cy]" of such education provision under section 40:

The Minister shall provide special education in special schools established under paragraph 34(1)(b) or in such primary or secondary schools as the Minister deems expedient. (GoM, 1996, p. 24)

alongside the authority to determine:

- a) the duration of primary and secondary education suitable to the needs of a pupil in receipt of special education;
- b) the curriculum to be used in respect of special education;
- c) the categories of pupils requiring special education and the methods appropriate for the education of pupils in each category of special schools; and
- d) any other matter which the Minister deems expedient or necessary for the purposes of this Chapter. (GoM, 1996, p. 24)

Based on the regulations specified above, these analyses suggest that institutionally empowered social actors such as "the Minister" (GoM, 1996, p. 24) could hide behind these clauses in the Act to provide ample latitude for professional interpretations concerning the educational rights, access, duration, and curriculum for people with disabilities.

Another example in this 1997 Special Education Regulations that invoked conditionality is through the 'educability' criterion. As can be observed, the educability criterion entered the 1997 Special Education Regulations as postulated below:

- (1) For government and government-aided schools, pupils with special needs who are educable are eligible to attend the special education programme

except for the following pupils:

(a) Physically handicapped pupils with the mental ability to learn like normal pupils; and

(b) Pupils with multiple disabilities or with profound physical handicap or severe mental retardation:

(2) A pupil with special needs is educable if he is able to manage himself without help and is confirmed by a panel consisting of a medical practitioner, an officer from the MOE and an officer from the Welfare Department of the MWFCD, as capable of undergoing the national educational programme. (GoM, 1996, p. 341)

As can be seen in the extract, the analysis illustrates that the perspectivisation (i.e., the positioning of the writer's point of view) of being 'educable' rested upon a claim, that is, those who are able "to manage themselves without help" (GoM, 1996, p. 341). Based on this claim, schools may discriminate on the basis of disability without any policy justification on the exclusion of a child. On the one hand, children who were considered educable were "eligible to attend [one of] the special education programme[s]" (GoM, 1996, p. 341). Depending on the categories of SEN, pupils were to receive education in either: special schools, integrated programmes, or inclusive education programmes in mainstream schools. On the other hand, children with severe physical disabilities, severe and profound intellectual disabilities, and multiple disabilities were referred to community-based rehabilitation centres to attend what appears to be a compensatory programme (Slee, 1996). In this programme, this particular group of children will receive skills training provided by the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (MWFCD) (GoM, 1961; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012). Further to this point, precedence was given to self-care concerns over the children's "mental ability to learn like normal pupils" as part of the eligibility criterion, as mentioned in subsection 1(a) (GoM, 1996, p. 341). These exclusionary practices around a normative conception of human functioning could be rooted in the ideology that pupils who were pathologically categorised with physical and severe mental disabilities were deemed 'unfit' for the public schooling system. As a result, these othering labels may unintentionally stigmatise individuals in such a

manner that they are not “expected to be [strong], intellectual, or attractive” in mainstream society (Coleman, 1997, p. 221). In this regard, children's presumed potential had sometimes been limited to vocational training and practical skills offered within institutions located beyond the education system. Segregated practices led not just to their physical incarceration, but also to the “incarceration” of their ability “to take the same risks and seek the same rewards” (Brisenden, 1986, p. 177) in mainstream settings as their peers. More importantly, such provisional statements stemming from unequal power relations may have infringed the right of children with presumed SEN to be educated in their local mainstream schools during the first phase.

On top of this, the analysis shows that when the claim of being ‘educable’ is pathologically “confirmed by a panel consisting of a medical practitioner, an officer from the MMoE and an officer from the Welfare Department of the MWFC, as capable of undergoing the national educational programme” (MMoE 1997, p. 1), this process displays Ball's (1994) legitimising voices, speaking with conviction and confidence in understanding "what works, for whom, and when" (p. 69). In this case, this exclusionary practice was discursively legitimised through authorisation. As discussed in chapter 3, authorisation is generally understood in terms of referencing to some kind of tradition, custom, and law, as well as persons linked to a certain institutional authority (van Leeuwen, 2007). In this sense, the presupposed assumption and knowledge of the ‘authorised professionals’ on schooling opportunities for pupils with disabilities was articulated, thus strengthening the educability criterion.

From this point of view, it can be inferred that the professionals mentioned in the Education Act 1996 carried the semantic role of ‘agents’, thus giving them more influence over how children with SEN are classified, rehabilitated, and evaluated on their capability in undergoing the national educational programme (MMoE, 1997). This influence is exhibited through the use of implicit terms from the extract relating to diagnosis and normalisation that were anchored in the medical discourse, an area on which chapter 6 further elaborates (Sailor & Roger, 2005). What this analysis probably suggests is that children's perceived inadequacies and the endeavour to discursively construct a group of students against an arbitrary notion of normality were again reinforced by deciding on their education pathways. Thus, large-scale

empirical studies conducted in Malaysia reported that parents felt powerless to interfere in all these institutionally sanctioned procedures and accepted their role as patients within the bureaucracies of education politics (Amar-Singh et al., 2018; UNICEF Malaysia, 2017, 2019).

Moreover, certain integration practices that masquerade as inclusive practices were legitimised through rationalisation. This practice is elucidated through what was noticeably backgrounded in the Act and the regulation in terms of the curriculum provision for pupils with SEN:

In implementing the special education curriculum, teachers can modify the methods or techniques of teaching and learning, time for activities and order of activities, subjects and teaching aids to achieve the goals and objectives of special education. (MMoE, 1997, p. 1)

As Foucault (1994) asserts, the idea of the invisible—such as what is never said and not-said — may be able to expose the inherent tensions and contradictions underlying governmental policies. In this instance, the analysis of this linguistic silence suggests that children's subjection to normalisation regimes of special educational practices was presumably justified on the basis of their best interests, so that the goals and objectives of special education can be achieved. It could be for this underlying reason that the 1997 Special Education Regulations demonstrate that low expectations were likely to be placed upon the potential of 'othered' pupils by occasionally restricting them to either: (a) practical skills and vocational training in community-based rehabilitation centres; or (b) an alternative curriculum (i.e., the special education curriculum—see the above extract). This finding resonates with what Gillborn and Youdell (2000) refer to as an educational triage that stems from a deficit-oriented perspective of disability which believes that some children are unable to respond to any mainstream educational approaches and facilities provided by and in the school. These alternate expectations that were reflected in both policy documents may then result in limiting what pupils with SEN should know and be able to do. There is mounting evidence that pupils with disabilities who face low expectations for academic achievement are less likely to persevere through challenges and therefore less likely to succeed in life (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Chang, 2004; Dweck, 1999).

To summarise, the analysis of the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations has revealed that the conceptualisation of IE is strongly linked to early ideas of 'integration' and 'separation'. Within the initial conceptualisation of inclusion too there was a discriminatory rhetoric by setting up an eligibility criterion for the exclusion of pupils with physical disabilities and severe mental disabilities. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the discursive strategies that were employed in the key policy documents to conceptualise this notion of IE during the first phase in Malaysia. As explored shortly, this conceptualisation has possibly resulted in subsequent policy documents being implemented into a policy landscape that reverberated with exclusionary special educational practices within its inclusive discourse.

**Table 5.1** Overview of the Key Discursive Strategies Used to Conceptualise IE in Key Policy Documents in Phase One in Malaysia

	<b>First phase (1996–2012)</b>				
	<b>Education Act 1996 and 1997 Special Education Regulations</b>				
<b>Discursive strategies used to conceptualise IE</b>	<b>Nomination</b>	<b>Predication</b>	<b>Intensification/ Mitigation</b>	<b>Argumentation</b>	<b>Perspectivisation</b>
	<p>Emphasis on the ‘othering image’ communicated through linguistic veneers that legitimise binary conceptions of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’</p> <p>Nominalised adjective of ‘special’ might be considered as a euphemism for failure and differentiation.</p> <p>Pupils with SEN and their parents assume the role of ‘patient/beneficiaries’ thus portraying them as dependent, powerless, and vulnerable. The authorities carry the semantic role of ‘agents’, and this role gives them more influence over how</p>	<p>Language appears to embody a person-first language.</p> <p>Discursive qualifications of ‘cacat’, ‘handicap’, and ‘severe mental retardation’ seem to connote negativity and helplessness which is not only derogatory but has inaccurately described experiences of disability.</p>	<p>The policy documents are riddled with ‘clauses of conditionality’ to potentially mitigate the illocutionary force of legislations in respect of educational rights, access, duration, and curriculum for people with disabilities.</p>	<p>Authorisation: SEN identification is certified by a panel of authorised professionals I consisting of a medical practitioner, an officer from the MOE, and an officer from the Welfare Department of the MWFC.</p> <p>Rationalisation: Due to the perspectivisation adopted by the policy, it is considered to be more appropriate that ‘othered’ pupils are restricted to either: (a) practical skills and vocational training in community-based rehabilitation centres; or (b) an alternative curriculum.</p>	<p>A child is only deemed as educable and capable of undergoing the national educational programme if he/she is able to physically manage himself without help.</p> <p>Linguistic absence: Pupils with SEN are considered to be less capable than their typically developing peers.</p>

	children with SEN are managed.				
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## **5.2 Phase 2: 2013 – 2017**

### **5.2.1 Background to the development of the Education (Amended) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations**

During this phase (2013 to 2017), which will be generalised as the second phase hereafter, the third and fourth document, specifically the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations were introduced to improve IE provision in Malaysia. While the Education Act 1996 was amended a number of times, this study pays particular attention to the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 in force from 2012. This amendment was significant in the way that it introduced the 2013 Special Education Regulations, a seven-page-long document under chapter 8 in the Act, to revoke the earlier 1997 Special Education Regulations (Mat Rabi, 2016). Similar to its predecessor, this document was authored by the Malaysia Ministry of Education (MMoE) and was launched on the July 18, 2013 (GoM, 2015; MMoE, 2013a). It seeks to improve access to education for children with disabilities by omitting the term ‘educable’ from its regulation as that was no longer considered to be relevant to the Malaysian context alongside inclusions of other regulations (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012). The debates that might have contributed to the omission of such a term are explored in the next subsection. This discussion is followed by a detailed examination of how earlier ideas of IE from previous policy documents were interpenetrated and incorporated with new ideas within the IE space. In order to unpack these complexities, the following two subsections examine how IE is conceptualised and legitimated from 2013 to 2017 in the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations.

### **5.2.2 Definitions of IE and SEN**

The textual analysis begins by considering how the definitions of IE and SEN from the first phase have slightly shifted and been scaled up in the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations in the second phase. Following the introduction of the key policy documents in respect of IE in the first phase, in 2008 Malaysia became a signatory nation of the UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in order to address concerns of segregation and discrimination faced by people with disabilities (Clark et al., 2011). It included regulating the discriminatory use of the term “educable” as appeared in the 1997 Special Education Regulations (GoM, 1996, p. 341). The commitment was an impetus

to Malaysia's Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 to ensure that persons and children with disabilities:

... shall not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disabilities .... (GoM, 2008, Article 28[1])

and

... [are] provide[d] reasonable accommodation suitable with the requirements of persons and children with disabilities in terms of, among others, infrastructure, equipment and teaching materials, teaching methods, curricula and other forms of support that meet the diverse needs of persons or children with disabilities. (GoM, 2008, Article 28[2])

However, this Act had little impact on national education policies and legal documents during its initial conception (Clark et al., 2011; Lee, 2010). It was not until 2013 that the newly amended 2013 Special Education Regulations redefined IE as:

Inclusive Education Programme means an education programme for a pupil with special educational needs which is attended by a pupil with special education needs together with other pupils in the same class in a government school or government-aided school. (MMoE 2013, p. 10)

and the Special Education Integrated Programme as:

... an educational programme for a pupil with special educational needs which is only attended by pupils with special needs together in a special class in a government or government-aided school. (MMoE 2013, p. 10)

As with the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations, the analysis shows that inclusion seems to be heavily characterised by the processes of othering in this regulation. On the surface, the slight terminological change from "normal pupils" (GoM, 1996, p. 341) to "other pupils" (MMoE 2013, p. 10) and the omission of the term educable in the amended regulation appears to be a shift towards adopting a rights-based discourse that is further discussed in the next chapter (Chong, 2016; UNICEF Malaysia, 2019). However, despite this change and omission, a closer examination reveals that the implications remained the

same. In this phase, the othering discourse was distinguished by a special educational needs language and methods for special education or what Campbell (2009) terms as a language that is accorded with an ableist view. As can be observed throughout the 2013 Special Education Regulations for example, the recurrent phrases of ‘special school’, ‘special class’, ‘pupils with special education needs’, and ‘other pupils’ demonstrated this divide. In this educational policy context, such ableist language tends to be connected with the preconceptions about disabilities that place a lower value on a specific group of individuals (Campbell, 2009; Hehir, 2007; Neely-Barnes et al., 2010). In other words, ableism prioritises the (sometimes concealed from view) presence of the traits that are used to assess persons with disabilities as different/deficient/inferior. As proposed by Campbell (2009), the alterity of people with disabilities is empty and hence ableist terms for people without impairment would symbolically exclude people with disabilities. Thus, the analysis of the key IE policy documents in phase two indicates that inclusion seems to be characterised by a frequently conflicting and uneasy alliance between inclusion and the traditional special education framework. Such ingrained discourses and practices of ‘special education’ have been seen as harmful to inclusion (Slee, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001) and may have influenced the way in which pupils with disabilities were defined in IE policy documents in Malaysia during the second phase.

While the discursive construction of pupils with disabilities remained constant in the second phase, the findings suggest that there was a significant effort to further include children with speech, physical, and multiple disabilities in the existing categories of SEN in the 2013 Special Education Regulations (MMoE, 2013a):

“Pupil with special educational needs” means a pupil who is certified by a medical practitioner, an optometrist, an audiologist or a psychologist, as...as a pupil having –

- (a) Visual disability;
- (b) Hearing disability;
- (c) Speech disability;

(d) Physical disability;

(e) Learning difficulties; or any combination of the disabilities, or disabilities and difficulties, referred to in paragraphs (a) to (e). (MMoE 2013, p. 9)

In tandem with this regulation, the 2014 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice was introduced to explicitly outline the various types of learning difficulties supported by the national educational system. They include “global developmental delay, Down syndrome, intellectual disabilities, and conditions that affect an individual's learning ability such as autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and specific learning disabilities” (MMoE, 2014, p. 9). Despite including those who were once systematically excluded from the first phase documents, the analysis suggests that such SEN classifications can become a matter of searching for visible signs of pathology and of ‘hunting down’ perceived deficits (Baker, 2002). This approach is evident in the strategies used in this regulation. For example, in arguing for this SEN classification, this regulation offers an authoritative and scientific basis that legitimised the government's approach to managing disability. In this sense, the scientific progress and knowledge are said to be more pronounced in the 2013 Special Education Regulations by including other medical practitioners from different fields such as “an optometrist, an audiologist or a psychologist” in the assessment and certification of pupils with SEN (MMoE 2013, p. 9). This policy ensemble therefore helped in establishing classification as the basis for a detailed system of medical certification of a number of disabilities. In other words, the concept of SEN proposed by the regulation is said to be grounded by a medicalised discourse to which the next chapter returns in its interdiscursive analysis. Suffice it to say however, the SEN categories in phase two can be seen to build on the definition of IE, which was critical in fortifying the effect of differentiation.

It is additionally important to pay close attention to the text's linguistic absences or silences, or, as Taylor (2004) puts it, the text's "marginalised discourses", which have an equally widespread influence on how pupils with disabilities are discursively constructed and positioned within legislative texts. It is suggested that linguistic silences tend to play a role in the “agentic marshalling of discourse” (Bacchi, 2000, p. 52) of dominant and elite groups (i.e., policymakers) over children with disabilities within the policymaking agenda. This idea might

have led to the superficial ways in which education for children with disabilities is governed and managed in the education system. As noted earlier, while the changes include new categories of different abilities, the analysis illustrates that the key IE policy documents concurrently leave out an account of children from different groups of disabilities such as those with invisible disabilities, i.e., those whose disabilities are not immediately apparent. For example, no mention is made of children who might be struggling with posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, diabetes or many other forms of disability (Chin, 2020). Especially when presenting the new classification of disabilities, the policy texts addressed people with learning disabilities as a collective and an undifferentiated group. However, abundant evidence confirms that disabilities such as behavioural, mental, and intellectual disabilities were perceived to be the least accepted and most stigmatised in Malaysia, a perception which works toward the disadvantage of these groups of children (Islam, 2015; UNICEF Malaysia, 2017, 2019). Indeed, a number of studies have found that people with invisible disabilities are overrepresented among those with no education and have not completed primary school and slightly underrepresented among those with secondary and tertiary education in Malaysia (MMoE, 2013a, 2017). These findings suggest that systemic disparities affecting children with specific impairments ought to be addressed. These initiatives however were absent in these documents.

As such, the focus of policy initiatives on those perceived as more severely affected is a Malaysian form of intervention which mirrors the then current trends in the West, in particular the Warnock Report in 1978, which is discussed in chapter 6 (Chong, 2016). This move presents a narrower category of people—people with disability who are deserving—for whom assistance is available, while risking leaving unprotected a number of others whose needs, although significant, may not be sufficient to qualify for special services and/or benefits. At its core, the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations actively construct a specific concept of what it means to be a pupil with SEN in Malaysia by incorporating what is included (a new focus on the most disadvantaged) as well as what it leaves out (an account of the other forms of disability). This understanding subsequently influenced the type of educational experiences that pupils with disabilities would have to undergo.

### **5.2.3 SEN and schooling opportunities**

The analysis reveals that schooling opportunities for pupils with SEN continued to be predetermined by the policy definitions of IE and SEN in various ways and to varying degrees. Similar to the initial phase, the Education (Amended) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations (MMoE, 2013a) stipulate that pupils with SEN received education in either special school, the Special Education Integrated Programme or Inclusive Education Programme:

“Special Education” means education for a pupil with special educational needs in a special school, or school which implements the Special Education Integrated Programme or Inclusive Education Programme... (MMoE, 2013, p. 9)

As previously noted, the term “educable” that emerged in phase one has inadvertently created a contentious paradox as regards the government’s support for an EFA agenda in its conception of IE in the subsequent phase. This paradox is demonstrated through the following analysis. While the newly gazetted 2013 Special Education Regulations had drawn on a bureaucratisation gaze of special education as an ideological replacement for the educability criterion in order to enforce alternative forms of segregation measures, the regulations were legislated through standard operating procedures related to making decisions both on pupils’ educational placement under subregulation (4):

4. (1) For the purpose of determining the suitability of pupil with special education needs to attend the Special Education under subregulation 5(1), the pupil shall attend a probation period of not more than three months at a government school or government-aided school. (MMoE, 2013, p. 10)

and access to participate in cocurricular activities based on their suitability under subregulation (9):

9. A pupil with special educational needs determined by the panel as suitable to attend the Special Education under subregulation 5(1) shall attend the co-curricular activities as defined in the Education (National Curriculum) Regulations 1997 [P.U. (A) 531.1997] according to the suitability of the pupil. (MMoE, 2013, p. 12)

These subregulations suggest that once children gained initial entry into the schooling system, they were subjected to what might be recognised as a special educational regime. Chong (2016) argues that this suggestion can be identified in policy documents through specific terminologies that project the necessity to evaluate and sort behaviours and learning potentials into different programmes according to what was essentially defined as 'normal' by undergoing a particular set of regimes. Through the intensive 3-month probationary period under subregulation (4), this regime involved observation, surveillance, and evaluation in the form of monitoring of learning and progress as stated below:

4. (2) Upon completion of the probation period referred to in subregulation (1), the school attended by the pupils during the probation period shall prepare and submit a probation period to a panel. (MMoE, 2013, p. 10)

5. (1) Upon receipt of the probation period report under subregulation 4(2), the panel shall determine on the suitability of the pupils with special educational needs to attend the Special Education. (MMoE, 2013, p. 11)

The policy documents clearly and consistently articulate the varied procedures assigned to pupils with disabilities that discriminated them from their 'other' peers. These bureaucratic procedures were specified within the document whereby this group of pupils shall serve a "probation[ary] period of not more than three months" and were subjected to assessment procedures for educational placement purposes. Therefore, it can be inferred that such legislation exhibited the presumed defective developmental trajectory of these children and highlighted the need to sort their abilities according to dominant indicators of normality. Thus, even though the new Act is purportedly argued to be a more inclusive Act, what seems to be disseminated by the MMoE was the importance of identifying children with presumed SEN and their placement in the most 'suitable' setting. This appears to be essentially a pull-out clause of conditionality in that inclusion was conditional on the 'suitability' of the placement, thereby indicating and statutorily offering the option of segregated placement if deemed appropriate.

To legitimate the above practice, this type of modality demonstrates that the policy relied on the authority of persons of institutional authority and relevant policy documents to persuade

the reader of the link between pupils with SEN, suitability, and their educational placement. This is a particularly pertinent element in educational policy analysis where "the significance of the power discourse at the national legislative level cannot be underestimated" (Cookson, 1994, p. 119). Powers entrenched within dominant discourses can authoritatively promote "certain subjectivities and meaning systems over others" (Ball, 1994, p. 108). Under subregulations (4) and (5), in reiterating this link, legitimisation strategies were employed by invoking the authority of "section 41 of the Education Act 1996 [Act 550]", "the Registrar", and "the panel" which includes:

- (a) the Principal, Head Teacher or Senior Assistant for Special Education;
- (b) the State Education Department Officer or District Education Officer; and
- (c) the Social Welfare Department Officer or Persons with Disabilities Development Department Officer. (MMoE, 2013, p. 10-11)

to endorse its appeal to such special educational practices. Additionally, the terms "probation", "panel", and "report" function as a militaristic metaphor that reinforced the need for those who are implicated by the policy to follow its order (Sandby-Thomas, 2011). Understandably, these bureaucratic procedures were entangled in asymmetrical power relations, whereby the professionals mentioned above were entitled to exercise their discretionary power in "disguise" (Withers & Lee, 1988, p. 175) and impose unobtrusively their "own will to power" which, as Foucault (1977) puts it, is already a "will to truth". The probationary and examination processes were forms of disciplinary power, characterised by the opaque and invisible ways in which it objectifies pupils with SEN, and, according to Foucault (1977, p. 191), "makes each individual a 'case': a case which at one and at the same time constitutes an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power". Noticeably backgrounded from the conceptualisation of IE is the voice of the parent or the child with disabilities throughout the policy documents from the second phase, signifying disempowerment. For instance, while subregulation 5(2) stated that (MMoE, 2013, p. 11):

The school which is attended by the pupil during the probation period shall notify the determination made by the panel under subregulation (1) to the

parent of the pupil.

and that:

6. (1) Any person aggrieved by the determination of the panel in subregulation 5 (1) may appeal to the Registrar in writing within thirty days from the date of the notification of the determination.

the regulation stated that:

(2) The determination of the Registrar is final.

This analysis suggests that the predication of “may appeal” and “final” attributed to the appeal processes both worked to discursively obscure certain hidden power relations. Although the parents of children with disabilities may appeal to the Registrar in relation to their children’s placement, the result of the appeal was primarily dependent on the Registrar (Subsection 6). Accordingly, the statutory authority assigned to the Registrar can legitimately debar children from mainstream schools.

Along the same lines, page 11 of the 2013 Special Education Regulations drew attention to the importance of complying to the Code of Practice in the IE space, as regulation (7) stated that:

7. (1) The Registrar General shall prepare the Code of Practice which consists of standard procedures that provide guidance in planning, preparing and implementing the educational programme for a pupil with special educational needs.

(2) The Registrar General may amend the Code of Practice.

(3) Any person who is involved in the implementation of the Special Education shall comply with the Code of Practice. (MMoE, 2013, p. 13)

The adoption of the modal auxiliary *shall* and verb *comply* under subregulation 7(3) reveals the government’s attempt to exercise authority by invoking a lower level of coercion to ensure “any person who is involved in the implementation of the Special Education shall comply with the Code of Practice”. For Gotti (2003), the frequent use of *shall* in political registers is due to

its dual ability to indicate both obligation and prohibition in an ambiguous way and which is inherent in the nature of regulative Acts. In fact, according to Fowler (1991), this use of *shall* is an example of a "pseudo-locative" phrase in the way that it "mystifies a set of complex relationships" (p. 128) in a single sentence. In this particular instance, no information is provided on, among other things, what sort of punishment one might expect for not following the Code of Practice. As a result of obscuring such information, the pseudo-locative phrase puts forward the impression that the legality of the subregulation should go unchallenged by the implied audiences. Likewise, the same exertion of authority could be observed in relation to the duration of education for a pupil with SEN:

- (1) The education for a pupil with special educational needs may be extended for a period as follows:
  - (a) not more than two years in a primary school;
  - (b) not more than two years in a secondary school; or
  - (c) one year in a primary school and one year in a secondary school.
- (2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1)(b), the education for a pupil with special educational needs who attends a vocational education in a secondary special education vocational school may be extended for a further period of one year. (MMoE, 2013, p. 13)

As indicated in the regulations above, the modal *may be* is commonly used to convey the idea of permission, possibility, and ability (Biber et al., 1999). Collectively, the use of the modal auxiliaries *shall* and *may* place not only parents, but also the school community members in a subordinate position, and they are institutionally allotted some degree of ability to make decisions about the placement, educational programme, and duration of education for pupils with SEN. From these, it is possible to infer that the bulk of the Education Act 1996 and 1997 Special Education Regulations were concerned with establishing the roles and tasks of various local, regional and national Panels in arbitrating children's 'deficiency' and 'divergence' against a monolithic notion of 'normalcy'. The excessive forms of proceduralism help to protect the interests of a school-effectiveness movement for "orderliness, uniformity and adherence"

(Loyd, 2000, p. 140), in which children with disabilities are often viewed as a major threat to the preordained system. Thus, it can be argued that the evaluation processes, classification, delayed admittance, and probable exclusion of children with disabilities are dictated by the "unfettered discretion" of the professionals (Fulcher, 1989, p. 116). This move may then result in sustaining their hegemony, resulting in disempowering children with disabilities and their parents, whose voices are silenced. In this regard, policymaking is inextricably linked to asymmetrical power relations, an asymmetry which shapes both the formal and informal aspects of educational policymaking.

Once SEN pupils were officially enrolled in the education system, the regulation outlined the following provisions to support their educational needs:

- (a) any person who is involved in the implementation of the Special Education shall use the Special Education Curriculum;
- (b) a teacher shall use the Individual Education Plan; and
- (c) a teacher may make modification to –
  - (i) the teaching and learning methods or techniques;
  - (ii) the time allocated for each activity;
  - (iii) the activities arrangement; and
  - (iv) the teaching aids. (MMoE, 2013, p. 12)

This analysis suggests that a drawback of this regulation is the assumption that pupils with physical disabilities who have the learning ability to learn like their typically developing peers cannot achieve to the same level under the National Education Curriculum, as they are required to "use the Special Education Curriculum". This regulation also means that they are required to participate in alternative assessments based on alternative achievement standards (MMoE, 2013a). Similar to the first phase, this regulatory phase demonstrates that lower expectations are reflected in the 2013 Special Education Regulations where the regulation assumed that a certain group of pupils are not expected to learn and perform to the same

level expected of other students. However, the inclusion of the Individual Education Plan in the above extract shows an effort to increase support provision that is tailored to individual pupils with SEN in classrooms. In the Malaysian education context, an individual education plan “means a record containing items as determined by the Registrar General which specifies the educational plan for each pupil with special educational needs” (MMoE, 2013, p. 10). As explored in greater depth in chapter 6, the individual education plan was intertextually borrowed and appropriated from the USA’s Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

To summarise, the analysis of the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 (2015) and the 2013 Special Education Regulations identified a recent shift towards adopting a more inclusive approach towards systematically supporting pupils with SEN in its conceptualisation of IE. However, despite this more recent change, this analysis reveals that the policy documents have placed more emphasis on bureaucratic procedures tied to the management and education for pupils with SEN by subtly exercising different forms of segregation measures that were likely to be influenced by the imperatives of special education thinking from the first phase. These findings imply that such an amalgamation of ideas might have muddied the waters for the conceptualisation of IE in policy documents in the second phase. Table 5.2 provides an overview of the discursive strategies that were employed in the key policy documents to conceptualise such a notion of IE during the second phase in Malaysia. As demonstrated shortly, this complexity has to some extent had an effect on the ways in which the IE policy introduced in the third phase, the Zero Reject policy, is created and defined in Malaysia.

**Table 5.2** *Overview of the Key Discursive Strategies Used to Conceptualise IE in Key Policy Documents in Phase Two in Malaysia*

	<b>Second phase (2013–2017)</b> <b>Education Amended Act 1996 and 2013 Special Education Regulations</b>				
	<b>Nomination</b>	<b>Predication</b>	<b>Intensification/ Mitigation</b>	<b>Argumentation</b>	<b>Perspectivisation</b>
<b>Discursive strategies used to conceptualise IE</b>	<p>Slight terminological change to “other pupils” from “normal pupils” and the omission of the term “educable” appears discursively to show the construct of IE’s experiencing a shift towards adopting a rights-based discourse.</p> <p>There is a resounding sense of otherness, and there is a propensity for the Act and the Regulation to homogenise the majority of students and create a divide between the majority and a minority that was depicted as having SEN.</p> <p>Linguistic absence: The SEN classification leaves out an account</p>	<p>Evident use of ableist language to describe persons with disabilities as different/deficient/inferior</p> <p>Despite the inclusion of more categories of disabilities, the SEN classification can become a matter of searching for visible signs of pathology and of “hunting down” perceived deficit, thus contributing to the framing of people with disabilities as inadequate and incapable.</p> <p>Linguistic absence: Leaves out an account of children from different groups of disabilities such as children with invisible disabilities</p>	<p>The policy documents are replaced with different “clauses of conditionality” in that inclusion is conditional on the "suitability" of the placement, thereby indicating and statutorily offering the option of segregated placement if deemed appropriate.</p> <p>Intensification through the use of modal auxiliaries such as “shall”, “may” placed not only parents, but also the school community members, in a subordinate position and they are institutionally allotted some degree of ability to make decisions about the placement,</p>	<p>Authorisation: This mode is more pronounced by invoking the authority of “section 41 of the Education Act 1996 [Act 550]”, “the Registrar”, and “the panel” and medical practitioners from different medical field, and is further strengthened through militaristic metaphors.</p> <p>Linguistic absence: Voices of children with disabilities and their parents are muted in terms of their educational placement through authorisation.</p> <p>Rationalisation: Due to the strong perspectivisation of</p>	<p>There is a need to identify children with presumed SEN and their placement in the most “suitable” setting. This identification can be achieved through imposing bureaucratic procedures and practices such as observation, surveillance, and assessment prior to their placement.</p>

	of children from different groups of disabilities such as children with invisible disabilities.		educational programme, and duration of education for pupils with SEN.	suitability adopted by the policy, pupils with SEN are placed in the "most appropriate" educational setting corresponding with their abilities.	
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### **5.3 Phase 3: 2018–to the present**

#### **5.3.1 Zero Reject Policy**

The conceptualisations of IE found in previous policies seem to have been carried over and further developed in the introduction of the Zero Reject policy. During this phase (2018 to the present day)—hereafter generalised as the third phase—the fifth document, specifically the Zero Reject policy, was introduced in 2018 by the MMoE under a different government called *Pakatan Harapan* (or the Alliance of Hope). The 12-page-long policy signals a historical shift towards a more inclusive educational environment and a point of departure from previous IE policies (MMoE, 2018b). According to the Zero Reject policy, children with disabilities are now reaffirmed and, beginning from 2019, their rights to education in the national mainstream schooling system are protected. However, it should be highlighted that *Pakatan Harapan* was the ruling coalition at the federal level for 22 months from May 2018, when it won the 2018 Malaysian general election, until February 2020 when Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister in its administration resigned. The rise of *Pakatan Harapan* was significant, particularly in relation to the development of this policy. This political reform is therefore revisited in chapter 7 through an extra-discursive analysis of the Zero Reject policy. Despite the change in government, the Zero Reject policy remains in operation as the de facto IE policy in the current *Perikatan Nasional* (or the National Alliance) administration (Chin, 2020; Maaruf et al., 2021). The remaining subsections aim to build on the previous timeline and turn to textually analysing the shifts in the understanding of and approaches to IE within the Zero Reject policy.

#### **5.3.2 Definitions of IE and SEN**

This subsection examines how IE has gained considerable traction through the inclusion of certain linguistic details collocated to the definitions of IE and SEN in the Zero Reject policy. Beginning in 2019, the MMoE implemented the Zero Reject policy as a renewed commitment to IE, in particular for children with disabilities, using a similar definition to the one postulated in the 2013 Special Education Regulations (MMoE, 2018b). However, the analysis suggests that the Zero Reject policy can be said to be structured around the perception of “change”, as the policy is portrayed as a pivotal moment in history, one that breaks with the past and old traditions (i.e., from the previous administration of Barisan Nasional) by bringing a new way of thinking about educational inclusion (i.e., through the rise of *Pakatan Harapan*) in Malaysia.

In tracing the new policy approach to pupils with disabilities in Malaysia, the analysis shows that a considerable section of the policy is dedicated to reconceptualising IE. For example, it can be observed that the representation of “change” emerges in the policy where it rebrands the term IE with a greater inclusive framing under regulation 4: “2019 will be a year of great change for children with disabilities where all types of disabilities can be placed in schools” (MMoE, 2018b, p. 5). In contrast with the previous IE policies, the Zero Reject policy claimed to have been put in place to ensure that pupils with all types of SEN are accepted in any government schools and government-assisted schools of their choice (MMoE, 2018b, p. 2). It is also evident that the change enshrined within the policy is accompanied by a positive discursive qualification of “great”. As Martin (2004) notes, such a discursive qualification is categorised as an inscribed evaluation that explicitly displays positive attitudinal judgement of an action or a process. At the same time, the establishment of the positive positioning of the policy is further supported through the use of evidentiary warrant as a form of legitimation in subregulation 6(2). The subregulation claims that “in this year [2019], we [the MMoE] have achieved 50.1% enrolment of pupils with SEN in the IE Programme for full and partial inclusion” (MMoE, 2018b, p. 10). While an evidentiary warrant is largely based on the trustworthiness and credibility of the evidence, a decision to establish a certain positioning based on evidence may not entirely be neutral (Hyatt, 2013; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The findings imply that the claim to achieve an increased enrolment in the IE Programme based on quantitative forms of empirical research (50.1%) can be argued to construct a positivistic claim to objectivity that tends to be undisputable. Taken together, it is possible that positive discursive qualification and evidentiary warrant are engaged to construct a favourable picture of the stated change, even if the outcome of such change over the coming years is not yet clear. As such, these discursive strategies may play a potentially powerful role in persuading the public about the legitimacy of the aim of the policy.

When it comes to protecting the educational rights of children with all types of disabilities, the analysis illustrates that the impression of legality through making references to the overriding Education (Amendment) Act 1996 is employed under subsection (2):

Every parent who is a Malaysian citizen residing in Malaysia shall ensure that

if his child has attained the age of six years on the first day of January in the current school year the child is registered as a pupil in a primary school in that year and continues to be primary school pupils throughout the period of compulsory education.

and in subsection (4) whereby:

A parent who contravenes subsection (2) shall be guilty of an offence and shall, on conviction, be liable to a fine not exceeding five thousand ringgit or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to both. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 2)

According to van Leeuwen (2007), this legal-rational mode of legitimation is generated from a belief in the "legality" of normative rules and the authority of individuals elevated to power under such rules to issue orders. Moreover, this belief rests on the government's establishing of clear rules and procedures whose implementation is believed to be transparent and accountable. Within this perspective, Weatherley (2006) suggests that citizens of a country that bases its authority on legal-rational standards must adhere to these procedures closely and that they will be subjected to punitive consequences if they do not. In relation to any educational policy, this strategy can be used to justify action (i.e., imposing penalties such as fines and imprisonment) by appealing to the consequences of inaction (i.e., failure to enrol a child in school). Indeed, the analysis indicates that this is one of the deployed argumentative strategies in the policy and that it is essential to the conceptualisation of IE in the hegemonic presentation of a future in which the MMoE envisioned an inclusive environment. This language is characteristic of a political discourse, because it seeks to underline the political conviction and commitment to "Education for All" that was referenced to in the Zero Reject policy (MMoE, 2018b, p. 3). In so doing, it may offer a sense of reassurance that no child will be left behind in the education system and that it is perhaps made more necessary to hold relevant individuals who have violated the regulations accountable for their failure to comply with what the policy dictates.

In line with the rebranded version of IE promoted through the Zero Reject policy, it is interesting to examine the insertion of English terms in a policy that is almost entirely

authored in Malay, an approach which is considerably different from that taken with policy documents in the first and second phases. It can be seen that the English phrase—"Zero Reject policy"—is used a total of seven times throughout the policy (MMoE, 2018b, p. 1). In fact, the phrase also appears in the title of the policy: "Zero Reject Policy untuk Murid Berkeperluan Khas [Zero Reject Policy for Pupils with Special Educational Needs]". Moreover, the following extract illustrates the use of English vocabulary such as "love, happiness and mutual respect" to highlight the importance of inculcating such values within an educational institution:

Semua warga pendidik perlu menghayati tanggungjawab masing-masing sebagai pendidik dan mendidik murid berkeperluan khas (MBK) dengan penuh kasih sayang. Ini selari dengan hasrat YB Menteri Pendidikan yang sentiasa menekankan tiga elemen penting yang perlu disemai dalam sesebuah institusi pendidikan iaitu **love, happiness and mutual respect**. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 11)

Translation:

All educators need to appreciate their responsibilities as educators and educate students with special educational needs (SEN) with love. This is in line with the wishes of the Minister of Education who emphasises three important elements that need to be instilled in an educational institution, namely **love, happiness and mutual respect**. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 11)

It is common to observe the use of code-switching in formal settings in a multicultural country like Malaysia. According to David (2003), Malaysians have a tendency to mix two languages, Malay and English, in their discourse. The power of language choice and who uses what language to whom in the mixed discourse used by Malaysians may represent a specific strategy to achieve a particular aim (see for example David, 2003; Kia et al., 2011). In the case of the Zero Reject policy, this finding suggests that code-switching is used, to quote the Minister of Education, to create an authenticity in the retelling by echoing the language used by the original speaker in his speech, as detailed further in chapter 7. As demonstrated through the above extract, such authenticity is critical in this political context to lend truth to this statement and thus build public trust and confidence in the current policy. Making reference to an authority, and at the same time inserting some English terms into the policy,

helps to emphasise a crucial point to the public. To uncover this crucial point, it is necessary to identify another strategy—moral legitimacy—employed in the policy to legitimate certain educational ideas.

The analysis reveals that moral legitimacy is used in addition to authorisation to achieve an appeal to a value system that revolves around what is good or desirable, where these evaluations are viewed as ideologically linked to certain discourses. This linking strategy relates to how a policy is justified in connection with the public and national interest or the construction of a “good society” (Inglis, 2004). From this perspective, the use of vocabulary such as “love, happiness and mutual respect” in the regulation above appears to rhetorically intensify the imagery by injecting emotional engagement into the policy that pupils with SEN belong in their educational institution and within the larger society. This example, in conjunction with the use of “Zero Reject policy”, also exhibits phrases that Fowler (1991) terms “ideological slogans”, in that these phrases “can be strongly foregrounded offering conceptual simplicity and memorability... [and] their simplicity provides a packaging of ideas with a very solid and clear outline” (p. 178). These slogans thus can be closely associated with the strategy of assimilation to strengthen a bond within a group that is generally couched in more broad, emotive, and positively regarded terms that evoke social justice, inclusion or family values. In this instance, inclusion is framed in such a way that it represents a changing and moving beyond tolerance towards the desirability of more equitable and inclusive forms of education that stem from the rights discourse. This device is aligned with the title of the policy—the Zero Reject policy—which is concerned with a commitment to social justice and elaborating on building an inclusive, welcoming, and equitable education system and society.

Interestingly, the definitions of SEN remain unchanged in the Zero Reject policy and are still associated with disabilities and/or some form of learning difficulties (MMoE, 2018b). Apart from the existing six SEN categories specified in the 2013 Special Education Regulations, there was no mention of education provision for children from other groups of disabilities in the policy (MMoE, 2018b). This omission seems to be inconsistent with the message reiterated in the Zero Reject policy that suggests a stronger orientation to human rights with a promise of

“great change” to ensure that “children...with all types of disabilities” have a right to education in schools as mentioned earlier (MMoE, 2018b, p. 5). This tension and contradiction has possibly led to the continuation of a two-track integration policy (Lee, 2010), resulting in an approach to determine how schooling opportunities for pupils with SEN are defined and managed (Chong, 2016).

### **5.3.3 SEN and schooling opportunities**

The findings demonstrates that the definitions of IE and SEN constructed in the Zero Reject policy help to determine the educational placement of pupils with disabilities. As stipulated in the policy, in subregulation 3.3 pupils with SEN are sorted according to their abilities to attend different educational programmes:

- High-functioning students with SEN are placed in Inclusive Education Programmes.
- Students with SEN that require a moderate level of support are placed in the Special Education School or the Special Education Integrated Programme.
- Students with SEN that require a maximum level of support are recommended for intervention in community-based rehabilitation centres. (Special Education Division, 2018, p. 5)

As seen in the extract above, the linguistic arrangements in response to the schooling placement of pupils with SEN appears to position pupils with SEN as being controlled and acted on by the agents and thus reflects a certain power relation. The analysis highlights that the sentence structure and verbs used in the Zero Reject policy reinforce the patient/beneficiaries-agent relation discussed in the first phase. Although they (i.e., pupils with SEN) are syntactically positioned before the verb, which typically signifies the act of being empowered, such construction takes on a passive voice. This passive construction traditionally assigns pupils with SEN as the patient who, as this construction suggests, are impacted by the action verb “placed” and that their ‘placement’ is carried out by the MMoE. This use of the passive means that pupils with SEN not only assume the semantic role of ‘patients’ whose lives

are affected and changed by the actions of these institutions, but also as 'beneficiaries' who receive educational support or intervention from these special and inclusive education programmes. The patient/beneficiary-agent relationship may discursively portray pupils with SEN as individuals who are powerless, vulnerable, and dependent, and thus, as argued by Bandura (2001), increases the control that the agents have over pupils with SEN or disability issues. The agent-patient relationality reveals a lower level of coercion due to power inequalities embedded within this policy in that pupils with SEN are expected to participate in such educational arrangements, signalling subtle tones of a charity discourse, a topic that is revisited in the next chapter.

Furthermore, Billig (2008) argues that passivation works to convert statements with specified agents of actions into agentless statements that communicate less information. By removing the agent, writers can reify agents of processes thus "obfuscate[ing] agency, and therefore responsibility" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 144). The use of passivisation therefore suggests that the use of passive voices in the educational placement of pupils with SEN might be attributed to the idea that the impact of the *action* is more significant than the *actor*. As van Dijk (2011) argues, the agency can be made less prominent by shifting the expression from "The district education officer places high-functioning students with SEN in Inclusive Education Programmes" to "High-functioning students with SEN are placed in Inclusive Education Programmes". As such, responsible individuals are defocused and distanced from the surface of the text and are thus concealed from the readers. As Simpson (1993) shows, by fending off the 'who by?' question in this scenario likely leaves little room for the public to question the authority of the MMoE. Further to this point, Fowler (1991) writes that processes assume status of things that are inanimate. Consequently, a pupil with SEN who assumes such an impersonal position may be susceptible to being manipulated and controlled. Fowler et al. (1979) note that when official discourse uses passivation in this way, it frequently insinuates that the educational arrangements presented are fixed and objective. Put simply, the analysis indicates that the use of passivation in the Zero Reject policy can help maintain these asymmetrical power relations by reproducing a social context of inequality.

In contrast to the asymmetrical construction examined in the extract above, an active voice is

employed in the final clause attached to the previous extract, which states that:

- However, if parents/guardians wish their child to remain in a Special Education Integrated Programme, the school cannot refuse to enrol the child. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 5)

While the passive voice encodes a view from the perspective of a patient, the active voice encodes a view from an agent, as exemplified above (Hart, 2014). As discussed in the previous subsection, the representation of “change” in the conceptualisation of IE is further consolidated when the role of the parents/guardians as an agent are foregrounded in the policy with regard to the final educational placement decisions for their children (pupils with SEN). Switching the use of passive to an active voice, in this case, helps to modify and mitigate the illocutionary force of the previous statements (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). For example, while it is clearly evident in the Zero Reject policy that a certain authority assigns children different educational placements according to their abilities, the final clause enables parents/guardians to decide the type of education their children will receive. As an improvement to the earlier IE policy cycles, this insertion signifies a shift in power distribution, empowering parents and/or guardians with some degree of authority, an agency which was absent in previous policy documents (Chong, 2016; MMoE, 2018b).

In addition to the educational placement of pupils with SEN, the findings show that there are similarities in the current Zero Reject policy and the policy documents from the second phase in respect of how pupils with SEN are managed. The policy text is littered with detailed specifications about certain procedures and coordinated effort from the MMoE, Special Education Service Centre, and relevant nongovernmental organisations to optimise the participation of these children in the educational system. For example, subregulation (4) states that:

- (i) The identification of SEN needs to be implemented as early as possible to enable interventions to be given before they begin to step into the school environment. Early intervention for children with SEN is important to reduce the impact of their disability and can affect student readiness. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 6)

and

- (v) Early intervention can also detect the need for special equipment that can be used to support the child being referred. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 6)

While the presumed “deficiencies” of these children who will be educated in government or government-assisted schools in the above regulations are accentuated, these intervention services are provided to ensure that children with SEN are properly supported within the system. The analysis suggests that this support is accomplished through rationalisation, which is a form of legitimation based on goals, uses, and the effects of practices (van Leeuwen, 2007). As claimed in subregulations 4 (i) and (v), early intervention programmes can help to increase a child’s readiness to learn in formal education by minimising the impact of disability through support services, therapy, and rehabilitation as early as possible. Thus, the appeal to such instrumental rationalisation in this section opens up space for persisting procedures of screening, certification, and placement in the current policy. This practice is perhaps a response to the previously discussed issue raised by policy texts from the first phase, which alluded to the inability of certain groups of children to respond and adapt to mainstream educational facilities and approaches. Despite its links a medicalised discourse, it can be suggested that this step is undertaken to ensure that pupils with SEN will be perceived and treated as equal and valuable members of the school community. In doing so, this approach may aid in achieving one of the intended goals of the policy, that is, to “achieve a 75% enrolment of pupils with SEN in the IE Programme by 2023” (MMoE, 2018b, p. 10).

Furthermore, the data suggests that there exists an authority structure between the policy and the recipient. The regulation above is expressed with the modality of “need to” (see subregulation 4[i]). The usage recurs in subregulation 4 (iv) to reinforce the importance of the Early Intervention Programme by stating that:

- (iv) Parents/guardians can request early interventions provided by Special Education Service Centre and MMoE for their child. Involvement of parents/guardians during therapy and rehabilitation sessions are needed to ensure intervention continues to meet the child’s needs at home consistently. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 7).

In this context, *need to* is a modal verb that is linked to the semantic notions of necessity and obligation (Lillian, 2008). Specifically, Coates (1983) argues that on an obligation continuum *need to* is slightly weaker than *should* and that, when offering advice or expressing moral obligation, it conveys compulsory obligation of the type generally conveyed by the word *must*. Thus, it is possible to interpret the policy as trying to influence the implied audience through advice by creating a sense of urgency or importance. Here, the policy is communicating the urgency to provide intervention to the identified group of pupils with SEN “to reduce the impact of their disability [which] can affect student readiness” (MMoE, 2018b, p. 6). This image of obligation is further reinforced when the policy includes the “Special Education Service Centre and MMoE” in the subregulation to invoke a sense of the authorities’ involvement. Similarly, the modal verb “can” is used concurrently in subregulation 4(iv), as shown above and in subregulation 4(vii), where it states that: “In addition to the Special Education Service Centre, children with special needs or those with special needs characteristics can also participate in early intervention programs at non-governmental organisation operations centers” (MMoE, 2018b, p. 7). The use of modal auxiliary here signals permission, with most of these statements being concerned with what the law does or does not permit (Hyatt, 2013). In this instance, the Zero Reject policy allows the recipient (i.e., parents/guardians) to perform some action such as seeking early intervention for their children. Collectively, the findings imply that the connection between the two modalities [*need to* i.e., obligation and *can* i.e., permission] and power may be argued to be evident, where there is a discursive reproduction of unequal power relations. This distinction ensures that while those with more knowledge about the relevant domain under MMoE need to provide for children with SEN, the former still has authority over children with SEN and their parents/guardians. Consequently, the policy reform process is characterised not just in terms of promoting “what is beneficial” and removing “what is harmful”, which worked to create consensus amongst readers. It also works to obscure the political power exercised by the MMoE in deciding what is considered to be “beneficial” and “harmful” for pupils with SEN.

A final point of interest in this analysis is located in the final page of the Zero Reject policy, where the MMoE included a section on the impending challenges and barriers to inclusive education in Malaysia. These barriers include inadequate disability-friendly facilities, lack of

readiness of pupils with SEN, lack of acceptance from school staff, and shortage of special education teachers and student management assistants as specified under regulation 7:

1. The physical condition of the existing classrooms must be safe and adequate and the infrastructure facilities in schools, especially in terms of disabled-friendly facilities, must also be completed in all schools.
2. Readiness of pupils with SEN in terms of behaviour management and self-management such as toilet training.
3. Acceptance of school staff including administrators towards pupils with SEN.
4. The shortage of special education teachers and student management assistants (PPM) needs to be addressed immediately. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 11)

The above extract shows that the MMoE works with a “problem-solution” structural pattern to lay out the problems that can potentially disrupt the Ministry’s effort in their educational inclusion measures in the future and presents solutions to address these concerns. According to Hoppe (2018), this structural pattern usually begins by describing a problem and its severity, followed by a proposed solution. However, it should be pointed out that this sequence can occasionally be inverted. As can be seen in the Zero Reject policy, the placement of the solution is presented on page 10 and precedes the problem that is outlined on the subsequent page. The solutions include improving disability-friendly facilities, implementing a holistic model of IE programme, and providing teacher professional development courses that are designed on the basis of the needs of pupils with SEN, as stipulated under regulation 6:

1. Provide all government schools and government aided schools with disability-friendly facilities in stages, starting with Special Education Schools and Integrated Special Education Programs. So far, only 170 schools are equipped with four disability-friendly facilities which consist of handrails, ramp, disability-friendly toilets and disability-friendly parking.

2. Implement a comprehensive Inclusive Education Program for Students with Special Needs (Holistic Model) in stages in 2019 at the primary school level.
3. Implement a Teacher Professional Development Course continuously designed based on the disabilities of pupils with SEN starting 2019. This course involves the participation of mainstream teachers and special education teachers from preschool to secondary level. Emphasis will be given in the aspects of behaviour management, self-management and 3Rs (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic). (MMoE, 2018b, p. 10)

The findings suggest that that governments are likely to use such an inverted structure to shift blame away from their potential failures or to leave some room as a provisional way out of the crisis (Hoppe, 2018; Portnoi, 2016).

Equally important, the problem-solution structure attempts to draw readers' attention away from the subject of why the problem exists and towards the topic of how the problem may be solved. In the case of the Zero Reject policy, the analysis indicates that this schema closes off potentially awkward questions such as "why are children with disabilities rejected from being enrolled in their local schools" while, at the same time, suggesting that this pressing issue of accessibility is something that is, indeed, solvable. There is also a sense of urgency that necessitates a response, as seen by the use of "must" (expressing necessity) and "needs to" (expressing obligation) in the extract. The sense of urgency is possibly invoked due to a lack of confidence in public education expressed by relevant stakeholders that were involved in the previous IE policy documents which form part of the background to the trajectory of the Zero Reject policy (Amar-Singh et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF Malaysia, 2017, 2019). From these problem-solution patterns, it can be seen that a portion of the policy is devoted to spelling out the various solutions that will be undertaken to increase the participation and learning of pupils with disabilities. In this way, the government's objectives are shown by displaying the prospects for the Zero Reject policy in the future, thus fostering public confidence.

Further to this point, analysis demonstrates that there is an increased focus on the

collaborative role of the parents or guardians and the school community as one of the proposed solutions, as the policy stipulates that:

...the cooperation of parents/guardians is very much needed to ensure the readiness of pupils with SEN to go to school so that they receive help and learning support in line with their disability. Positive cooperation between the school and parents/guardians is very important to optimize the potential of pupils with SEN. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 12)

This argumentative strategy draws on rationalisation by connecting a conclusion to a claim (Wodak & Fairclough, 2010). As explored in chapter 3, rationalisation seeks to legitimise the grounds for action on the basis of results or outcomes. For instance, rationalisation can be employed in discussions of what may be the possible positive outcomes of the policy approach. In the Zero Reject policy, the terms "very much needed" and "important" are used to describe the link between fostering positive collaboration between the school and parents/guardians, thus emphasising the positive value of the relationship in enhancing educational opportunities for pupils with SEN. Furthermore, these positive values are bolstered by the modal verb "is", which tends to be used to assert the truthfulness of a statement. According to Fowler (1991), the efficacy of this sort of modality is derived from the fact that there is no ambiguity, thus leaving no room for any doubt about the validity of the claim presented. In other words, the cooperative role between parents and schools is seen as being an unquestionable solution to "ensure the [classroom] readiness" and to "optimise the potential of pupils with SEN" (MMoE, 2018b, p. 12).

Thus, the problem-solution pattern is effective in a persuasive context, especially in policymaking, because it lends itself readily to promoting policies, responses, and actions (Hoppe, 2018). The strength of this pattern lies in the sequential engagement it invites from the readers or implied audiences. If the readers accept and trust the policy's depiction of a problem and believe that the problem is significant or urgent, they will yearn for a solution. In this way, the policymakers, who provide solutions that address the problem they have previously identified, have a better chance of convincing the readers to endorse the recommended solution proposed by the policy and thus the likelihood that those who are

involved with the Zero Reject policy will follow the government's direction and guidance.

To summarise, the analysis of the Zero Reject policy has demonstrated that the conceptualisation of IE is notable for its attempt to transition from an integrative to an IE system. However, despite this change, the analysis revealed that along with an increased focus on removing barriers and transforming the system to improve provision for children with SEN, the concept of full inclusion in the policy is held back by highlighting the deficiencies of pupils with SEN found in previous policy documents. Thus, it could be suggested that remnants of old approaches from previous phases have merged with new ideas in the current policy. Table 5.3 provides an overview of the discursive strategies that have been employed in the key Malaysian IE policy documents to conceptualise this notion of IE in phase three.

**Table 5.3** Overview of the Key Discursive Strategies Used to Conceptualise IE in Key Policy Documents in phase three in Malaysia

<b>Third phase (2018–present)</b>					
<b>Zero Reject policy</b>					
	<b>Nomination</b>	<b>Predication</b>	<b>Intensification/ Mitigation</b>	<b>Argumentation</b>	<b>Perspectivisation</b>
	<p>Structured around the perception of “change” as the policy is portrayed as a pivotal moment in history, one that breaks up with the past and old traditions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- giving voice to parents of children with SEN by assigning them the role of an “agent”;</li> <li>and</li> <li>- shifting greater focus in removing barriers and transforming the system</li> </ul> <p>Pupils with SEN and their parents assume the role of “patient/beneficiaries” thus portraying them as dependent, powerless and vulnerable</p>	<p>Due to the mode of argumentation (rationalisation) adopted by the policy, pupils with SEN continue to be framed as different/deficient/inferior.</p> <p>The Zero Reject policy is established in a positive positioning by predicating the policy with a positive value (“great”) and positivistic claim by citing evidence of the increased enrolment in the IE programme.</p> <p>Linguistic absence: Leaves out an account of children from different groups of disabilities such as children with invisible disabilities</p>	<p>Code-switching with the use of vocabulary such as “love, happiness and mutual respect” and “Zero Reject” in the regulation above appears to rhetorically intensify the imagery of pupils with SEN belonging in their educational institution and within society at large, by injecting emotional engagement into the policy.</p> <p>Inclusion of a clause that enables parents/guardians to make the decision regarding the type of education their children will receive. This new-found agency functions to mitigate</p>	<p>Legal-rational: this strategy is used to justify action (i.e., imposing penalties such as fines and imprisonment upon parents) by referring to the consequences of inaction (i.e., failure to enrol a child in school).</p> <p>Authorisation: This mode is more pronounced as it invokes the authority of “section 41 of the Education Act 1996 [Act 550]”, “the Registrar”, and “the panel” and medical practitioners from different medical fields.</p> <p>Rationalisation: The problem-solution</p>	<p>Children with all types of disabilities can be placed in schools provided that they go through a probationary and intervention period. In combination with a suitable educational placement, these optimise their academic potential and maximise participation in the classroom.</p> <p>A positive collaboration between the school and parents/guardians is needed to enhance educational opportunities for pupils with SEN.</p>

	through passive construction		<p>the previous illocutionary legislation that positions pupils with SEN and their parents as powerless.</p> <p>Intensification of authorisation through the use of modal auxiliaries such as “can” and “need to”</p>	<p>structure helps to communicate an urgent need to address issues pertaining to IE through the stating of a set of solutions throughout the policy.</p> <p>Moral: Appeal to the construction of the “good society” by injecting a sense of social justice, love, and inclusiveness into the policy.</p>	
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#### 5.4 Textual analysis: Cross-phase synthesis

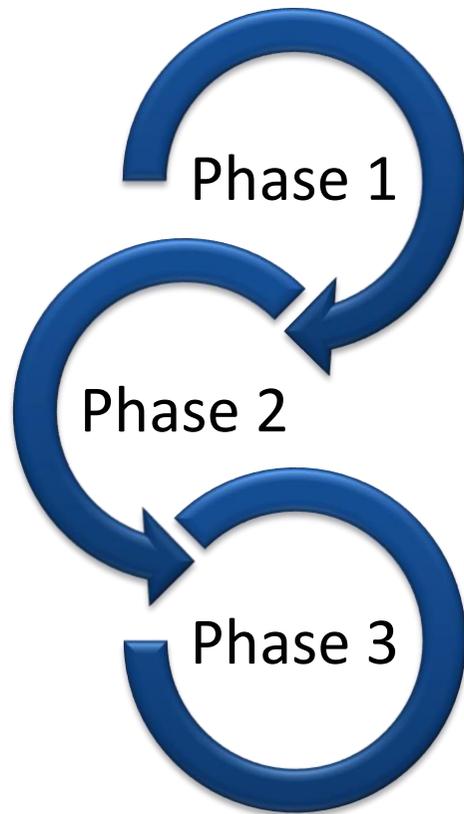
Chapter 5 sought to examine five key policy documents relating to IE, from three phases, with the intention of better understanding how IE is conceptualised in policy documents through various discursive strategies over time in Malaysia. Figure 5.1 provides a visual overview of the evolution of this conceptualisation (see page 166). The figure (Figure 5.1) shows that the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations during the first phase (1996–2012) appear to lay a solid foundation in their advocacy for a two-track integration policy whereby the educational needs for pupils with SEN could be catered for in either special school or mainstream school systems. While this policy approach at this stage indicates that there is a strong emphasis on the historical imperatives of special education thinking, it also facilitates the discrimination and exclusion of certain groups of children. The notion of inclusion is occasionally reduced by setting up a criterion for excluding pupils with physical disabilities and severe mental disabilities from the education system.

In the following phase from 2013 to 2017, the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations were introduced purportedly to promote more inclusive ideas, as depicted in Figure 5.1. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the deep structures surrounding special education thinking and integration still loomed large over the conceptualisation of IE in these policy documents. This influence is evident in the way the policy documents convey the necessity for the identification of children with presumed SEN and their placement in the most suitable setting. This policy required the education authorities and medical professionals to continue to legitimatise what counts as inclusion through authorisation and rationalisation. As this chapter has detailed, the discriminatory rhetoric that was conspicuously present in the initial phase of IE was substituted with powerful bureaucratic practices and procedures imposed upon pupils with SEN and their parents/guardians.

As shown in Figure 5.1 below, in the third and current phase (2018–present), the Zero Reject policy rebranded the conceptualisation of IE as selective inclusionism through its attempt to disrupt the status quo of special education thinking. However, the definitions of IE and SEN in the policy remain unchanged and are still associated with disabilities and/or some form of

learning difficulties. This chapter has shown that the Zero Reject policy ensures that what is more critical is students' rights to learning regardless of where and how learning might take place. In its conception, new ideas such as "change", "love, happiness and mutual respect", and "zero rejection" construct inclusion as a positive value by valuing and embracing learner diversity. Equally important, there was a considerable shift in the emphasis away from pupils' perceived deficiencies towards what they can potentially do along with the idea of changes in values and the need for school and system transformation to accommodate pupils with SEN. Thus, the Zero Reject policy represents amalgamated ideas of increased access and perceived optimal ways to meet different educational needs.

**Figure 5.1** Overview of How IE is Conceptualised in Policy Documents Over Time in Malaysia



- The conceptualisation of IE reverberates with traditional exclusionary special educational practices related to “integration” and “separation”.
- The conceptualisation of IE is framed by powerful bureaucratic practices and procedures imposed upon pupils with SEN and their parents/guardians that are linked to the historical imperatives of special educational thinking.
- The conceptualisation of IE is rebranded in that it embodies new ideas of “change”, “love, happiness and mutual respect”, and “zero rejection” to value and embrace learner diversity while at the same time amalgamating these elements with remnants of previous segregatory approaches to IE.

## **5.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter provides an understanding of how the conceptualisation of IE has evolved over time in Malaysian policy documents. The analysis showed that that the notion of IE has shifted away from exclusion towards selective inclusion. This chapter's findings provide a context for considering the dominant discourses that influence IE policy ideas and formation processes over time in Malaysia. In order to understand this influence, further investigation into the diverse ways in which different discourses (interdiscursive analysis) and borrowing from other texts (intertextual analysis) that interpenetrate each other within the IE policy environment is required. The following chapter attends to this need by responding to the following research question: How have the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships governed the conceptualisation of inclusive education in policy documents over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia?

## **CHAPTER SIX: INTERTEXTUAL AND INTERDISCURSIVE ANALYSES**

This chapter builds on the previous textual analysis to examine the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships of the key IE policy documents in Malaysia (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). In doing so, this chapter begins by investigating the following research question: How have the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships governed the conceptualisation of inclusive education in policy documents over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia? In order to respond to this question, this chapter returns to Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) second layer of the DHA—that is, the intertextual and interdiscursive analyses—to examine the links between key IE policy documents of interest in Malaysia from 1996 to 2018 and other texts and discourses. Traces of such relationships can be used to investigate how varying IE ideas have been borrowed and recontextualised in the Malaysian IE policy documents.

This chapter contains three sections. Sections 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4 address three phases determined by the significant shifts in the historical development of IE policies in Malaysia. Alongside a historical analysis, each section highlights and examines two types of intertextual representations—direct intertextuality—i.e., the explicit surface links between texts and indirect intertextuality, i.e., the “implicit thematic chains that relate texts to each other via underlying assumptions and presuppositions” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 37). The chapter then examines the presence of intersecting and overlapping of different discourses within the key IE policy documents. However, in order to provide the necessary theoretical understanding to engage in these intertextual and interdiscursive analyses, this chapter begins by returning to the notion of recontextualisation, as doing so may allow for consideration to how the conceptualisation of IE is shaped, reinterpreted, and transformed across time in the Malaysian context.

### **6.1 Recontextualisation of IE policy texts and discourses**

Chapter 3 introduced policy text by defining it as a governmental apparatus to exercise political power and the ways in which the language within it is used to establish certain claims, assumptions, world views, and processes (Codd, 1988). This exercise of political power is commonly achieved through interdiscursivity and intertextuality, and for this reason Reisigl and Wodak (2009) argue that political texts are more likely to be intertextual and

interdiscursive in nature than others. On the one hand, intertextuality concerns how borrowed texts are connected diachronically to other texts through careful selection or editing.

Interdiscursivity on the other hand studies the presence of multiple discourses and genres within a single text. These processes, according to Reisigl and Wodak (2009), can be realised in policy texts through recontextualisation.

As discussed in chapter 3, Bernstein (1990) sees recontextualisation as “a principle for appropriating other discourses and bringing them into a special relation with each other for the purpose of their selection, transmission and acquisition” (pp. 183-184). It is also through recontextualisation that ideologies embedded within policy texts “move between spatially and temporally different contexts” (Wodak, 2011, p. 629) and “(partly) acquire[s] a new meaning” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 90) for many different purposes. For this reason, recontextualisation is typically not seen as neutral and, according to Richardson and Wodak (2009), right-wing political parties are particularly skilled at utilising tropes, pragmatic presuppositions, and implicatures to alter historical phrases but retain a similar meaning. They argue that it is common to observe such “subtle historical continuities” in the recontextualisation of ideologically laden ideas, particularly in official political materials (Wodak & Fairclough, 2010, p. 24). By analysing the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships in the key IE policy documents in the context of this research, this chapter seeks to understand how both phrases and larger excerpts are borrowed (intertextuality) and how multiple discourses and genres are mixed (interdiscursivity) to govern the recontextualisation of IE. It is also through this second analytical layer of the DHA that one can reveal the origins, suppositions, and ideological underpinnings, as well as conflicts and inconsistencies, of the recontextualised IE policy documents.

## **6.2 Phase 1 (1996–2012): The Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations**

Building on the textual analysis in chapter 5, this section begins by considering the interdiscursive and intertextual relations that have governed the conceptualisation of IE in the Malaysian IE policy documents during phase one. The key IE policy documents examined

include the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations that were examined in the previous chapter under subsection 5.1.1.

### ***6.2.1 Intertextual analysis: The rise of “inclusion” and “exclusion” under international influence***

This section analyses the intertextual surfaces of the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations. Alongside the examination of the physical policy texts, the analysis includes interview data with relevant policymakers involved in IE policy development from the first phase. Adopting this method can enable triangulation of findings and account for nuanced and subtler intertextual and interdiscursive features found in the policy documents. Table 6.1 on page 171 and 172 provides an overview of the intertextual and interdiscursive connections of key IE policy documents in phase one from 1996 to 2012.

In relation to intertextuality, Table 6.1 reveals that several policy pronouncements, both international and foreign, were influential in the initial conceptualisation of IE. The following two subsections analyse two themes that emerged: first, “education but not for all” and second, “least restrictive environment”, both of which were born out of the intertextual ties surrounding the formation of the key IE policy documents in the first phase.

**Table 6.1** *An Overview of the Intertextual and Interdiscursive Relationships of key IE Policy Documents in Phase One from 1996 to 2013*

Phase 1 (1996 – 2012)	1997 Special Education Regulations	Intertextual Analysis		Interdiscursive analysis
		Direct Intertextuality	Indirect Intertextuality	
			<p>(4) A programme which is provided in special schools for pupils with visual impairment or hearing impairment;</p> <p>(5) An integrated programme in general schools for pupils with visual impairment or hearing impairment or with learning disabilities; and</p> <p>(6) An inclusive education programme for pupils with special needs and who are able to attend normal classes together with normal pupils (MMoE, 1997, para. 2).</p>	<p>The term “inclusive education” is an explicit adoption from the 1994 Salamanca Statement.</p> <p>Explicit reference to the term “special educational needs” from the 1978 Warnock Report.</p>
	Education Act 1996	Intertextual Analysis		
		Direct Intertextuality	Indirect Intertextuality	
		<p>41. (1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3), The Minister may by regulations prescribe:</p> <p>(a) the duration of primary and secondary education suitable to the needs of a pupil in receipt of special education;</p> <p>(b) the curriculum to be used in respect of special education;</p> <p>(c) the categories of pupils requiring special education and the methods appropriate for the education of pupils in each category of special schools; and</p> <p>(d) any other matter which the Minister deems expedient or necessary for the purposes of this Chapter (GoM, 1996, p. 24).</p>		<p>Indirectly calls reference to Public Law 94-142 or the Education of the Handicapped Act concerning the educational rights, access, duration, and curriculum for pupils with SEN</p>

	<p>A pupil with special needs is educable if he is able to manage himself without help and is confirmed by a panel consisting of a medical practitioner, an officer from the MOE and an officer from the Welfare Department of the MWFCD as capable of undergoing the national educational programme (GoM, 1996, p. 341).</p>	<p>Direct adoption of the term “educable” from Section 57 of the 1994 Education Act enacted in the UK.</p>		
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### 6.2.1.1 Education but not for all

The analysis shows that there is a tendency in the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations to use the phrase “inclusive education” and that this term is associated with different documents that influenced its conceptualisation. Consequently, there appears to be a fusion of different ideologies ascribed to the term (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Lee & Low, 2013). For example, it is evident that the Malay term *pendidikan inklusif* was adopted from the English words “inclusive education” contained in the 1994 Salamanca Statement and directly translated into Malay. This international agreement brought IE, for the first time, into the foreground of the policy texts during this phase (Chin, 2020). The following interview extract captures the view of Policy Actor 2, a key policymaker who worked as the Head of the Special Education Sector with the MME, on tracing the emergence of the term “inclusive” in the Malaysian educational context:

While there are several UN policies such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [1989], the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities [1993], and the UNESCAP Biwako Millennium Framework [2002] that affirm the right of all children to education, the Salamanca Statement document was responsible for giving shape to Malaysia’s initial policy to provide education for the disabled and students with special educational needs from the beginning of the 1990s. We adopted the term “inclusive education” from this international agreement as the basis for our commitment to providing equality in terms of education to those with special educational needs. This was later directly translated into Malay to capture what was not already available in our culture. (Interview data, Policy Actor 2)

While the term IE in the Salamanca Statement is taken to generally resonate with the “Education for All” (EFA) principles to enable schools in most parts of the world to serve all children particularly those with disabilities (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; UNESCO, 1994), the analysis demonstrates that the 1997 Special Education Regulations may have formed a different variation of IE by drawing a line between ‘educable’ and ‘ineducable’ children. As affirmed by Policy Actor 1, who was the Deputy Director of Schools Divisions of the MME,

the category of children who were 'ineducable' was drawn from the 1944 Education Act (Ministry of Education, 1944) enacted in the UK:

This was our response to the call of the Salamanca Statement. During the establishment of an official inclusive education system, our local perspective from Malaysia was built on the 1944 Education Act from the UK. In fact, the idea of educability was drawn from that particular Act. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

The UK's 1944 Education Act characterised certain groups of children who were considered to have severe impairments as 'ineducable' and they were therefore excluded from mainstream schools (Hall, 1997). Contradicting the inclusive notion of EFA in the 1994 Salamanca Statement, the notion of educability was generally used in the early 1900s to absolve teachers of responsibility for their pupils' failures through their exclusion in certain countries like Scotland, Australia, the UK, and the USA (Kauffman & Kroese, 1981). As this notion spills over into the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations, children with physical and severe mental disabilities were excluded from the national education system in Malaysia by labelling these groups of children as 'ineducable'. This exclusionary practice was justified by a child's inability to "manage themselves without help" and thus considered to be incapable of "undergoing the national education system" (GoM, 1996, p. 341). It was for this reason that the policy documents allowed only pupils with visual and hearing impairment as well as those with minor learning disabilities to enrol in the Malaysian education system.

With regard to how pupils with SEN were labelled in key IE policy documents in Malaysia, the analysis suggests that there is direct reference to the UK's 1944 Education Act alongside the Warnock Report drawn up by the British Education Commission in 1978. As discussed in chapter 5, pupils with SEN were largely assigned the term *cacat* or "handicap" in the 1997 Special Education Regulations. This finding shows that the discriminatory use of language appears to emulate the language used in the UK's 1944 Education Act (Ministry of Education, 1944), which established 11 categories of handicap including those pupils who are physically handicapped. The use of the term handicap is in contrast with the use of the

preferred contemporary term, 'special educational needs', which was also inserted in the same clause along with the term *cacat*, as noted in the 1997 Special Education Regulations:

“murid-murid dengan keperluan khas” ertinya murid-murid yang mempunyai kecacatan penglihatan atau kecacatan pendengaran atau mempunyai masalah pembelajaran; [“pupils with special educational needs” means pupils who have visual impairments or hearing impairments or have learning difficulties;] (MMoE, 1997, p. 1)

The term “special educational needs” (SEN) in the clause above seems to be directly adopted from the 1978 Warnock Report. This finding corresponds with the interview data from Policy Actor 1:

Following the Warnock Report in the United Kingdom in 1978, the word 'special education needs' became commonly used in several countries, and we adopted it to categorise those with certain deficits. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

Briefly, the 1978 Warnock Report was an outcome of the British Education Committee's enquiry (Warnock, 1978), which provided a comprehensive review of special and inclusive education in England. The Warnock Committee and the 1981 Act's solution distanced the system from medical categories by rejecting the term 'handicap' and promised to replacing the individual deficiency model inscribed in the 1944 Education Act. This shift had a substantial impact on subsequent inclusive and special education policies in the UK by radically introducing the concept of SEN to soften terminologies and to concentrate on individual educational requirements (Lindsay et al., 2020). However, the analysis indicates that this concept of SEN appears to have seeped into the Malaysian key IE policy documents to place emphasis on individual limitations. As such, it can be argued that this blend of conflicting terminologies and ideologies stemming from different documents, namely the 1994 Salamanca Statement, the UK's 1944 Education Act, and the 1978 Warnock Report used within the same policy documents may have created muddled implications on the ways that IE in Malaysia is conceptualised.

### 6.2.1.2 Least restrictive environment

Concurrently, the interview data shows that the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations allude to the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) principle from the Public Law 94-142 enacted in the USA in terms of how pupils with disabilities were managed (National Education Association of the United States, 1978). Policy Actor 1 succinctly highlights the harmonisation with this foreign influence of early initiatives to include children with disabilities in the Malaysian education system:

Inclusive education used to be a foreign ideology in Malaysia before the 90s. Since inclusive education is a concept that did not have any parallel concept in Malaysian culture ... our initial policies have been heavily influenced by initiatives from the USA. Among one of the major references was the LRE model from the Public Law 94-142, also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975 in the U.S. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

According to the Public Law 94-142, the LRE principle assures that children with disabilities are educated to the maximum extent appropriate alongside children without disabilities (Osborne, 1994), which means that the use of special classes and separate facilities or other removal from the mainstream education environment may occur only when the nature or severity of the pupil’s disability precludes satisfactory instruction in mainstream classrooms (Dubow, 1989). The policy readings reveal that the LRE lends itself to conceptualising IE or *pendidikan inklusif* in Malaysia to a certain extent. It does so by adopting a system that segregates pupils in an appropriate educational placement based on their degree of disability. In so doing, this segregation ensures that most pupils with SEN receive an education that is commensurate with their needs as well as the opportunity to learn alongside pupils without disabilities in mainstream settings. As outlined in chapter 5, pupils with SEN were given the option to attend mainstream schools through the Special Education Integrated Programme or the Inclusive Education Programme (MMoE, 1997). To build on this conceptualisation, as the analysis demonstrates, some of the key features of the Public Law 94-142 that were relevant to the Malaysian context were also included in the key IE policies to reinforce the rights of children with disabilities to attend their local schools. Policy Actor 1 states that the key features include the “identification of children with

disabilities through assessment” and “the provision of free education for children with disabilities”. While the LRE emphasises the protection of pupils from elements of discrimination in the educational system and ensures that all pupils with disabilities receive an education, what appears to be contradictory in the IE policy documents in Malaysia was that they included only pupils with SEN who were categorised as “educable”. However, Policy Actor 2 points out that that the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations ensured that what is more critical during the first phase was pupils’ opportunities to learn regardless of where and what sort of learning might take place:

So, I’d like to think that inclusive education means education for all by not leaving any child behind and the least restrictive movement fulfils this requirement. We made sure that no one was left behind by methodically sorting pupils in such a manner that top performers seek further education, the middle should try their best to survive, and those who were weak and have special educational needs should be diagnosed, assessed, and sent to the vocational schools or rehabilitation centres. (Interview data, Policy Actor 2)

Thus, it can be argued that the key IE policy documents in Malaysia in phase one conceptualised IE based on several guiding LRE principles as the preferred mode of inclusion in an effort to integrate pupils with disabilities into the education system.

To summarise, this intertextual analysis highlights that the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations relied heavily on a number of international and foreign policies in their conceptualisation of IE. These include the 1994 Salamanca Statement from UNESCO, the 1994 Education Act and the Warnock Committee and 1981 Act solution from the UK, and the Public Law 94-142 from the USA. These findings indicate that IE in this phase took on a new meaning through the composite of different ideas of IE—education but not for all and the least restrictive environment—taken from different documents and inserted into the Malaysian context. This form of recontextualisation further suggests that a prevalence of Western paradigms has shaped and influenced inclusive educational systems and thinking in Malaysia. The next chapter builds on this finding to examine its link to the notions of coloniality of knowledge and power that key policymakers drew on. Additionally,

the terminologies and the ideologies adopted within these official documents can occasionally indicate contradicting views about IE. Such a contradiction reflects the existence of plural driving forces from multiple texts that may have created a blurred philosophy within the IE policymaking terrain in Malaysia. Thus, in these official documents, the concept of "inclusion" is sometimes seen to obscure and obfuscate the issue of excluding a group of pupils with specific disabilities (Phtiaka, 2001). This factor has possibly led to a composition of different discourses that have contributed to the conceptualisation of IE, as examined in further detail in the following subsection.

### **6.2.2 Interdiscursive analysis: Lay, medical, and charity discourses**

Building on section 6.2.1's intertextual analysis, this subsection seeks to unpack the composition of plural discourses that appear in the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations. This interdiscursive analysis of both official policy texts indicates layers of multiple discourses that work hand in hand to influence the conceptualisation of IE. They include the lay, the medical, and the charity discourses, as shown in Table 6.1 (refer to page 171-172).

The analysis suggests that the policy documents in this phase are informed by lay discourse. It is this perception that may have potentially constructed those with physical impairments and severe mental disabilities as "ineducable" (MMoE, 1997). Such assumptions, while often triggering alternative support for learning, negated the academic success of many children with disabilities during this phase (Mannay et al., 2017). It is found that allowances given in education such as exclusions from the national education system and public examinations or provision of institutionalised rehabilitative welfare services have downplayed the capabilities of children with disabilities to succeed academically (GoM, 1961; MMoE, 1997). Building on this observation, what is also noticeably absent in the policy documents is the consideration of what alternative education options for children with disabilities who were considered "ineducable" might look like. As Policy Actor 1 makes clear, "these options might vary considerably depending on the child's disabilities" (Interview data, Policy Actor 1). Acknowledging these variances is critical in order for "the panel of experts" or social workers to curate responsive educational or skills training plans for the individual child.

Nevertheless, there is a critical lack of references to alternative educational programmes, which signifies the impact of the lay discourse on the lack of educational consideration given to the excluded group of children.

Another discourse that seems to have further strengthened the lay discourse or discriminatory practices in the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations in Malaysia is the medical discourse. The initial conceptualisation of IE, specifically in relation to the educational placement of pupils with SEN, appears to have adopted a medical model of provision. In the case of both IE policy documents, eligibility for mainstream and/or special education is determined by the degree of disability, which is often interpreted as scrutinising and providing an “educational remedy” to a child’s deficiency. The findings show that, associated closely with the medical discourse, language such as “impairment”, “disability” and “handicap” are common terms used in the policy documents to refer to pupils with disabilities in the first phase. Moreover, the concept of “educability” that was applied to children with disabilities was generally assessed and determined by a medical practitioner. As discussed in the previous section, this kind of assessment mirrors a general disability criterion used in the UK’s 1944 Education Act, which suggests that the conceptualisation of IE and disability in both the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations reflect a medical deficit model that tended to involve a “stigmatising and dehumanising labelling process” (Triano, 2000, p. 409). A growing number of academics have criticised this approach as an inappropriate medical model that will do little to aid IE (Norwich, 2008; Triano, 2000). Pijl and Veneman (2005) go on to suggest that this process leads to the use of traditional forms of medical indicators, which can have negative effects on people with disabilities.

This interdiscursive analysis reveals that the focus on biomedical definitions of disabilities may have resulted in a charity model of policy. In the case of the Malaysian context, Policy Actor 1 acknowledges in her interview that the initial conceptualisation of IE during the policymaking process was based on the “welfare/charity” model. The following interview extract highlights the educational arrangement of such a model:

It was common for us to use a welfare/charity model in our educational

planning. Inclusive education means to include everyone in the system. It doesn't have to be just the education system, you see. By this I mean, if they are able to, especially for those who have special educational needs and meet the minimum criteria, we try our best to integrate these individuals into special or mainstream schools. Even if they do not fit the criteria, we did prepare alternative options for these children. By collaborating with the Department of Social Welfare, we have rehabilitation centres that are readily available for them to ensure that they are best equipped with the necessary living skills but this would be dependent on the officials in charge to make those decisions.

(Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

What this means for people with disabilities is that, while the welfare/charity approach did contribute to the improvement of their wellbeing to a certain extent, the approach leaves their fate entirely in the hands of professionals such as doctors, educators, and rehabilitation and social-care workers. This finding demonstrates that these key IE policy texts might have worked under the principle of benevolent paternalism embedded within the sociocultural context of Malaysia, an area which is examined in chapter 7.

In sum, the findings reveal that there was a dynamic interplay between three discourses within the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations. The lay, medical, and charity discourses may have worked collectively to advance a special education approach to managing issues related to inclusion and disabilities. These interrelated discourses are themselves a mosaic of discursive truths and knowledges which emphasise the functional limits of individuals with disabilities, educational exclusion, and rehabilitation (Albrecht et al., 2001). As such, it is possible that these discourses may have flowed into subsequent policy documents in the second phase.

### **6.3 Phase 2 (2012–2017): The Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations**

This section now turns to examining the interdiscursivity and intertextuality that governed the conceptualisation of IE in the key Malaysian IE policy documents during phase two.

These documents include the Education (Amended) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations previously introduced in chapter 5 under subsection 5.2.1.

### ***6.3.1 Intertextual Analysis: The conflicting terrain of “inclusion”***

The multiple layers of intertextual references and interdiscursive moments from key policy documents in respect of IE in the first phase may have periodically shaped the IE policy landscape in phase two. In order to gain a greater understanding of this potential influence, this section analyses the diverse ways in which borrowing from other texts and different discourses has interpenetrated the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations. The findings are corroborated with the interview data with relevant policymakers from the second phase. Table 6.2 on page 182 and 183 provides an overview of the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships of key IE policy documents in from 2013 to 2017 (phase two).

With regard to intertextuality, Table 6.2 shows that the key IE policy documents were products of explicit and implicit intertextual links to international agreements, local wider policies, and predecessor policy documents. With this background in mind, the two subsections that follow analyse two themes that emerged in these policy texts: first, the provision of a “suitable education placement” and second, the introduction of “excessive proceduralism as contemporary forms of exclusion”.

**Table 6.2** An Overview of the Intertextual and Interdiscursive Relationships of Key IE Policy Documents in Phase Two from 2013 to 2017

	2013 Special Education Regulations	Intertextual Analysis		Interdiscursive analysis
		Direct Intertextuality	Indirect Intertextuality	
Phase 2 (2013 – 2017)	Inclusive Education Programme means an education programme for a pupil with special educational needs which is attended by a pupil with special education needs together with other pupils in the same class in a government school or government-aided school (MMoE 2013a, p. 10).		Indirect reference to the 1978 Warnock Report by replacing the term “normal pupils” with “other pupils”	Signals a subtle rights discourse (Fulcher, 1989) and injection of ideas that are based on choice, social justice, inclusion, and family values
	<p>“Pupil with special educational needs’ means a pupil who is certified by a medical practitioner, an optometrist, an audiologist or a psychologist, as...as a pupil having –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Visual disability;</li> <li>b) Hearing disability;</li> <li>c) Speech disability;</li> <li>d) Physical disability;</li> <li>e) Learning difficulties; or any combination of the disabilities, or disabilities and difficulties, referred to in paragraphs (a) to (e) (MMoE 2013a, p. 9).</li> </ul>	<p>Explicit adoption of the term “special educational needs” and its definition from the 1978 Warnock Report</p> <p>Direct reference to Malaysia’s Guidelines for Registration of Persons with Disabilities 2011, which provided a comprehensive classification of disabilities supported by the Malaysian government</p>	Indirect reference of the SEN categorisation was made to the International Classification of Diseases by the World Health Organisation and the Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders from the American Psychiatric Association. These documents provide an authoritative guide to the creation of the Guidelines for Registration of Persons with Disabilities 2011 enacted in Malaysia.	Signals a strong medical discourse (Fulcher, 1989) and discourses relating to diagnosis, treatment, normalisation, and cure as anchored in the medical model.
	4. (1) For the purpose of determining the suitability of pupil with special education needs to attend the Special Education under subregulation 5(1), the pupil shall attend a probation period of not more than three months at a government school or government-aided school (MMoE, 2013a, p. 10).	Explicit reference to the term “suitability” from the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 enacted in Malaysia	Indirect reference to the Education Act 1961 and the Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008 in order to address concerns of segregation and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities	

	<p>An individual education plan (IEP) “means a record containing items as determined by the Registrar General which specifies the educational plan for each pupil with special educational needs” (MMoE, 2013a, p. 10).</p>	<p>Explicit reference to the term “IEP” and the functions it embodies from the Public Law 94-142 enacted in the USA</p>	<p>The IEP is an indirect reference to the 1994 Salamanca Statement’s call for a mechanism to plan, monitor and evaluating educational provision for children with SEN.</p>	
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### 6.3.1.1 Suitable education placement

The intertextual analysis suggests that education placement for pupils with SEN begins to be overtly based on suitability in the second phase. Suitable education placement ensures that learners receive appropriate education in line with the degree of their disabilities (Lee, 2010). A possible explanation for the emergence of the concept of suitability might be that such a concept stems from the Education Act 1961 enacted in Malaysia. This Act outlined the original endeavours to combine ministerial effort and medical professionals in “defining the several categories of pupils requiring special educational treatment and the method appropriate for the education of pupils in each category in special schools or otherwise” (Section 10, MMoE, 1961). As discussed earlier, this idea had some impact on the previous documents in the first phase. However, it was not until Malaysia became a signatory nation of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008 that appropriate placement became a significant indirect intertextual link to the IE policy documents in the second phase. With regard to this specific international agreement, the goal of the UNCRPD is to address concerns of segregation and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities in different aspects of their lives, including those related to education (Clark et al., 2011). This commitment may have been an impetus to Malaysia’s Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 to ensure that persons and children with disabilities:

...shall not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disabilities... (GoM, 2008, Article 28[1])

and

...[are] provide[d] reasonable accommodation suitable with the requirements of persons and children with disabilities in terms of, among others, infrastructure, equipment and teaching materials, teaching methods, curricula and other forms of support that meet the diverse needs of persons or children with disabilities. (GoM, 2008, Article 28[2])

The interview data with Policy Actor 3, who served as the Head of Committee for International Cooperation in Higher Education for the MMoE, reveals that adoption of the key features of the previous Education Act 1961 (GoM, 1961), UNCRPD (UN, 2015), and

Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (GoM, 2008) along with the 1978 Warnock Report have led to the omission of the educability criterion and the term 'handicap', which was deemed to be a challenge in the Malaysian context, and that their adoption marks a turn towards appropriate placement options and an emphasis on the term "special educational needs".

The international disability movement by the UN such as the CRPD initiated widespread political activism in Malaysia. It called for an understanding that discrimination should be eliminated and barriers should be removed to provide increased access to learning. This was why determining whether or not a student is 'educable' was a major challenge during this phase. Not only that, words like *cacat* and 'normal pupils' were pointed out to be controversial. So, it was only rational for us to remove these terms and soften them with 'appropriate', 'suitable', and 'SEN' which were propagated in the landmark Warnock Report, Education Act 1961, Persons with Disabilities Act and the CRPD at that time. (Interview data, Policy Actor 3)

While more consideration was given to pupils with disabilities, the analysis shows that the segregatory educational model of IE in policy documents in phase two echoes with what seems to be a similar exclusionary model found in the first phase. This model is legitimated through the concept of 'reasonable accommodation' or 'suitability' reflected in the Persons with Disabilities Act (GoM, 2008) and the UNCRPD document (UN, 2006), as highlighted in the interview extract with Policy Actor 3 seen earlier. The UNCRPD defines 'reasonable accommodation' as:

... necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. (UN, 2006, p. 4)

On this basis, on the one hand, the 2013 Special Education Regulations ensure that pupils with SEN receive a suitable educational programme corresponding with their disabilities. By making a consistent and indirect reference to the concept of suitability, the regulation

explicitly states that provisions such as ‘modification and adjustments’ are to work towards the best interests or ‘benefits’ of pupils with disabilities, as seen in the following statement:

“Special Education Curriculum” means –

- (a) the National Curriculum;
- (b) the National Curriculum, which is modified by the Registrar General;
- (c) a curriculum that is specially designed by the Registrar General; or any skill training curriculum which, in the opinion of the Registrar General, is suitable and beneficial for a pupil with special educational needs. (MMoE, 2013, p. 8)

On the other hand, the policy readings suggest that exclusionary practices were covertly expressed through a clause that relegated those who are less suitable for the mainstream national curriculum and/or the national education system to be educated with either a “modified curriculum”, “specially designed curriculum” or in a community rehabilitation centre. This intertextual shift in both the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations may have paradoxically permeated a more inclusive but prescriptive policy based on ‘suitability’. Consequently, this shift may have given bureaucratic processes ample space to manoeuvre in the process of including pupils with different types of disabilities in and beyond the education system, as discussed in the next subsection.

#### **6.3.1.2 Excessive proceduralism as contemporary forms of inclusion and exclusion**

Another theme that emerges from the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and 2013 Special Educational Regulations is the excessive proceduralism that is attached to the inclusion process of pupils with SEN in the national education system. Excessive proceduralism imposes, as Weber (1970, p. 214, as cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 187) points out, "strict subordination" to enhance "orderliness, unity, [and] adherence" (Loyd, 2000, p. 140). In this context, there remain significant bureaucratic barriers to entry into the formal schooling system particularly for pupils with physical disabilities or multiple disabilities, and those who meet the admission criteria face much larger challenges in obtaining a placement of their choice. These barriers have taken the form of segregatory measures involving screening, admission evaluation, and a stringent 3-month probation period, as described in chapter 5.

In support of such proceduralism, the analysis demonstrates that the 2013 Special Education Regulations made direct reference to Acts and guidelines provided by local legislations that were heavily influenced by international documents. According to Policy Actor 2, the International Classification of Diseases by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2019) and the Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders from the American Psychiatric Association (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) provided authoritative guides in the creation of the Guidelines for the Registration of Persons with Disabilities 2011 by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in Malaysia. Indirect and direct references to such international and local legislations, as Prior (2008, 2011) asserts, act as resources for further actions, in particular in influencing the categorisation of SEN, assessment, and placement procedures in key IE policy documents in Malaysia. It can be observed that such bureaucratic practices masquerade as neutral and lawful ways to exclude pupils with disabilities who were considered as 'unsuitable' or 'unfit' for the education system.

While bureaucratic practices are likely to have a pervasive impact on IE policy development, certain educational interventions such as the IEP, which is used for each pupil with SEN during and after the 3-month probation period, appear to be a positive measure. In the case of the Malaysian context, the IEP is defined as a "record containing items as determinant by the Registrar General which specifies the educational plan for each pupil with special educational needs" (MMoE, 2013, p. 10). The following interview extract from Policy Actor 2 describes the adoption of the IEP:

... some of these [IEP] records may include documentations of applications and modifications made to the learning programmes and services given that are connected to the planning, monitoring and assessment of learners with SEN. Like I've mentioned before, some of these strategies were inspired by the Salamanca Statement. Additionally, we adopted those, like the IEP, from the Public Law 94-142 which we thought could be adapted into the Malaysian context. (Interview data, Policy Actor 2)

The analysis reveals that the use of such plans is an indirect response to the

recommendation of the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), which “call[s] upon all governments [and] urging them to establish decentralised and participatory mechanisms for planning, monitoring and evaluating educational provision for children and adults with special education needs” (p. ix). The analysis also shows that the 2013 Special Education Regulations explicitly adopted the IEP, which is enshrined in the US Federal Education Act under Public Law 94-142. The Malaysian legislation stipulates that an IEP should include “at least consecutive short-term objectives which will enable the achievement of annual goals, special education programme to be provided, related special services to be provided, participation of the student in the regular class, projected beginning date and duration of the education programme or service, as well as objective evaluation criteria and procedures” (MMoE, 2014, p. 32). These features were similar to those of the IEP introduced in the Public Law 94-142. As Policy Actor 1 highlights:

After all, it is a historic federal legislation [Public Law 94-142] that dealt with the education of disabled children. Based on this, we decided that some of the key features of this legislation that were relevant to the Malaysian context were included in the policy such as identification of children with disabilities through... the use of Individual Education Plans based on the needs of these children.

(Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

Taken together, it can be argued that references to international agreements, foreign policies, and local legislations created opportunities for IE to be framed as both inclusionary and exclusionary practices in the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations. The incorporation of multiple intertextual components discovered in this analysis further reveals a possible mixture of battling discourses, thus capturing the possible diversities and complexities in the conceptualisation of IE in Malaysia.

### **6.3.2 *Interdiscursive analysis: Rights and medical discourses***

The intertextual analysis of the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations displays a mixture of references to international agreements, local policies, and policy documents from the initial phase, which, in turn, involve multiple discourses. This understanding encourages a deeper interdiscursive investigation into the

nature of the different discourses within the policy documents in the second phase. Such investigation is necessary for understanding the extent to which the amalgamated interplay of the rights and medical discourses has facilitated the conceptualisation of IE in policy texts, as shown in Table 6.2 (refer to page 182 to 183).

The rights discourse of IE is a present, but subtle, component in the analysed IE policy texts in the second phase. Exemplifying the rights discourse were regimes of truth regarding equitable opportunities and resources and the rights of the child to a suitable educational programme. Commenting on the incorporation of these values in the 2013 Special Education Regulations, Policy Actor 3 describes the need to:

... make every possible effort to ensure that the MMoE, JPNs [State Education Offices], PPDs [District Education Offices] and schools collaborate with the parents or guardians, only where appropriate, with regard to the learning and development of, and decisionmaking about the enrolled children. Whether they're going to be in a school, taught in the same class with their other peers, that's not something we emphasised in the previous policy. And in fact, that's why it's not the goal of the policy during my time because I think we were still so many steps behind that it was quite impossible to get there [full inclusion]. But sadly, that's also not the goal. The goal right now is just to make sure that all these students, if they want to have some form of education, they have a place in the system. (Interview data, Policy Actor 3)

The interview excerpt above implies a certain degree of opportunities for the involvement of parents and guardians through “possible effort” from the MMoE, State Education Offices, District Education Offices, and schools “only where appropriate”. As outlined in chapter 5, the idea that parents and guardians might have some involvement in deciding their children’s educational opportunities could indicate that there were discussions over a variety of different techniques, resources, time, and programming that highlight the need for additional support and provision for pupils with SEN and the inclusion of all children with disabilities regardless of “whether or not that they will be in a school” (Policy Actor 4, who was the Deputy Director of the Special Education Division for the MMoE). Even though this

opportunity has resulted in rights-based discourse's ability to make slight progression towards inclusion in Malaysia, it has also enabled the progress of the medical discourse, which overpowered and constituted the former discourse within the selected policies.

The policy documents from the second phase indicate the strong presence of the medical discourse. In comparison to the rights discourse, the medical discourse locates disability within individuals but positions itself as a more modern, clinical, and scientific approach to disability (Christensen & Rizvi, 1996). Within this perspective, it is an intervention *on* people with disabilities rather than *with* them, thus denying this group of individuals agency and reserving power for medical professionals and subsequently the state (Grue, 2011). In other words, the medical discourse surrounding disability contains elements of medical paternalism, an area on which chapter 7 further elaborates. As analysed in subsection 6.3.1.2, the bulk of the policy documents go into great depth about how to "identify and assess" pupils with SEN. Put simply, integrative efforts can be said to lay a greater emphasis on the medical rather than the human rights dimensions, as children's deficiencies are assessed during a "probation period" (MMoE, 2013, p. 10). In addition, there is a presence of a multidisciplinary panel of experts responsible for preparing a report on which children may have to be "trained or corrected, normalised, excluded etc." (Foucault 1977, p. 191). Thus, there is an inherent assumption that children who have been "corrected" will be trainable, which will lead to enhanced learning in mainstream classroom settings. In this sense, it is assumed, through the medical lens, that disability in an individual is the root cause that impedes learning. Such an assumption fails to consider that learning processes can also be impeded by the environmental and social barriers imposed by society (Fulcher, 1989). Given Policy Actor 2's political detachment from the government, she cautiously notes that:

The emphasis placed on these reports validates children's deficiencies while ignoring their right to engage, on an equal footing with their peers, as is usual under a democratic and inclusive policy. (Interview data, Policy Actor 2)

In other words, the analysis implies that the policy texts from phase two are clear in that they do not convey an unconditional commitment to an inclusive discourse. The political

elasticity of language plays a critical role in the maintenance of power relations and the concurrent formation of an exclusionary discourse which were reproduced in IE policy documents in the second phase (Slee, 1996). Thus, despite the "cosmetic linguistic surgery" (Slee, 1993, p. 353) that the initial policy documents have undergone, archaic special education discourses remain intact. The medical lens of individual pathology has not only not vanished, but it has been elevated in stature and credibility in its potential to normalise "defects" through a series of procedures assigned to pupils with SEN.

This interdiscursive analysis demonstrates that subtle tones of the rights discourse begin to underpin the understanding of educational inclusion in the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations. The analysis also shows that the medical discourse from phase one has possibly interpenetrated and been scaled up in those IE policy documents. Thus, it can be suggested that even though key policymakers may envision the disruption of the special education status quo, the contradictory legislations seem to have muddied the waters for the discursive construction of IE. On the one hand, the policy documents exude an inclusive language, and, on the other, they are fraught with exclusionary viewpoints and ways that have been solidified over the years since the initial conception of IE, further indicating that the contrasting drivers of discourses in the selected policies in phases one and two have potentially influenced the pursuit of a fully IE system in the subsequent policy.

#### **6.4 Phase 3 (2018–present-day): The Zero Reject Policy**

Building on the analysis in chapter 5 and the previous sections, this section focuses on the interdiscursive and intertextual connections present in the key IE policy text—the Zero Reject policy—that influenced the conceptualisation of IE in phase three. The analysis zooms in on the Zero Reject policy introduced earlier under subsection 5.3.1.

##### **6.4.1 *Intertextual analysis: A new beginning for inclusion?***

The intertextual transpositions and interplay of dominant discourses in key IE policy documents from the two previous phases may have influenced the conceptualisation of IE in phase three. The intertextual analysis performed on the Zero Reject policy displays findings regarding the complex influence of intertextual and interdiscursive links to various

documents and discourses. These findings are substantiated by interview data with prominent key policymakers intimately involved in the formation of the Zero Reject policy. Table 6.3 on page 193 and 194 provides an overview of these intertextual and interdiscursive relationships.

Table 6.3 reveals that IE ideas in the Zero Reject policy have consistently strong and persistent intertextual relations with international agreements and existing local political documents, advancing particular regimes of truth about IE. With this idea in mind, the subsequent subsections demonstrate two themes that appear in the Zero Reject policy: “no child left behind”, which encompasses an egalitarian model of EFA; and “the amalgamation of the old”, which looks at the fusion of traditional segregatory approach with newer inclusive ideas.

**Table 6.3** An Overview of the Intertextual and Interdiscursive Relationships of Key IE Policy Documents in Phase Three from 2018 to the Present Day

	Zero Reject Policy	Intertextual Analysis		Interdiscursive analysis
		Direct Intertextuality	Indirect Intertextuality	
<b>Phase 3 (2018 – present)</b>	Title of the Policy: Zero Reject Policy for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (MMoE, 2018b, p. 1)	Explicit reference to the term “zero reject” from the No Child Left Behind Act enacted in the USA. Zero reject is an educational philosophy that says that no child can be denied education because they are “ineducable”.		Signals a strong rights discourse (Fulcher, 1989). Injection of ideas that are based on choice, social justice, inclusion, and family values.
	Zero Reject Policy is an existing policy that needs to be strengthened in terms of its implementation to ensure that pupils with SEN receive education in line with their disabilities either to mainstream schools through the Inclusive Education Program, Special Education Integration Program (PPKI) or Special Education Schools (SPK) from preschool, primary, secondary and post-secondary levels (MMoE, 2018b, p. 1).		Indirect reference to the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) principle from the Public Law 94-142 or the Education of the Handicapped Act in the USA. The LRE ensures that handicapped children receive special education that is commensurate with their needs.	Signals a strong medical discourse (Fulcher, 1989). Discourses relating to diagnosis, treatment, normalisation, and cure as anchored in the medical model.  Signals a strong neoliberal discourse (Fulcher, 1989). A discourse that favours pupils with SEN that are seen as more able-bodied to contribute to the economy and the society, at large.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-functioning students with SEN are placed in Inclusive Education Programmes.</li> <li>• Students with SEN that require a moderate level of support are placed in the Special Education School or the Special Education Integrated Programme.</li> <li>• Students with SEN that require a maximum level of support are recommended for intervention in community-based rehabilitation (MMoE, 2018b, p. 5).</li> </ul>	Direct quotation from the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 on page 120.		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However, if parents/guardians wish their child to remain in Special Education Integrated Programme, the school cannot refuse to enrol (MMoE, 2018b p. 5).</li> </ul>		<p>This nondiscriminatory statement is an indirect reference to the Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008 to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal opportunities to inclusive learning.</p>	
<p>1. Guided by Act 550, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) emphasizes that students with special needs (MBK) are also entitled to receive compulsory education at the primary school level.</p> <p>3. The MMoE’s Special education is also based on the 2013 Special Education Regulations...</p> <p>3.3 (iv) A probationary period of 3 months is contained in the Code of Practice for Special Needs Education (MMoE, 2018b, pp. 4-5).</p>	<p>Indicates a reader’s disposition as being minimal. Explicit reference to the Education Act 1996 (Act 550), the 2013 Special Education Regulations, and the 2014 Code of Practice for Special Needs Education. Each of these explicit references displays the documents needed to understand the ways in which pupils with SEN and their parents as well as the schools that are implicated by the Zero Reject policy.</p>		
<p>3.1 (iii) Ensure that potential pupils with SEN are given the opportunity to be placed inclusively in the current class in line with the principles of education for all (MMoE, 2018b, p. 3).</p>		<p>Indirectly calls reference to the education for all agenda forwarded in international documents such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UN, 2015).</p>	

#### 6.4.1.1 No child left behind

The following analysis shows that the implicit message of leaving no child behind seems to form the basis of the Zero Reject policy. This message emerges from the outset in the title of the policy itself: “Zero Reject Policy for Pupils with Special Educational Needs”. The term “zero reject” appears to be an explicit reference to the zero reject principle from the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act enacted in the USA in 2001 (Othman & Matore, 2020). According to the NCLB Act, the zero reject principle is an educational philosophy that is based on the value principles of EFA to ensure that no child can be excluded from the education system simply because they are ‘ineducable’ (Meier & Wood, 2004). This principle is embodied by the Zero Reject policy, as evidenced in the following statement contained in the introductory page: “2019 will be a year of great change for children with disabilities where children all types and levels of disabilities can be placed in schools” (MMoE, 2018b, p. 5).

Another less direct intertextual element of the zero reject and EFA principles stems from the 1994 Salamanca Statement. The 1994 Salamanca Statement seeks not only to make education inclusive as an end, but also to facilitate the development of inclusive schools (UNESCO, 1994, para. 23). As described in chapter 5, this result can be achieved by empowering parents to decide the schooling placements of their children, instilling guiding moral values such as “love, happiness and mutual respect” in educational institutions, improving schooling physical infrastructures, and providing additional resources for pupils with SEN as advocated throughout the Zero Reject policy (MMoE, 2018b, p. 12). In this way, the policy attempts to address attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers that people with disabilities may encounter. By implementing zero rejection principles and addressing these discriminations, the Zero Reject policy establishes indirect intertextual links to the United Nation’s CRPD and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. In this case, both international agreements, to which Malaysia is a signatory representative, ensure nondiscriminatory “inclusive and equitable quality education” for all children (UN, 2015, p. 19). Policy Actor 5, the then Malaysia Minister of Education from the *Pakatan Harapan* government, highlights the ideational dimension behind the Zero Reject policy that stems from these collective intertextual connections:

The introduction of the ZRP by the Ministry echoes the aforementioned Salamanca Statement in 1994. The Salamanca Statement stated that participation

and inclusion are salient to human dignity and the exercise of human rights. For this reason, there is a need for Malaysia to reflect on strategy development within the education field with the purpose of achieving genuinely equalised opportunity for every child through love, happiness, and mutual respect. These are the moral values that, I believe, will act as strategic pillars to our education system. And one extremely relevant policy that we learnt from is the zero-reject ideas from the No Child Left Behind Act from the USA. This means that parents get to decide where their children learn. It was relevant because those are things that I think don't get shouted as much about in the public. Both policies advocate that children with disabilities have equal access to an education, which is the most ideal inclusion at this stage in Malaysia. This duty aligns with the United Nations CRPD and SDG 4 of providing inclusive and equitable quality education. Malaysia has broad, ambitious plans for this. When I was still in the Ministry, I said this before: I will ensure that access to quality education to special needs students is implemented radically and thoroughly nationwide. (Interview data, Policy Actor 5)

To support this egalitarian goal, the Head of the Policy Research Department under MMoE (i.e., Policy Actor 6) asserts that the punitive measures against parents in the Zero Reject policy are directly linked to the previous defining document, the Education (Amendment) Act 1996, to induce student attendance in primary education:

More than 98% of children are already enrolled in primary school, but our goal is to reach 100%. In support of this, we have the existing Education Act 1996 to fall back on. Under this regulation, parents who fail to send their children to school may be fined up to RM5,000 or sentenced to 6 months of imprisonment.

(Interview data, Policy Actor 6)

By indirectly cross-referencing other policy texts and echoing ideas, concepts, phrases, and words within the current policy, intertextuality creates a policy ensemble that acts to legitimate certain actions, ideas, and modes of thought, that is, equal educational opportunity for all pupils, particularly those with disabilities.

#### **6.4.1.2 Amalgamation of the old**

While the introduction of the Zero Reject policy in Malaysia signals a historical shift towards a more inclusive educational environment, a deeper analysis suggests that there are certain intertextual considerations in the policy that mirror deep-seated values and attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities from the first and second phases. Incorporating previous conceptualisations of IE in respect of how children with disabilities are managed, the Zero Reject policy describes its function as:

... an existing policy that serves to strengthen the implementation to ensure that pupils with SEN receive education in line with their disabilities either to mainstream schools through the Inclusive Education Program, Special Education Integration Program or Special Education Schools from preschool, primary, secondary and post-secondary levels. (MMoE, 2018b, p. 2)

This statement also includes making direct and indirect references to the Public Law 94-142, Education (Amendment) Act 1996, and the 2013 Special Education Regulations. What is interesting in this analysis is that the Zero Reject policy seems to encompass a double gesture: producing an ambition for equality and reproducing inequality from previous documents in its desire. By formulating the new notion of “children with all types of disabilities” as the included learners, the child who falls within the definition of a “pupil with SEN that require[s] a maximum level support”, and who is thus more suitable to be placed in a community rehabilitation centre, is also defined within the notion. This point is seen in the following statement of the Zero Reject policy in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4** *A Comparison of Educational Placement for Pupils with SEN in the Zero Reject Policy and the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025*

<b>Zero Reject Policy</b>	<b>Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-functioning students with SEN are placed in Inclusive Education Programmes.</li> <li>• Students with SEN that require a moderate level of support are placed in the Special Education School or the Special Education Integrated Programme.</li> <li>• Students with SEN that require a maximum level of support are recommended for intervention in community-based rehabilitation. (Special Education Division 2018, p. 2)</li> </ul>	<p>High-functioning special education needs students who can cope with the mainstream curriculum and assessments will be encouraged to attend inclusive education programmes. Moderate functioning special education needs students will attend SEIP. Low functioning special education needs students will be encouraged to attend special education schools where they can expect to learn a simplified curriculum focused on basic skills, life skills, and social skills. (p. 120)</p>

In this case, the analysis shows that there seems to be an indirect echo of the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) principle from the USA’s Public Law 94-142 which is found in the previous two phases. As discussed earlier, the LRE ensures that children receive an education that is commensurate with their competency levels, which can be argued to be an important added dimension in embracing the leaving no child behind principle stipulated in the Zero Reject policy.

Table 6.4 also reveals that the educational placement of pupils with SEN in the Zero Reject policy is a direct quotation lifted from the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. This suggests that there is a strong intertextual connection from the Blueprint in the “rebranding” process of the Zero Reject policy, a connection which is highlighted by Policy Actor 5:

What happened was we came into office and we looked at a bunch of things that were already in the Blueprint. And then we looked at just the kind of things that

international practices have been advocating for a while so, access and quality and things like that. (Interview data, Policy Actor 5)

The Blueprint, which charts the education path of Malaysia from 2013 to 2025, addresses the specific needs of pupils with SEN. As a result, there was an increase in quality and a commitment to pushing pupils with SEN towards an IE paradigm within this period of time. The Blueprint seeks to enrol 75% of pupils with SEN in the IE Programme by 2025 (MMoE, 2018b). This aspiration is also directly quoted in the Zero Reject policy, signifying the Blueprint's significant influence on this current policy. Within this goal, the Zero Reject policy extends its support by recognising the need to strengthen existing foundations of IE programmes that directly answer the call in the Blueprint. These include: (i) the introduction of flexible and appropriate curriculum, (ii) equipping teachers and other specialists with the necessary knowledge, skills, and techniques to teach students with special education needs; (iii) provisioning adequate resources, including financial and other essential schools infrastructures as well as facilities; and (iv) creating public awareness and involvement. However, it is essential to point out that while IE was given due prominence in the release of the Blueprint, a "globally competitive" society was formulated through the goals of the same document by using education to prepare pupils for participation within these societies (MMoE, 2013b). This finding highlights the potential pushes and pulls of hidden discourses working silently behind the scenes that may have influenced the landscape of the Zero Reject policy, as interrogated in the next section.

#### **6.4.2 *Interdiscursive analysis: Medical, neoliberal, and rights discourses***

The intertextual analysis of the Zero Reject policy has indicated the presence of pluralised layers of discourses. This analysis reveals a conflicting composition of amendments that appear to continually write over one another in what Kristeva would term an "intersection of textual surfaces" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 65). These surfaces appear to establish fluid struggles of discourses and governmentalities over what counts as IE that combat and compete with one another as they constantly shift the text to advance their own discursive power/knowledges. As a result, the findings of the interdiscursive analysis did not find the charity discourse to be predominant despite its influence having been pointed out in chapter 5. Rather, the analysis

indicated the interpenetration of the rights, medical, and neoliberal discourses from both old and emerging ideologies within the IE space as competing and battling through the amendments that are carved into the Zero Reject policy, as can be seen in Table 6.3 (see page 193 and 194).

The interdiscursive analysis demonstrates that the conceptualisation of IE may have been shaped by a confluence of discourses driven by the rights and the medical discourses. With regard to the rights discourse, the human rights approach to disability in the Zero Reject policy can be said to be framed by the local political context. As signalled earlier on in the previous section, this discourse is illustrated in the use of the term “great change” for IE in Malaysia (p. 5). The “great change” includes a gradual shift of power to decide on placement options to the parent of a child with SEN, removal of physical and social barriers that obstruct the inclusion process, and an increase in the provision of educational support such as special education teachers and teacher aides. Another particularly interesting interdiscursive moment that relates to the rights discourse is that the policy holds traces of different genres—an advertorial-like policy. Bhatia (2004) frequently uses a portmanteau word like interview advertorial to characterise the hybrid features of discourse. In the context of this research, an interview advertorial is a term that combines interview, advertisement, and editorial, which appears to be a less formal approach to repackage a policy. This interview advertorial, which takes a question-answer structure, is illustrated in the screenshot of the Zero Reject policy below (MMoE, 2018b, p. 2):

## **2) Bagaimanakah pelaksanaan Zero Reject Policy?**

Pelaksanaan Zero Reject Policy melibatkan semua sekolah kerajaan dan bantuan kerajaan di mana MBK diterima masuk ke mana-mana sekolah. Bagi MBK prasekolah, pendaftaran adalah tertakluk kepada dasar sedia ada mengikut Surat Siaran yang dikeluarkan oleh Bahagian Pengurusan Sekolah Harian, KPM dari semasa ke semasa.

This discursive innovation, according to Fairclough (1992, 1995), is associated with a shift in the direction of social and cultural change as a form of discursive democratisation which should be understood and discussed in the context of a broader and more general notion of

democratisation. The democratisation of discourse is broadly referred to as a trend towards equality in discursive practice and language use through eliminating power imbalances (Fairclough, 1992). This innovation is closely related to the political democratisation that took place in Malaysia in 2018 when the new government, *Pakatan Harapan*, was elected, a topic which the next chapter comes back to in its extra-discursive analysis. As a result, the education system has undergone some political reforms including IE under the new administration of the MME as highlighted by Policy Actor 5:

It's [Pakatan Harapan] a new government, a government in transition, and I think that we had new ideas like social justice that we wanted to inject into the system. And Zero Reject policy is actually one of a very clear policy that has been ongoing for a while but we just had to rebrand it and really pay special attention to it and talk about it as if it's an ongoing work. So, there are a lot kinds of managing perceptions and putting a veil on things and things like that. One of the ways, our team felt, that was more relatable to the common audience was to repackage a policy that mimics an interview advertorial. In this way, we had high hopes that this message, social justice, that we are fighting for, gets across efficiently.

(Interview data, Policy Actor 5)

As such, this shift in genres, as they intersect with human-rights discourse, seems to push forward the new government's inclusive agenda for "social justice" through not only increasing access and participation of learners with disabilities in education, but by also setting up a less dominant and authoritative voice that dictates the Zero Reject policy to the common audience.

On the other hand, the findings demonstrate that discourse concerning diagnoses rooted in a medical model are evident in the Zero Reject policy. Historically, the reproduction of such discourse appears to be a continuation of previous policy documents such as the Education (Amendment) 1996, the 2013 Special Education Regulations, and the 2014 SEN Code of Practice. For example, as already noted in the intertextual analysis, these official documents are mentioned several times to legitimise and persuade the audience that the policy aims to reproduce many of the rules and procedures that already exist along with bringing about

imperative changes. In particular, the Zero Reject policy presents regulations, scientific and statistical data collected from the MMoE, the Ministry involved in the provision of services for the disabled population. For example, children with SEN are continuously defined as those who are "certified by a medical practitioner, an optometrist, an audiologist or a psychologist" (MMoE, 2014, paragraph 2) and sorted according to their "potential". This arrangement appears to be starkly predicated on the psycho-medical discourse whereby children with disabilities should be arranged in different placements to receive appropriate advice and remedy. Further, the policy dedicates a few pages to explaining the importance of receiving appropriate educational placements based on medical assessments, as well as offering a thorough description of the components of the procedures and their interrelationships (MMoE, 2018b). These laws and data are probably used in the text to construct a description and critique of the existing situation of pupils with disabilities in Malaysia as well as to support arguments in favour of the policy.

While the neoliberal discourse remained largely hidden in key IE policy documents from the previous two phases, it begins to gain visibility in the Zero Reject policy. Within its subtlety, it incorporated an appreciation of the individual as the basic unit of society that contributes to the nation as a whole, as explicitly stated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. It additionally incepted that education functions to "provide youth with the necessary skills to be able to compete in the modern labour market; and is a key driver of growth in the economy" (MMoE, 2013b, p. 6). Moreover, it is also interesting to quote Policy Actor 6 from the third phase whose thoughts mirror the plural discursive realities regarding inclusion that are based on the medical and neoliberal discourse:

There is no point in teaching students skills that we already know they cannot master. The detection and investigation of classifications and categories of disabilities allow Ministries to provide educational curricula appropriate to their needs. This method is beneficial in two ways. First, schools in particular and teachers, in general, can provide educational programmes that meet the needs of these students. Second, this sorting process reduces disruptions in mainstream schools. When disruptions are reduced, focus can be placed on pupils who have more potential and can excel academically to contribute to the betterment of this

nation. While pupils with SEN may not be expected to contribute to the economy directly, these individuals will be equipped with the necessary skills to be independent, able to plan, manage their own lives, able to realise their own potential, and can adapt to survive in the society. (Interview data, Policy Actor 6)

The above policymaker is explicit when referring to the inability of certain children with disabilities to survive within schools and procedures made for others. Thus, this form of education segregation is supported on the grounds of the 'best interests' of the child. This suggests that, whilst there is an urgency to include children with all types of disabilities into the education system, mainstream education and culture tend to be preserved for the selected pupils with SEN and privileged able-bodied who are expected to contribute to the development of the economic capital of Malaysia. This frequently held perspective of academic elitism and neoliberal agenda within the wider political, economic, and sociocultural contexts of Malaysia that influence the conceptualisation of IE is revisited in chapter 7. As illustrated, the hybridisation of this medical and neoliberal discourse with a discourse from the human rights order is accomplished on numerous occasions in the Zero Reject policy. As Fairclough (1995) points out, the novel combination of multiple discourse orders has the potential to generate a new discourse. The systematic articulation of the three discourses across the Zero Reject policy indicates that a new political discourse around disability issues is emerging in Malaysia: one that is based on medical and neoliberal knowledge and practices, as well as in the principles of human rights. These findings demonstrate the ways in which IE has been recontextualised to acquire new meaning as it has moved between the economic and education policy fields. Additionally, it can be suggested that such an outcome potentially represents a new policy strategy to imbue the conceptualisation of IE with the aura of truth.

However, the hybrid format of the Zero Reject policy may produce its own problems through the ambivalences and contradictions that permeate this policy. In fact, the policy not only portrays IE and disability as a human rights issue, but also as something that can be objectively evaluated and classified through the application of the SEN categorisation. This problem demonstrates that there is a distinction between these two visions. The rights approach to disability implies that persons with disabilities are seen as legal beings, deemed capable of making life decisions, and entitled to demand their rights from the state. It also implies that

the policy and actions established take a holistic perspective on human beings and their rights. In practice however the adoption of the SEN classification and its many purposes are utilised as the primary tool for education policy planning in Malaysia. This policy includes the provision of services and benefits, indicating that the state retains the authority to select who gets what rights and when. The ambivalence that this policy reflects and helps to contribute to the processes of continuity and change that are enacted through these contradictory discourses.

### **6.5 Intertextual and interdiscursive analyses: Cross-phase synthesis**

This chapter sought to analyse how different discourses and borrowing from other texts have interpenetrated each other in influencing different variations of IE in policy texts over time in Malaysia. In attempting to bring some justice to these intricacies, Figure 6.1 (see page 206) provides a visual summary of the influence interdiscursive and intertextual relationships have had over time on the analysed key IE policy documents. Although Figure 6.1's two-dimensional image is not wholly capable of portraying these complexities, it does indicate the plurality of intertextual references and interdiscursive moments that go into each phase.

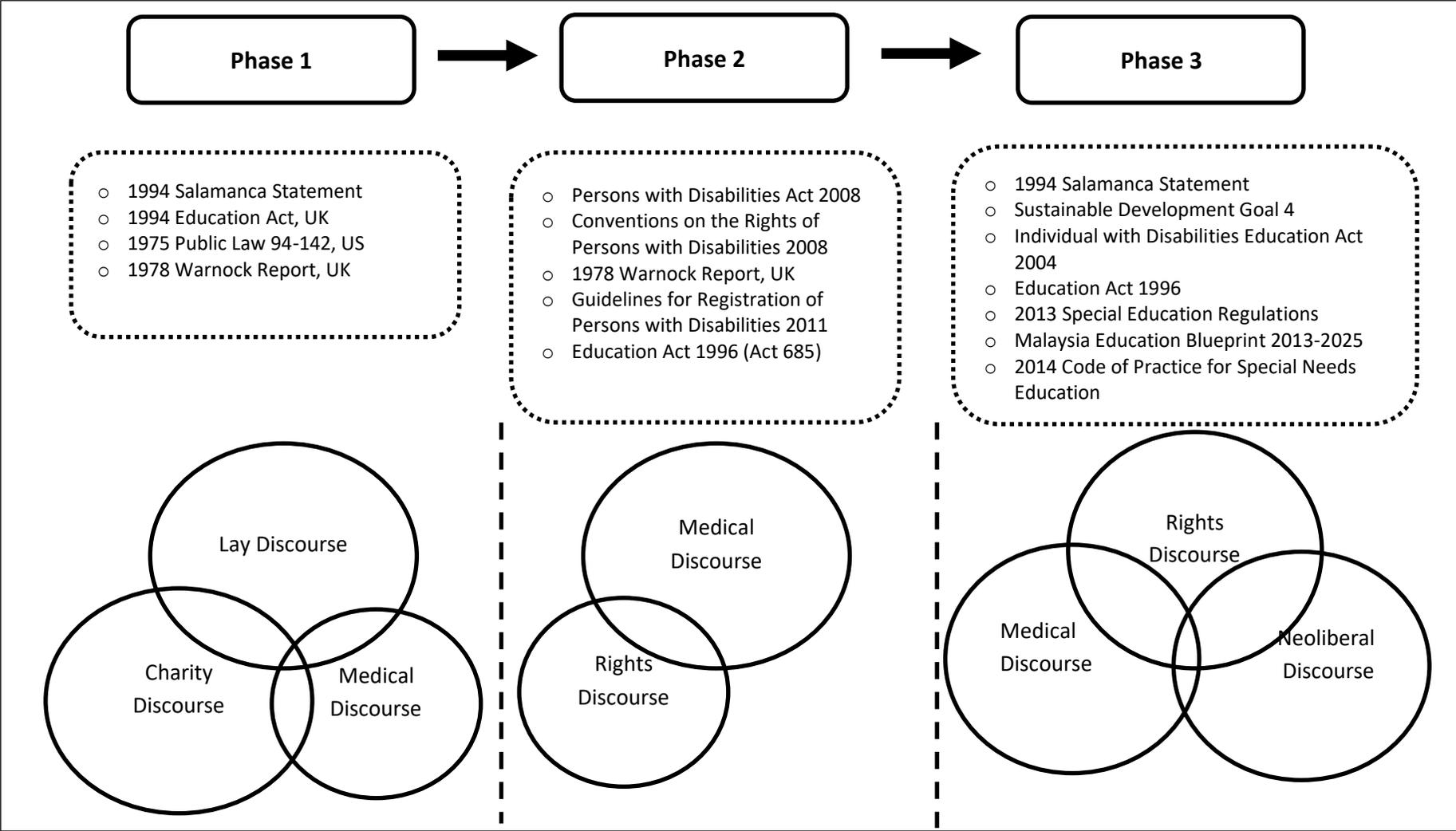
What can be clearly seen in Figure 6.1 is that IE ideas in the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations during the first phase (1996–2012) were significantly shaped by a selection of policies originating from the international and foreign landscape. These include UNESCO's 1994 Salamanca Statement, the 1994 Education Act and the 1978 Warnock Report from the UK, and the 1975 Public Law 94-142 from the USA. The borrowing of ideas from the global context saw the creation of the initial IE policies' being influenced by pronounced lay and charity discourses along with subtle tones of the medical discourse. As a result, certain groups of children with disabilities were seen to fall through the cracks and ended up being excluded from the education system.

In the following phase from 2013 to 2017, IE experienced shifting discourses in the Malaysian context. As this chapter has detailed, there was a slight shift in the definition and understanding of IE in the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations through their drawing on both international and local legislations. The international legislations include the International Classification of Diseases by the World

Health Organization, the Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2008, and the 1978 Warnock Report, which provided impetus for the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 and the Guidelines for Registration of Persons with Disabilities 2011 in Malaysia. Along with the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and the previous documents from the first phase, the MMoE worked quickly to define and legitimate what counts as IE where the medical, along with a subtle rights, discourse work to continuously reinforce segregatory measures to prioritise the inclusion of those who were deemed 'capable' to partake in the national education system. The confluence of such discourses in the second phase has essentially created a muddled space for the formation and introduction of the subsequent policy.

In the third and current phase (2018–present), the Zero Reject policy has gained considerable traction in relation to its conceptualisation of IE. The chapter has demonstrated that, while local ideologies of IE are quickly dominating the IE scene, current and “trending” ideas of educational inclusion from the global context continuously lend their definitions in the recontextualisation of IE in the Zero Reject policy. They encompass international documents such as the 1994 Salamanca Statement, the UN’s CRPD and Sustainable Development Goal 4, and the No Child Left Behind Act from the USA as well as the same local legislations from the second phase. This finding suggests that the Zero Reject policy may have been shaped by an amalgam of IE ideals driven by the medical, rights-based, and neoliberal discourses. While these discourses can be different, a combination of these approaches, Hornby (2015) argues, provides a viable option of education for children with SEN.

**Figure 6.1** Overview of the Interdiscursive and Intertextual Profiles in Key IE Policy Documents Over Time in Malaysia



## **6.6 Chapter Summary**

To conclude, this chapter has shown that a variety of fluid interplays that display varied struggles, amalgamations, and competition across these analysed texts are at work in influencing the conceptualisation of IE. This understanding raises a question about the dynamics behind IE policymaking processes in Malaysia. It is for this reason that there is an urgent need to consider extra-linguistic variables such as the wider historical, sociocultural, political, and economical contexts which influence the discursive practices within these key IE policy documents. In order to gain a robust understanding of this dynamic, further investigation into the selective strategies key policy actors employ in response to such contexts is required. The following chapter therefore attends to this issue by examining the extent to which economic, political, and cultural factors have influenced key policy actors' decisionmaking in the development of IE policy over time in Malaysia.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: EXTRA-DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS**

Chapter 3 drew attention to Kamenopoulou's (2020) prompting to examine the extent to which policy actors and mechanisms associated with contextual structures interact in the development of IE policy in the local context. To do so requires considering an analytic theory that probes into the governing structures within which such historical, political, economic, and cultural centres are located. This chapter seeks to examine key policy actors' strategic responses in influencing policy formation and bringing about policy change related to IE in Malaysia. The analysis considers the local political, cultural, and economic exigencies to investigate how such conditions constrained or enabled the policy actors' ability to act within the IE policymaking arena. In doing so, it responds to the following research question: To what extent have the economic, political and cultural factors influenced key policy actors' decisionmaking in the development of IE policy over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia?

This chapter thereby draws on the third analytical layer of the DHA—extra-discursive analysis—to identify and explore possible mechanisms linked to the historical, economic, cultural, and political structures of interest that influence the processes of IE policymaking in Malaysia between 1996 and 2018. The chapter also draws on the SRA to examine the interplay between structure and agency, i.e., the effects of contextual structures on policymakers' strategies and their decisions during the reproduction and transformation of social structures. As such, an analysis of policy actors' strategic responses demonstrates how mechanisms work discriminately through various structural contexts that function as conditions of constraints and possibility affect the actions that key policymakers engage in within this field. Collectively, it is hoped that this analysis will bring understanding to the strategically selective conditions that govern the field of IE policymaking and the selective strategies policy actors employ in response to such conditions in Malaysia.

This chapter is structured into three sections that examine policy actors' strategic responses to the political, economic, and cultural influences in IE policymaking (i.e., sections 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3). Within the analysis of policy actors' strategic responses to specific conditions, each section is organised in the order of the three phases of IE policy formation and changes that have taken place in Malaysia between 1996 and 2018.

### **7.1 Key policymakers' strategic responses to political influence**

One of the most notable outcomes of the Malaysia Ministry of Education's (MMoE) alignment with the global education agenda has been the way that wider and local political forces have shaped and influenced IE policymaking processes over time in Malaysia. While these political elements take the form of invisible structures, they are identifiable through the key policymakers' strategic responses. Table 7.1 on page 210 outlines the key strategies MMoE policymakers employed in response to political conditions between 1996 and 2018 in Malaysia. These include: 1) strategic policy borrowing of foreign IE models; 2) individualisation and totalisation; and 3) hybridisation. The following subsections explore the strategic decisions key policymakers made in response to the political conditions in the creation and modification of the IE policy documents over time.

**Table 7.1** Overview of Key Policymakers’ Strategic Responses to Political Influences

Reform Phase	Phase 1 (1996-2012)	Phase 2 (2013-2017)	Phase 3 (2018–present)
<b>Political Influences</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. International political regulation by EFA convenors (i.e., 1994 Salamanca Statement)</li> <li>2. Colonial and geopolitical ties with the UK, the USA. and Australia</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. International political regulation by EFA convenors (i.e., UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2008)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Changing political terrain in Malaysia (the rise of the new government, <i>Pakatan Harapan</i>)</li> </ol>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p><b>Strategic policy borrowing</b></p> <p>Policy actors strategically imported foreign IE policy models in alignment with international mandates and as education “quick fixes”.</p>	<p><b>Individualisation and totalisation</b></p> <p>Policy actors strategically endorsed the special educational needs (SEN) categorisation and the least restrictive movement (LRE) principle in alignment with international mandates and as tools to determine the educational pathways for individuals with disabilities.</p>	<p><b>Hybridisation</b></p> <p>Policy actors strategically combine a confluence of IE values driven by medical and rights-based discourses to gain ongoing political support and to inject new ideas of “social justice”.</p>

### **7.1.1 Strategic policy borrowing of foreign IE models (Phase 1: 1996–2012)**

The discursive analyses in chapters 5 and 6 highlight that several policy pronouncements, both international and foreign, were influential as regards the processes and outcomes of local IE policymaking in phase one. The analysis at this level further reveals that foreign IE policy models were strategically imported by key policy actors into the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations due to international political regulation from EFA convenors and geopolitical ties with the UK, the USA, and Australia.

With regard to international political regulation, the findings suggest that local policymakers in Malaysia strategically borrowed the global Education for All (EFA) policy's symbolism in the pursuit of inclusive educational reforms in alignment with the demands of supranational organisations. As noted by Policy Actor 1, who was the Deputy Director of Schools Divisions of the MMoE, this form of symbolic policy borrowing often involves policymakers' agreeing to adopt a policy because it fulfils a specific mandate in the international context, for example, the need to comply and align with international conventions organised by EFA convenors like the UNESCO and the UNICEF:

Several international treaties during this era influenced the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia. Many were based on the general ambitions of supranational policies and there has been an urgent need for Malaysia, as a member of the United Nations (UN) since 1957, to fulfil these goals to educate every child, regardless of disability or learning difficulty. This alignment was achieved through involvement in workshops and training activities by the UN and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).  
(Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

These "important international treaties" included, according to Policy Actor 1,

...the Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the UN Rights to Children with Disabilities 1958, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, the UN Standard and Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 1993, the UNESCAP Biwako Millennium Framework for Action 2002, and the Dakar Framework for Action 2000. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1).

Through such international conventions, which function as international binding agreements, EFA convenors work predominantly through agenda-setting strategy to indicate to member nations the likely future directions of EFA or IE. Due to such agenda-setting mechanism's stemming from international influence, Policy Actor 1 asserts that there was an "urgent need" for local policymakers in Malaysia to meet the "general ambitions of [these] supranational policies":

From our end, we had tremendous political pressure from the higher-ups [the Government of Malaysia and supranational organisations] to come up with an inclusive education policy in an unrealistic timeline just to conform to supranational ambitions, structures, processes, and techniques. It has always been done in an ad hoc manner to solve immediate problems—a quick fix, always policy first before evidence-based research. So long as the term "inclusive education" was in the policy, that's all that matters. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

The interview extract above suggests that Malaysian politicians and key policymakers were likely to have adopted the EFA policy symbolically due to pressure emanating from the global context and may have led to Malaysia's adopting features of inclusion with 'clauses of conditionality' aimed at glossing over exclusionary values and practices in the key IE policy documents in phase one, as revealed in chapter 5. In other words, it seems that the particularities of IE in policies were of less significance than was their role in political discourse during this phase.

In response to this call for EFA, a second political condition attributable to geopolitical ties with several countries influenced national policy actors to strategically emulate foreign IE models. Policy Actor 2, who worked as the Head of the Special Education Sector with the MMoE, points out that the final version of the EFA framework adopted by the World Education Forum in Dakar was "not as prescriptive" (Interview data, Policy Actor 2) as "the scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time" (UNESCO, 2000, p. 75). This finding reveals that the lack of prescription and a standardisation mechanism in the EFA framework

resulted in local policymakers' in Malaysia appropriating several foreign IE policies as “quick fixes” through the process of policy borrowing, as shared by Policy Actor 2:

This influence from the West on developments in Malaysia is easily understood given our colonial histories that we have with the UK, and the response to multinational agencies and consultants with expertise in the field of special and inclusive education, following the Jomtien and Salamanca declarations in the early 1990s. The heritage left behind by the British is extensive, particularly the basis in English law of much of the Malaysian education system. (Interview data, Policy Actor 2)

and by Policy Actor 1:

During the first stage, we relied heavily on foreign expertise before the emergence of local expertise. In Malaysia, the very first professionals to provide services such as what we have in the teaching profession were normally trained abroad like the UK, US, and Australia. The third stage occurred when colleges and universities started importing expertise from Western countries to meet the discipline's requirements. During this point, we needed to learn from these developed countries of the principles, theories, and implementation models. The choice of these countries was, of course, deeply rooted in our bilateral ties. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

The interview extracts above additionally suggest that the strategic adoption of foreign models of IE was influenced by Malaysia's colonial histories and bilateral ties with “the UK, US, and Australia”. These historic ties may have led to several notable IE policies from the UK (i.e., 1944 Education Act and 1978 Warnock Report) and the USA (1975 Public Law 94-142) being strategically taken up by local policymakers as a policy prescription for the education system in Malaysia, as was demonstrated in chapter 6. Alongside policy prescription, the MMoE began strategically importing expertise and knowledge by sending its education professionals abroad for research degrees and in-service attachments in special needs education in the 1980s and 1990s. This strategy suggests that the stature of a country (i.e., “developed countries”) and geopolitical relationships factor into the positive reception of IE models for key policy actors in

Malaysia. Through these strategic responses, the lay, medical, and charity discourses from foreign countries may have worked collectively to advance a special education approach to managing issues related to inclusion and disabilities. One example includes the acceptance of foreign diagnostic categories for learners, particularly with reference to labels such as “educable”, “handicapped” and “special educational needs”, as noted in chapter 5 (MMoE, 1997, p. 1). Interestingly, this analysis also draws attention to the considerable value that key policymakers place on foreign conceptual resources, in particular IE models from the West, in influencing how IE policy has been conceived in Malaysia over time. Subsection 7.3.1 explores this understanding of ‘neocolonialism’ to explore policy actors’ strategic decisions to follow the lead of Western orthodoxies in IE policymaking more fully.

The analysis in this subsection of the strategic IE policy borrowing due to geopolitical relationships and pressure from international regulation has demonstrated how wider political conditions promoted key policymakers to strategically respond. The key strategy policymakers employed in response to the political condition in phase two is further examined in the next section.

### **7.1.2 Individualisation and totalisation (Phase 2: 2013–2017)**

As was found for phase one, the analysis of the 2013–2017 phase shows that the increasing global pressure for the inclusion of PWDs in all aspects of society influenced the strategy key policy actors employed in the formation processes of the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations at that time. The analysis reveals that key policymakers strategically expanded the procedures of screening, certification, and intervention along with the provision of reasonable accommodation such as suitable education placement in the IE policy documents. Policy Actor 3, who served as the Head of Committee for International Cooperation in Higher Education for the MMoE, states that those adjustments resulted from being a signatory nation to the UN Conventions on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008:

The UNCRPD in 2008 was the key human rights instrument that propelled the adjustments of the existing IE policies. If you look at Article 24 in the document, Malaysia acknowledges that “persons with disabilities will not be excluded from

the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability” and “reasonable accommodation of the individual’s requirements will be provided”. Based on this commitment, the 1997 Special Education Regulations was revoked and replaced by the 2013 Special Education Regulations. The most significant improvement my team and I had made was to ensure no children with physical and severe mental disabilities are excluded from the system. But the challenge during this time was that changing the wider political and economic visions of the country and the culture of the society were much more difficult than changing the policies and structure of the IE system. Malaysia did not ratify the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD. So, that gave us the space to take up on an approach that is suitable and could resolve any potential tensions. This approach is based on the SEN categorisation and least restrictive movement principle that focus on suitable educational placement in segregated settings. (Interview data, Policy Actor 3)

While there was a need for Malaysia to acknowledge the principles of nondiscrimination and equality of opportunity as described in the UNCRPD, the interview extract above shows that the Government of Malaysia “did not ratify the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD” (Interview data, Policy Actor 3). The decision not to ratify this protocol draws attention to the absence of an enabling legislation that holds educational institutions accountable for the exclusion of and discrimination against PWDs. Importantly, such reservation from the Malaysian government functions as an important political enabler for key policymakers to legitimise certain IE ideas and practices. As Policy Actor 3 highlights, this decision allowed key policymakers to strategically endorse the SEN categorisation and the LRE principle adopted from the UK and the USA. As explored in chapter 2, this strategic decision seems to be framed by a double bond of individualisation and totalisation (Foucault, 1983), which is characteristic of strategies through which modern governmental states exercise power over citizens. Essentially, such strategic responses to individualise and totalise people with disabilities is a politically expedient choice that encompasses a double gesture: (1) to establish what it means to be an individual based on social norms, and (2) thus to make it possible to produce individuals that

are governable by the state. The relevance of these ideas to the IE policy documents in this phase is further unpacked below.

With regard to the individualising strategy, the analysis reveals that children with SEN are defined by the “ruling rhetoric” (Billing, 1991, p. 4), that is, the power evinced through the language inscribed in IE policy documents in this phase. This individualisation strategy might have subsequently contributed to the totalisation of individuals with disabilities. In particular, the totalisation principle works by binding the individual to the social norms, thus rendering them governable. For example, the endorsement of the SEN categorisation and the LRE principles adopted were legitimised as the new knowledge-based approach to disability in the IE policy documents in phase two. Consequently, the shift towards a strong medical discourse (as discussed in chapter 6) rendered the principles of SEN and LRE as a technology of power operated through and through discourse to segregate, contain, exclude, and normalise individuals with disabilities. In other words, the inscription of certain figurations of legal disability necessitated that people with disabilities’ education experiences be regulated and restricted within the confines of juridical formations, which excluded autonomy and choice in educational options. Thus, these forms of legal procedures convey the message that to be entitled to receive special support, PWDs must abide by ableist interpretations of how educational opportunities should look in law, as implied by Policy Actor 4, who was the Deputy Director of the Special Education Division for the MMoE:

Almost all children with disabilities are provided access to the national education system provided, if they follow this set of requirements and rules. The reason for this was that the needs of the majority must be addressed before considering those of individuals with special needs who are the minority. Addressing the needs of people with special needs was deemed too expensive at that time. Look, given the minimal amount of allocation that we had, we needed to impose what was practical, realistic, rational, and necessary on these individuals [with disabilities] to increase the country’s budget efficiency. (Interview data, Policy Actor 4)

In this regard, the language of IE policy documents in phase two becomes “language of unfreedom” when it is utilised as “a vehicle of subordination through individualisation,

normalisation and regulation, even as it strives to produce visibility and acceptance” (Brown, 1995, p. 66). As such, there was a likelihood of this strategy’s spilling over into the strategic move taken by policy actors in the formation of the subsequent policy document, as investigated in the third phase, to sustain and reproduce asymmetrical power relations.

It is also through the above interview that we begin to see individualisation and totalisation being presented in the IE policies as "practical, realistic, rational, and necessary" strategies in the light of underlying neoliberal ideologies. This finding implies that policymakers were using resources more “efficiently” if allocations benefited the greater proportion of the population—the deserving abled—given the fiscal austerity Malaysia experienced in this phase. These economic conditions that encouraged key policymakers to strategically respond by producing a segregated educational system for IE are discussed in further depth in section 7.2.

### **7.1.3 Hybridisation (Phase 3: 2018–the present day)**

The findings reveal that in phase three the change in Malaysia’s local political terrain influenced policymakers to respond strategically, and resulted in the creation of a hybridisation of discourses flowing into the Zero Reject policy. Such a strategically selective context was altered by the presence of a new government, *Pakatan Harapan*, which gained power in 2018. The new governmental administration generated a political shift that was accompanied by political reforms, including those related to educational policies which triggered the introduction of the Zero Reject policy. Following the new political setup, the key policy actors made a strategic calculation that resulted in a confluence of IE values driven by medical and rights-based discourses in the Zero Reject policy. The purpose of this hybridisation strategy appears to be twofold: (1) to gain ongoing political support from the civil servants who served the previous government; and (2) to push forward the new government’s own inclusive agenda. Policy Actor 5, the then Malaysia Minister of Education from the new administration, acknowledged that:

It's [*Pakatan Harapan*] a new government, a government in transition, and I think that we had new ideas like social justice that we wanted to inject into the system. Very quickly we realise that the setup actually doesn't work because the job itself

and what it requires is political. However, every Minister that comes into office has their own agenda, and they have been doing that for 60 years. [But] they (civil servants) are the ones doing the work. So, every time someone new comes in and comes up with a new idea, they have to scrap all the work that they have done before, and it's difficult for them. So, this trust was very natural. It's a new government, and we saw that, so we had to work really hard to build that trust and relationship by looking at things that were already in the Blueprint. And the Zero Reject policy is actually one very clear policy that tries to bridge two ideas. (Interview data, Policy Actor 5)

On the one hand, the interview extract above shows that the reproduction of the SEN categorisation appears to enable key policy actors from *Pakatan Harapan* to “build that trust and relationship” with civil servants who served the previous government to gain ongoing political support. Historically, the reproduction of such discourse appears to be a continuation of previous policy documents such as the Education (Amendment) Act 1996, the 2013 Special Education Regulations, and the 2014 SEN Code of Practice introduced by the MME under *Barisan Nasional*. In doing so, this approach allows the governing state to continue to hold the authority to control access to disability support, services, and benefits, as demonstrated in subsection 7.1.2. The human rights approach to disability in the Zero Reject policy, on the other hand, can be said to be framed by the *Pakatan Harapan*'s political agenda for a “great change” (MME, 2018b, p. 4). This agenda is evidenced in their attempt to affirm the fundamental rights of learners with disabilities to education through the Zero Reject policy in the following interview data with Policy Actor 5:

In the process of reforming the education system on a large scale, it was my initiative to do something close to my heart. Before I became the Minister, I remembered those years when I was actively involved in various organisations that focus on people with disabilities such as the Down Syndrome Association for Kids, the Autism Association, IDEAS, and many others. That is why children, friends, teachers from the *OKU* (people with disabilities) community have always lived in my heart. I still remember how my *OKU* students became my friends. This is why from the first day I stepped into the MME office, I was determined to give this

[the Zero Reject policy] piece of happiness to the disabled community and their families. (Interview data, Policy Actor 5)

and the Head of the Policy Research Department under MMoE, Policy Actor 6:

We picked things that resonated with the Minister. So, the Zero Reject policy is something that is actually what the Minister really wanted to do because I think he has been researching and thinking about special needs for a while and it's something that was very close to him. It's his personal interest, to be honest. When he said that you know he wants to do something for special needs, we just look at what policies existed before, and kind of expand a little bit on that. (Interview data, Policy Actor 6)

While IE is presented in a relatively different package in which a rights discourse is emphasised, there appears to be continuity in how disability is defined and managed through the biomedical lens in the Zero Reject policy due to Malaysian historical and political exigencies. The analysis demonstrates that these politically endogenous factors have resulted in the systematic articulation of two discourses in the Zero Reject policy: one that is grounded in medical knowledge and methods from previous documents produced under the previous administration (*Barisan Nasional*) and one that is based on "social justice" and the human rights principles "injected" by *Pakatan Harapan*.

To conclude, this section has examined the strategies MMoE policy actors employed in response to political conditions. The analysis reveals how the complex political scene in Malaysia and the international context significantly influenced the MMoE's organisational and IE policy directions. In response to these complexities, these policymakers sought to make informed choices in the policy ideation of IE in Malaysia by implementing three key strategies: (1) borrowing foreign policy prescriptions of IE models, (2) implementing individualisation and totalisation as tools for segregation and exclusion, and (3) attempting to hybridise old (i.e., medical perspective) and new ways (i.e., human rights perspective) of managing IE. Such strategies sought not only to retain the political viability of IE, but also worked to support the reproduction of a certain ideology through its policies, as shown later in the next section.

These findings provide greater insight into how MMoE policy actors exploit these structural conditions for their own political survival and reproduce and transform the IE policy directions into their preferred mode of inclusion—exclusion, segregation, and selective inclusion. Through this investigation, we are starting to understand how the neoliberal agenda works silently through political conditions to infiltrate the IE policymaking processes. To gain a greater understanding of how neoliberal structures facilitate these strategically selective conditions, the following section examines the selective strategies that key policymakers used to respond to the economic conditions that have influenced the development of IE policy in Malaysia over time.

## **7.2 Key policymakers' strategic responses to economic influence**

The spread of the economisation of education model significantly influenced MMoE policymakers' strategic decisions in the IE policy creation and modification processes from 1996 to the present day. This part of the analysis is particularly interested in the strategies key policymakers employed in response to such neoliberal interests, as it brings further insight into the political structures that have influenced the development and direction of the MMoE's own IE policies, practices, and agendas. Table 7.2 on page 221 outlines the three economic conditions which have prompted MMoE policymakers to strategically respond to: 1) the transformation of the role of education towards a human capital agenda, 2) the adoption of accountability measures, and 3) the acceleration of accountability and performativity. Each of these conditions that occurred in their respective phases is examined in greater depth in the following subsections, with specific consideration being given to the selective strategies employed by key policymakers.

**Table 7.2** *Overview of Key Policymakers’ Strategic Responses to Economic Influences*

Reform Phase	Phase 1 (1996-2012)	Phase 2 (2013-2017)	Phase 3 (2018–the present day)
<b>Economic Influences</b>	<p><b>Transforming the role of education towards a human capital agenda (neoliberal influence)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Bilateral relations with Japan</li> <li>3. Focus on science and technology-based educational programmes</li> </ol>	<p><b>Adoption of accountability measures (neoliberal influence)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Adoption of national accountability policies</li> <li>3. Funding was heavily tilted on schools with better student outcomes.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Enhancing the “quality” of education (neoliberal influence)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve Return on Investment by enhancing the “quality” of education</li> <li>2. Growing presence of international scale assessments such as PISA and TIMSS</li> </ol>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p>Policy actors strategically reduced the notion of inclusion to include and accommodate certain groups of children with disabilities in education as a financially viable option.</p>	<p>Policy actors strategically curated powerful bureaucratic practices and procedures that privilege pupils who were medically assessed as more “capable” in contributing to the betterment of the economy to be included in the education system.</p>	<p>Policy actors strategically limit their engagement with IE by continuing to determine who is and is not disabled, and therefore who is and is not entitled to educational services and support.</p>

### **7.2.1 Transformation of the role of education towards a human capital agenda (Phase 1: 1996–2012)**

In considering the role of the economic context in facilitating the MMoE's responses in the development of the IE policy, it is important to highlight that Malaysia was classified as a lower-middle-income country during phase one of IE policy development. The World Bank reported that Malaysia had a GNI per capita of less than US\$4,045 prior to 1997. Therefore, like many other countries that fall under this middle-income bracket, there was an explicit target for Malaysia to embark on an important mission towards becoming a high-income nation (Takagi & Boo, 2019). When economic agendas ascended within the policymaking process, they resulted in the concept of inclusion introduced in the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations in this phase (as shown in chapter 5) being fraught with tensions and inconsistencies. The analysis in this subsection found that this economic condition had influenced the MMoE's strategic decision to "sidestep [the] rights of children with disabilities to engage in education" in policy documents (Policy Actor 1, interview data). This decision is evidenced in the interview data with Policy Actor 1, who explains how the initial IE policies in Malaysia had indirectly interacted with the *Look East* policy:

It was during this period too that the IE policy had to compete with the *Look East* policy that was launched in 1982. Under the Mahathir administration, this policy has been regarded as a major turning point for Malaysia. The thrust on the policy issues on inclusive education in the Malaysian context was focused on the stipulated goals and achievement of the Prime Minister's vision of Malaysia entering the year 2020 as a fully developed and industrialised status as a nation with a strong and caring culture and society. I'm not saying that this is not achievable but this global response to provide equal and equitable access to education had been problematic when it comes to a developing nation that is striving to emulate industrialised and highly-developed countries. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

Due to the competitive pressure to escape the middle-income trap driven by Malaysia's economic condition, the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, launched the *Look East* policy in 1982. The policy, which stemmed from Malaysia's bilateral ties with Japan, included aid packages from Japan (i.e., Official Development Assistance) to shift the nation's

economy from one that was based on agriculture to one that was based on manufacturing under the banner of development or *pembangunan* in Malay (Takagi & Boo, 2019). It was envisioned that this policy would deliver rapid economic growth to Malaysia. The ambition was accomplished by restructuring the role of education with the purpose of creating a globally competitive society as thrusts for Malaysia to achieve the status of a high-income and developed nation (Takagi & Boo, 2019). The analysis shows that this policy had inadvertently led to education funding tending to be heavily skewed towards investing in “science and technology”-based education programmes with the aim of enhancing human capital that can contribute to the economic development of the country, as pointed out by Policy Actor 1:

So, he (Mahathir Mohamad) enunciated that education programmes that allow young Malaysians to learn about science and technology in Japan will help with economic and social growth. There were two parts to the programme. The first was sending Malaysian students to Japanese universities and technological institutes. The second move was to deploy trainees to Japanese businesses and educational institutions. These initiatives were, of course, extensively funded by the Malaysian government. In addition, the Japanese government aided these initiatives by sending Japanese professors to Malaysia and covering a portion of the expenditures. These bilateral relations provide strong influence to our national education policies because advice through ODA [Official Development Assistance] was attached to this aid package. So, it was a decision from that main administration [MMoE] to prioritise and commit to what is ultimately important for the country to prosper under the administration of Mahathir. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

As such and within the nuances of the economic context of Malaysia, Policy Actor 2 notes that special and inclusive education agendas had to be “renegotiated under this economic constraint. “So, our department had to join the queue with the others and wait for our turns to be funded” (Interview data, Policy Actor 2). This finding suggests that an imbalance in resource distribution had exacerbated polarisation between well-equipped elite schools and low-achieving schools, preventing the development of inclusive learning environments. This situation may have resulted in the notion of inclusion in key IE policy

documents during this phase to be occasionally reduced to including and accommodating certain groups of children with disabilities in the education system as a strategic and “financially viable” option (Interview data, Policy Actor 2).

In sum, this analysis reveals that the competition mechanism, stemming from geopolitical ties with Japan and limited domestic resource and activated through neoliberal agendas, may have constrained the ability of key policymakers to strategically support the introduction of a fully inclusive educational system in Malaysia. When economic development takes centre stage in a middle-income country context like Malaysia, the need to produce a valuable source in the form of human capital is seen to have considerable influence on IE policymaking decisions. The same is observed in subsequent phases of IE reform in Malaysia.

### ***7.2.2 Adoption of accountability mechanisms (Phase 2: 2013–2017)***

As discussed in the previous subsection, the broader political and economic forces continued to have a significant influence on the strategic directions of IE policy in Malaysia undertaken by policy actors in phase two. This influence was evident in the way that neoliberalism ushered in performance accountability mechanisms that came with heightened control in terms of funding in the education sphere. This heightened control, in turn, led to key policy actors strategically restricting education access and participation for children with disabilities in the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations, as detailed in chapter 6.

To provide some brief contextual background, the neoliberal interest was reinforced in the 10th Malaysia Plan (2011–2015) which emphasised the potential of education to enhance human capital and develop a capable labour force with a competitive advantage in the global market (GoM, 2010). This emphasis on enhancing the country’s economic status can be detected through key ideas such as “transition to a high-income and knowledge-based economy” (p. 126), “unleashing productivity-led growth and innovation” (p. 136), and “government as a competitive corporation” (p. 134). Alongside these ideas, education is listed as one of the National Key Economic Areas and inclusiveness is defined as equal opportunities of economic participation and enjoyment of national prosperity (GoM, 2010). The analysis

demonstrates that this economisation of the educational model in Malaysia had led to the adoption of accountability measures that allowed the state to make judgements about monetary investments in the education domain. According to Policy Actor 4, such monetary decisions were guided by public managerialism ideologies adopted from the World Bank to determine the effectiveness of utilising public money with the aim of accelerating economic growth:

In the Education for All assessment, Malaysia regularly incorporates the World Bank method to prioritise management for results such as strengthening financial monitoring efforts, measuring learning outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and financial returns of student support services and vocational programmes. One of the many ways to realise this was by implementing an effective investment monitoring system. (Interview data, Policy Actor 4)

An apt example of an “effective investment monitoring system” implemented in Malaysia includes, as Policy Actor 3 highlights, “the School Improvement Programme in 2010” which distributes the School Improvement Toolkit and Plans to all public schools to strengthen self-management (MMoE, 2013b). Policy Actor 3 further explains that the launch of this programme created rippling effects throughout the rest of the education context in Malaysia and that several of these measures involve monetary rewards tilted towards investment in high-performing schools:

Schools were held accountable for the educational outcomes of their pupils through public high-stakes examinations. These outcomes were compared against their standing in school league tables and the national benchmark. The Minister's Quality Award and the National Aspiring School Award were then awarded to a selected group of schools that made it to the top tier and passed a quality management inspection. This was supported through the introduction of new accountability-based policies such as the New Deal and High Performing Schools. Within these policies for example a budget of RM140 million (US\$ 33,656,345) was allocated in 2009 as a form of reward and an empowerment tool for 100 high performing schools. On top of this, new categories such as cluster schools received more than RM500,000 (US\$ 120,205) to help them improve to gain recognition as

high performing schools. The substantial amount of funding and autonomy given to schools were intended to foster strong work cultures and boost human capital development that are capable of competing on a global scale. (Interview data, Policy Actor 3)

The interview extract above suggests that the interplay of these political and economic events seems to align with neoliberal ideologies. This alignment was observed through directing a larger proportion of investment towards adopting accountability mechanisms that promoted institutional competition, high-stakes testing, and performance-based allocations to ensure that Malaysia retains a competitive edge at the global level. According to Policy Actor 4 however the adoption of such measures was carried out with observable negative consequences on IE policy development and the educational pathways for people with disabilities:

The economy's liberalisation is bolstered by a strong emphasis on achievement and responsibility, as outlined in the 2010 New Economic Model, which, by 2020, aims to create a market-friendly, transparent, and sustainable knowledge-based economy. The whole educational system was overhauled based on a human capital development framework, with the goal of improving student results, enhancing employability, and changing the labour market towards a knowledge-based economy. So, there's only so much that the Special Education Division can do with the IE policies. Other ministries tend to forget this crucial part of IE resulting in people with disabilities being further marginalised and isolated from the education system, the workforce, and society. What percentage of employment opportunities are provided to people with disabilities? Less than 10%, while the population of children with special needs is estimated to be 15% of the population of a country. (Interview data, Policy Actor 4)

As the interview data above reveals, many of these interrelated political and economic events have influenced and constrained the IE policymaking terrain in Malaysia. Policy Actor 4 asserts that for this reason:

...it (the movement of IE ideas in policy) was clearly not an aggressive movement at

that period and we, in the policy research department, have to take a step back ... economic considerations affect everything ... everything is measured against the cost it might have. We are currently in a low budget period in Malaysia and the message is to lower the cost whenever this is possible. (Interview data, Policy Actor 4)

In sum, the findings in this subsection demonstrate that neoliberal ideologies had constrained the response employed by policymakers, thereby working as a detrimental counterbalance to the MMoE's IE initiatives. Within this competing framework, neoliberal demands acted against educational equity through several accountability measures that had significantly elevated the stakes of academic competition. Consequently, policymakers that were involved in the policy formulation of the key IE policy documents in phase two had strategically curated powerful bureaucratic practices and procedures imposed upon pupils with SEN and their parents/guardians (MMoE, 2013a). In doing so, the MMoE could "systematically sift and sort" (Interview data, Policy Actor 4) pupils who were medically assessed as more "capable" in contributing to the betterment of the economy of Malaysia, as highlighted in chapters 5 and 6. The analysis indicates that these policies were formulated in such a way that they appear to resolve contrasting educational goals and contextual needs between equality, efficiency, and higher standards. However, they resulted in some unintended consequences as a result of inter-policy competition based on different principles or means at the national level. This conflict can be further observed in subsequent IE policy reform as neoliberal thinking originating from economic theories has seeped into national policy structures.

### ***7.2.3 Acceleration of accountability and performativity (Phase 3: 2013–present)***

The findings suggests that the conflict between the acceleration of accountability and performativity for economic outcomes and striving for EFA unintentionally muddied the landscape for the introduction of the Zero Reject policy in phase three. This subsection examines how such neoliberal interests stemming from external influence interact with policy actors' decisions in shaping the development of the Zero Reject policy.

As highlighted in the text analysis of the Zero Reject policy in chapter 5, a neoliberal

conception of inclusion can be observed in how the concept of “optimis[ing] the potential of pupils with SEN” is attached to the term inclusion (MMoE, 2018b, p. 12). However, such a narrow focus upon inclusion reveals that, at least at the national level, issues concerning educational inclusion appear to be dominated by more neoliberal considerations about the cost and return on investment (ROI) for these students. This concern is spelt out in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, a defining document that key policymakers referred to when aiming to make informed choices on the policymaking processes of the Zero Reject policy:

In order to determine how to best utilise the Ministry’s resources, it is important to examine the return on investment (ROI) in the current education system, particularly in relation to other countries. As a developing country, Malaysia has invested significant resources into [the education system] to enable the expansion of access to education. This spending has successfully translated to almost universal access to primary education and significant improvement in access to secondary education. **However, there remain large areas for improvement in moving forward, particularly with regard to quality.** (MMoE, 2013b, p. 100 [emphasis added])

The statement above suggests that the Malaysian government has construed ROI and quality education as being synonymous. Policy Actor 4 argues that such interpretation derives largely from “the growing presence of international large-scale assessments such as PISA and TIMSS (Interview data” Policy Actor 4).

As elaborated earlier in this thesis, these international assessments have been marketed by their convenors, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement [IEA], as a form of representation of a country’s education quality. Specifically, the OECD claims that PISA “offers insights for education policy and practice” and that its results allow policymakers around the world to “learn from policies and practices applied elsewhere” (OECD, 2014, p. 24). This international benchmarking exercise has motivated the Malaysian government to legitimate what counts as quality education by using the rules established by the OECD and the IEA.

Importantly, international benchmarking has encouraged many MICs, including Malaysia, to steer local educational policymaking to refocus its attention on the economic value of quality education for human capital development (Schuelka, 2013; Verger, 2020).

Malaysia's participation in such international assessments has, to a certain degree, encouraged key policymakers to respond strategically in the policy ideation of the Zero Reject policy during the third phase. This response was especially prevalent after the release of the PISA report in the year 2009 when expectations in PISA were not met:

The results from PISA 2009+ (the first time Malaysia participated in this assessment) were also discouraging, with Malaysia ranking in the bottom third of 74 participating countries, below the international and OECD average. (MMoE, 2013b, p. 25)

Policy Actor 5 asserts that such strategically selective political and economic contexts have facilitated the repositioning of IE in the Zero Reject policy:

This was from the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. Malaysians took part in the OECD's PISA study in 2012. Based on the results, Malaysia was ranked in the bottom third of the 65 nations that participated in this international assessment. This came as a surprise given the generous amount of funding channelled to our education system. So, in 2013, with the release of this Blueprint, the government took steps to address the national education system's declining performance by transforming the education system. The primary goal of this transformation plan is to raise Malaysia towards the top third of nations in both PISA and TIMSS. The issue of education was centralised on enhancing the "quality" of our education based on these results. So, it's no longer about access to education and the Zero Reject policy has to accommodate this competing priority. Unfortunately, this means limited resource was allocated to support the introduction of this policy. (Interview data, Policy Actor 5)

The interview extract above corroborates one of the strategic plans outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 in its aspiration to raise the quality of the national education

system and for the “quality” of the system to be determined by and measured against PISA and TIMSS:

Quality: All children will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education that is uniquely Malaysian and comparable to the best international systems. The aspiration is for Malaysia to be in the top third of countries in terms of performance in international assessments, as measured by outcomes in TIMSS and PISA, within 15 years. TIMSS and PISA currently test for literacy, Mathematics, and Science only. (MMoE, 2013b, p. 30)

The analysis shows that the rerouting of resource distribution towards “attain[ing] an excellent education” system has influenced how inclusive agendas are defined and reproduced by key policy actors in the Zero Reject policy. For example, while the policy strives to provide "special schools and mainstream schools that have Special Education Integration Programme" (MMoE, 2018b, p. 10) with disabled-friendly facilities starting 2019, the availability of funding to meet such an outcome remains unclear and unknown. The following interview extract highlights the financial constraints faced by the IE key policymakers in relation to the Zero Reject policy:

So, basically, upon closer inspection, we didn't get any extra budget from the government nor from any international organisation, and that's the biggest challenge actually. (Interview data, Policy Actor 6)

The analysis reveals hegemonic policy discourse rooted in neoliberal-ableist assumptions about the role and value of education in Malaysia. As explored in chapter 2, Goodley et al. (2014) coined the term “neoliberal-ableism” to refer to the concept of valuing normality in the manner which privileges ableism, thus prioritising provision for the ideal able-bodied citizen who contributes to the economy actively, depending on the state's neoliberal ideas of progression. The absence of broader economic factors such as financial assistance from the government for IE thus potentially constrained the realisation of the MMoE’s objectives for the Zero Reject policy to the phase of "in stages" (MMoE, 2018b, p. 1) or even none.

Evidently, IE policymaking in Malaysia has thus become complex and embroiled in the

constant conflict between setting a high academic benchmark for stringent results management and striving for EFA. As pointed out by Policy Actor 6 (Interview data), "there are many competing voices at the international and national level ... [which are in] conflict with each other" when it comes to making critical decisions on education reforms with limited domestic resources. When the federal government gained political and economic control over schools' learning outcomes through more data-intensive international policy instruments, the "strategic calculation" and the response of the MMoE was to limit their engagement with IE by continuing to determine who is and is not disabled and therefore who is and is not entitled to educational services and support. Such practice appears to backtrack on the country's political alignment to several international agreements (i.e., 1994 Salamanca Statement, 2015 UN SDG Goal 4, 2010 No Child Left Behind Act) that advocate EFA. Collectively, this phenomenon demonstrates how competition mechanisms underpinning neoliberalism, stemming from international large-scale assessments, have amplified the need to 'move up' the rankings as an indicator of educational performativity and quality. Importantly, the analysis highlights that such projections of economic value on education have likely encouraged policy actors to reproduce a plural composition of amendments between quality and equity that appear to write over one another in the Zero Reject policy.

To conclude, this section has shown that IE policy development in Malaysia has been influenced and constrained by neoliberalism. In response to this economic influence, it appears that relevant key policymakers involved in the formation and modification processes of IE policies between 1996 and 2018 strategically emulated certain exclusionary practices such as the educability criterion during phase one and various segregation measures in phases two and three as financially viable modes of inclusion.

This section's analysis has provided greater insight into how key policymakers navigate the complexities of its structural conditions for the survival of the IE policy and simultaneously, reproduce these structural conditions in the IE policy. The key policymakers' strategic responses to neoliberalism have both transformed their policies and also reproduced neoliberal conditions on individuals with disabilities. It is through these analyses that we understand how neoliberalism takes form as strategically selective political and economic

conditions to privilege some actors and some strategies over others. Finally, to also gain a greater understanding of the nature of culture in facilitating the development of IE policy between 1996 and 2018, the following section examines key policymakers' strategic responses to cultural influence.

### **7.3 Key policymakers' strategic responses to cultural influence**

The analyses imply that the MMoE's perceived optimal ways of meeting learner diversity are further shaped by the cultural influence in which the key IE policy documents are located. This section first briefly clarifies what *culture* entails to establish exactly what is under study and thus the boundaries of what is to be examined within this broader research.

Robertson and Dale's (2015) definition of "culture" is used in this section to identify the strategies employed by key policymakers in response to cultural influence. As explored in chapter 2, this viewpoint assumes that human thought processes are shaped by the demands of the practical activities in which people are regularly engaged. Within the context of this study, identifying this precept is pertinent to understanding the MMoE policymakers' *strategic calculations* or decisions in establishing what counts as IE in terms of their cultural perspectives. In particular, this exploration allows for the analysis of interactions between key policymakers and the organisation and society in which they operate; their views about IE; the characteristics and representations of IE in the local and international context, and the resources that enable and/or constrain their strategic actions. However, it is important to note that the emphasis of this section is not on examining culture as a separate entity; rather, it is on understanding its interaction with the political and economic conditions (Robertson & Dale, 2015). This section proceeds by examining how the political and/or economic forces which operate within the *cultural* have promoted key policy actors to respond strategically.

**Table 7.3** Overview of Key Policymakers’ Strategic Responses to Cultural Influences

Reform Phase	Phase 1 (1996–2012)	Phase 2 (2013–2017)	Phase 3 (2018–the present day)
<b>Cultural Influences</b>	<p><b>West knows best</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Absence of local ontologies and epistemologies of inclusion</li> <li>2. Built on the cultural hegemonic belief that the “West knows best”</li> <li>3. An instance of the neocolonialism through <i>coloniality of knowledge</i> stemming from colonial ties and geopolitical relationships with countries that have higher stature</li> </ol>	<p><b>Normalisation</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People with disabilities are often viewed through biomedical understandings of disability adopted from the West.</li> <li>2. Compatible with the Malaysian political, economic and social systems</li> </ol>	<p><b>The rise of social justice</b></p> <p>the rise of social justice through the prevalence of Western paradigms triggered by the political reform in Malaysia</p>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p>Policy actors strategically rely almost exclusively on Western approaches to inform the IE policymaking process.</p>	<p>Policy actors strategically adopted normalisation as a “soft landing” approach to gradually introduce the concept and process of integrating people with disabilities into the national education system.</p>	<p>Policy actors strategically implement “social justice and humanistic-driven actions” in the Zero Reject policy.</p>

As shown in Table 7.3 on page 233, key policymakers' strategic responses to cultural conditions in the development of IE key policy documents in Malaysia appear to be underpinned by these cultural ideologies or, as Dale and Robertson aptly put it, civilisational projects of neocolonial ideology. This ideology is represented by the hegemony of Western philosophies and they present themselves as recurring patterns of acceptable ways of thinking or acceptable ways of defining and legitimating what counts as IE. The following subsections—7.3.1 West is best; 7.3.2 Normalisation, and 7.3.3 3 The rise of social justice—explore these strategic responses in further depth. The analyses are substantiated with a selection of interview extracts which are used to show how each of the strategic responses of the key policymakers engaged in the IE policymaking processes were deeply embedded in particular belief systems in different reform periods.

### **7.3.1 *West is best (Phase 1: 1996–2012)***

The analysis in subsection 7.1.1 highlights that neocolonialism has an influence on the formation processes of the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations in phase one. This influence is evident in the way that Western paradigms significantly shaped and influenced the policymakers' understanding of IE.

In response to the call for EFA in the historic 1994 Salamanca Statement and an absence of local ontologies and epistemologies of inclusion in Malaysia, Policy Actor 1 asserts that the “best” strategy was to rely almost exclusively on Western scholarship to inform the IE policymaking process during the initial phase:

During our initial shift towards a more inclusive environment, our local perspective from Malaysia was built on the view that the “West knows best” given that IE is a foreign ideology. Methods of identification and eligibility requirements were then included as the education system started to respond to the international call to include special needs students following a Western template. (Interview data, Policy Actor 1)

The interview extract above corroborates Policy Actor 2's argument on the move to follow the lead of “early-starter nations like the US, UK, and Australia that have undergone a

Long period of maturation in respect of their IE policy development”:

There wasn't a parallel concept of inclusion in Malaysia and these countries (the US, the UK, and Australia) have gone through a transition from a medical to a social model for education for children with special educational needs. However, being a “late starter”, it was a challenge for Malaysia to provide education for children with disabilities and make it inclusive within a short span of time to keep pace with the philosophical shifts that have already occurred. The evolution of inclusive education in Malaysia was similar to that of other countries from the West. So, to fulfil the EFA mandate, Malaysia adopted the medical or what we term as the “twin-track” policy approach following the early initiatives of IE seen in the UK and the US. (Interview data, Policy Actor 2)

Based on this premise, it can be argued that the Malaysian twin-track IE model was built on the cultural hegemonic belief that the “West knows best”. This finding is in tandem with the analysis in subsection 7.1.1, which demonstrates that colonial ties and geopolitical relationships with countries that have higher stature, specifically “developed countries” or “countries from the West”, will likely induce a positive reception of Western IE models for key policy actors in Malaysia. The analysis indicates instances of *coloniality of knowledge* are reflected in the policy actors' vision of educational development and standards of knowledge production that seem to be based on Western epistemological schema and theories that are informed by colonial thought. The interview data above implies that key policy actors looked to their Western former colonisers for concepts and theories, technologies of teaching and learning, and innovative methodologies for IE reform. This assumption, while triggering learning support, often negated the local and cultural approaches to managing children with disabilities during this phase. A question that needs to be asked is how these colonial ties and geopolitical allies continue this cultural hegemony.

Responding to this question requires returning to Nguyen et al.'s (2009) concern that education neocolonialism is often achieved by means of economic imposition. The findings suggest that former colonisers like the British and other geopolitical allies like the USA and Australia maintained and protected their influence in Malaysia by creating a dependence on investment from them. Policy Actor 3 points out that:

It is true that Malaysia was not tied a particular economic aid from any bilateral or multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Rather, we had educational institutions in industrialised nations that invested in education in and for Malaysia from our former colonial tie with the British and bilateral ties with North America and Australia. An example of this was the various special education degree twinning programmes being offered in Malaysia by various British, North American, and Australian universities that I oversaw. These involve joint ventures between foreign and local institutions to create financially viable opportunities for current and future educational leaders and teachers. These were ventures that we took pride in. This had, of course, created dependency on these high-income nations not only on the best ideas, practices, and research, but also investment in our education that are related to special and inclusive education. However, they were valuable forms of relations with the West that we wanted to foster and grow. (Interview data, Policy Actor 3)

The interview extract above suggests that in order to qualify for these educational investments, Malaysian policy actors are required to take certain steps favourable to the interest of these investing nations by promulgating their “ideas, practices, and research”. Interestingly, the analysis also indicates that the Malaysian government appears to “take pride” in sending future educational leaders and teachers to study in universities abroad. Given the continued hegemony of Western educational practices and theories, taught by Western experts, it is unsurprising that international students return home with understandings and orientations that are likely to support the maintenance of a particularly Eurocentric mode of IE in policy and practice. Collectively, these understandings highlight that Malaysia’s dependence on investments from the UK, the USA, and Australia, compounded by the (re)colonising of mind, may have influenced the responses and thinking of key policymakers in Malaysia in phase one.

However, what is alarming about such deference to a Western worldview in the key Malaysian IE policy documents is that this earlier recontextualised notion of IE failed to ensure that all children with disabilities have access to education, as explored in chapters 5 and 6. Such recontextualisation had resulted in the legitimisation of segregation and exclusionary practices,

adopted from the West, to be gradually expanded in key IE policy documents in the subsequent phase.

### **7.3.2 Normalisation: 'Soft landing' approach (Phase 2: 2012–2017)**

A similar cultural condition in phase two that influenced policymakers to respond strategically is found in the ways disability was managed through the neocolonial model of normalisation from the West. The analysis in this subsection underscores how normalisation might be the preferred mode of governance, demonstrating the colonial mentality adopted by Malaysian key policy actors in IE policymaking and its compatibility to the complex sociocultural landscape of Malaysia.

During the 2010s (phase two), it was reported that children with disabilities in Malaysia were often hidden, portrayed negatively, and excluded from society (see UNICEF Malaysia, 2017, 2019). Several of these UNICEF Malaysia studies also highlight that this group of individuals face daily stigma and discrimination which compound their marginalisation. The analysis reveals that key policymakers involved in the conception of the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations had strategically emulated Western principles and standards of IE that were deemed more compatible with this cultural perspective on PWDs. Policy Actor 4 asserts the importance of the compatibility of inclusion with the Malaysian political, economic, and social systems into which they were being inserted:

In our culture, we always say ukur baju di badan sendiri [cut your coat according to your cloth], right? If we hop along the global inclusive education bandwagon, then all students with special educational needs will have to enter the mainstream. Now when that individual enters the mainstream, some will feel that this student will be incompetent and unable to cope with the mainstream. And this cuts across everything, from education to social capability, which could potentially lead to bullying and ostracisation. We are trying to eliminate such possibilities. So, for Malaysia, we design the inclusive education policy based on our ability and within our capacity to include this special group of children. (Interview data, Policy Actor 4)

In response to the strategically selective context of the Malaysian cultural landscape, policymakers adopted normalisation as a “soft landing” approach as a strategic way to gradually introduce the concept and process of integrating people with disabilities into the national education system, as highlighted by Policy Actor 2:

Due to the public's attachment to the academic elitist culture and lack of belief in an inclusive approach, the policy has to be done through a "soft landing" approach by introducing the 2013 Special Education Regulations. It's almost like a bible or the Quran. Not everyone will buy into and believe the things that are stipulated in this document immediately. You have this set of laws and policies that are based on good intentions that are needed to be understood by people. Given more time, the introduction of the 2013 Special Education Regulations will allow the public to slowly accept these special educational needs children. As I said earlier, the evolution of inclusive education in Malaysia was similar to that of other countries from the West and we need to follow that evolution to be accepted by the Malaysian society. (Interview data, Policy Actor 2)

The interview extract above reveals that to gradually incorporate such a foreign concept of inclusion into an “academic elitist” culture, the MME had decided to conceptualise IE by underscoring the importance of diagnosis, suitable placement, and intervention anchored in normalisation (MME, 2013a). As elaborated in chapter 2, normalisation is defined as “making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life” (Nirje, 1969, p. 181). However, the concept underlying this definition requires PWDs to adhere as closely as possible “to the norms and patterns of the mainstream of society” (p. 181). The rationale for such a strategy is explained by Policy Actor 2 below:

For example, these mothers shared that they tried to avoid seeing their friends that are pregnant because some even think that these disabilities are ‘contagious’ and that their children or unborn children might get infected. So, we try to include those who can be included and are most likely to be welcomed by the rest of the community in the schooling system first. We shifted the conversation to talking about normal people. We tried to encourage schools to ask questions like “Is this behaviour normal?” and “Is it normal for an 8-year-old boy to read at this pace?”

By doing this, we were able to take control of the situation and provide the necessary support to assimilate a realistic number of children with mild disabilities into the mainstream. Another example that I can share is from the school community. The lack of information on disability can cause various negative assumptions on these children. This resulted in labelling with remarks such as lazy, stupid, stubborn, and do not want to listen to instructions when these children do not achieve the desired learning outcomes set by the teacher. So, it was important for us [the policymakers] to cushion this impact for people with disabilities [and their parents] and the rest of the public by giving more time and introducing a foreign concept like IE as gradually as we could. (Interview data, Policy Actor 2)

The interview extract above suggests that the policymakers appear to have drawn on a normalisation gaze of IE as a “soft landing” approach to introducing IE for two reasons. They include: (1) enabling pupils with SEN to adapt themselves to the mainstream through educational support; and (2) “cushion[ing] the impact” of the discrimination towards people with disabilities; both of these approaches aim to facilitate the gradual acceptance of these individuals in mainstream society.

While this strategy appears to have met some basic and fundamental educational rights of children with disabilities, a deeper analysis reveals that the axis around which IE policy was modified in Malaysia assumed a paternalistic view. As examined in 7.1.2, this paternalistic strategy of normalisation that works hand in hand with individualisation and totalisation reproduces and sustains the asymmetrical position of power the MMoE holds in relationship to children with disabilities and their parents and/or guardians by “taking control of the situation” (Interview data, Policy Actor 2). This issue of control raises the question about the extent to which the MMoE works to exploit this cultural condition for its own power, dominance, and underlying vested political and economic interest, as revealed in 7.1.2 and 7.2.2. As Foucault aptly puts it; the “normalising gaze” places special education practice “into a complex power/knowledge web in which power is exerted over children, whether or not in their (best) interests” (Foucault, as cited in Marshall, 1996, p. 129). In other words, it can be argued that the overlapping of negative perceptions and stigma attached to people with disabilities coupled with the reliance on a Western model of normalisation for inclusion,

politics, and economic conditions may have influenced this strategic decision that key policy actors employ to redefine and reproduce such inclusive agendas in the policy texts. The next subsection examines how dependence on a different form of a Western ideology i.e., social justice continues to influence IE policymaking in the third phase.

### **7.3.3 The rise of social justice (Phase 3: 2018 – the present day)**

While the rise in social justice due to political reforms in Malaysia explored in subsection 7.1.3 is seen to have influenced IE key policymakers' decisionmaking in phase three, there is an increasing focus on disability by way of fighting for equality influenced by the West.

To illustrate, the EFA paradigm reaffirmed in the recent 2015 UN SDG Goal 4 (see UNICEF Malaysia 2017; 2019) has challenged the process of normalisation that contributed to the lack of educational access and rights for children with disabilities. Alongside this goal, Policy Actor 5, the then Minister of Education who served under the new administration (*Pakatan Harapan*), asserts that a key strategy employed to reconfigure the existing conceptualisation of IE was to implement “social justice and humanistic-driven actions” through the introduction of the Zero Reject policy:

There was a problem and a sense of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs related to access to education. It is an issue that *Pakatan Harapan* cannot ignore. And the Zero Reject provides a feasible and desirable tool to modify the current policy to alleviate this problem. This is a platform where social justice and humanistic-driven actions come into play. (Interview data, Policy Actor 5)

Corresponding with the interview data above, Policy Actor 6 highlights the idea that the choice to foreground the Zero Reject policy was based on the then Minister of Education's social justice outlook and the “zero-reject principle from the 2004 Individual with Disabilities Education Act from the US”:

When we (*Pakatan Harapan*) took office, one of the big priorities was to make sure that inclusive policies were implemented first. He (the former Minister of Education) has a heart for special needs, and that's what we did. His ideas are

significantly influenced by the zero-reject principle from the 2004 Individual with Disabilities Education Act from the US. We made sure we implemented zero reject policies to ensure that schools have special needs classrooms for children with special needs ... If there wasn't a policy shift in 2018, people with disabilities will continuously be abandoned at community-rehabilitation centres, left at home or not given education opportunities. For these reasons, we introduced the Zero Reject policy. (Interview data, Policy Actor 6)

The analysis reveals that these key policy actors see the rights model of education as a catalyst for overcoming the prejudicial attitudes of society towards PWDs by integrating social justice and humanistic frameworks into the Zero Reject policy. This commitment to address issues of discrimination experienced by people with disabilities is realised at several points in the Zero Reject policy. As found in chapter 5, this aspiration is operationalised by means of: (1) reinforcing the educational rights and access for “all children with all types of disabilities”; (2) urging the development of an inclusive learning environment; (3) providing space and structure for participation by all; and (4) maximising choice and independence for people with disabilities and their parents/guardians. Through these actions, according to Policy Actor 5, “it is possible to attain equality in education and freedom from prejudice within the passage of time” (Interview data, Policy Actor 5). Policy Actor 5 further shares that:

Fairness is essential, and everyone, regardless of who or what they are, should be given an equal chance. Who are we to judge, who are we to play God and say who is allowed to enter our educational system, who is not allowed to enter our educational system, who is worthy and who is not worthy? We have to provide a vehicle for children to achieve their truest potential in their own capacity ... It's about the process of growing individuals, and how can a child with a disability grow if he or she has no chance or somewhere to go? (Interview data, Policy Actor 5)

Additionally, it is through the policymakers' attempt to rupture the existing negative perception and discrimination against PWDs in this phase that we begin to see how this strategy is concomitantly utilised as an opportunity for the political advancement of *Pakatan*

*Harapan* by “appealing to the common humanity” (Interview data, Policy Actor 6). Policy Actor 6 is careful to acknowledge that:

It (the Zero Reject policy) is a political move as well. We hoped to appeal to the common humanity by facilitating and promoting the notion of equality in education and facilitating the introduction of inclusion by revamping the IE policy initiated in 2013. The idea of democratisation forms the bulk of the reason why we were elected. And we wanted to create moments of emancipatory ruptures which confronts discrimination against people with disabilities. To do so, we ensure the observance of the principle of equality, that all children are included, and that the rights of children in the educational realm are respected. (Interview data, Policy Actor 6)

The interview extract above suggests that the strategy towards providing a more inclusive and equitable education was motivated and enabled by the influence from the West, existing cultural conditions, and the changing local political terrain through the rise of democratisation that Malaysia experienced in 2018. Therefore, it can be argued that the key policy actors have exercised their agency by negotiating for social justice through creating “moments of emancipatory ruptures” via the Zero Reject policy. It was intended that, in this way, this approach would facilitate the transformation of perceptions towards people with disabilities while at the same time gaining political support and credibility from the public.

While it is evident that the Zero Reject policy provides a corresponding attack on the dehumanising institutions and practices therein, the analyses of the key strategies engaged in response to the political and economic conditions examined in subsections 7.1.3 and 7.2.3 show otherwise. The competing educational visions between enhancing quality education and EFA seem to have created varied struggles, amalgamations, and competition in the conceptualisation of IE in the Zero Reject policy. Such a contradiction raises the concern of whether underlying ideological assumptions of differences and segregation based on abilities have been examined to ensure a nurturing and meaningful commitment to IE.

In conclusion, there are three key strategies that MMoE policymakers used in response to

MMOE's cultural influence, all of which overlap with the key strategies the MMoE employed in response to the wider political and economic forces. These neocolonial influences are seen through the ways in which Western models of IE attained a position of dominance in Malaysia and are explored through Malaysia's 1) dependence on the West; 2) increasing focus on disability by way of normalisation; and 3) the rise of social justice. Each of these strategies has also been explored concerning the way that key policy actors responded to the Ministry's political and economic forces. What is also important to consider is the fact that policymakers' conscious and unconscious responses to the Ministry's cultural influence might not be overt. The findings of these subtle and symbolic responses to the cultural conditions are of great importance to this research as they signal the considerable value that the MMoE places on its cultural and organisational systems.

#### **7.4 Extra-discursive analysis: Cross-phase synthesis**

The chapter has sought to analyse the strategies of key policy actors from the MMoE in coordinating and steering policies related to IE in Malaysia. It considered the extent to which the political, economic, and cultural factors have influenced these key policy actors' strategies. The focus was on temporal trends in the IE policymaking processes between 1996 and 2018, during which Malaysia experienced significant reforms in its IE policy. As this chapter has demonstrated, key policymakers from the first phase (1996–2012) borrowed IE ideas from both international and foreign landscapes and that these borrowings stemmed from Malaysia's political alliance with international organisations (i.e., UN) and several other countries (i.e., the UK, the USA, Australia). It is here that we begin to see the reliance on several Western approaches as the "best" template to make informed choices to legitimise what counts as IE in the Education Act 1996 and the 1997 Special Education Regulations. This chapter also shows that the notion of inclusion has been strategically reduced to include and accommodate certain groups of children with disabilities in the education system due to neoliberal influence.

During the following phase from 2013 to 2017, the dominance of neoliberalism increasingly underpinned the key strategies key policymakers employed in the formation of the Education (Amendment) Act 1996 and the 2013 Special Education Regulations. As the chapter has detailed, this ideology has given rise to several performance accountability mechanisms (i.e.,

2010 School Improvement Programme, the Minister's Quality Award, the National Aspiring School Award, New Deal and High Performing Schools). This emphasis on performance improvement resulted in domestic resources' being heavily weighted towards educational programmes that could contribute to the furtherment of the nation's economic growth. Such political and economic forces have influenced key policymakers to strategically curate a "financially viable" option of IE. While normalisation is adopted as a "soft landing approach" adopted from the West to facilitate the inclusion of more children with disabilities in the education system, key policymakers had inadvertently imposed powerful bureaucratic practices and procedures that privileged certain groups of children over others.

In the third and current phase (2018–to the present day), Malaysia's political, economic, and cultural conditions resulted in the hybridised conceptualisation of IE in the Zero Reject policy. The chapter has demonstrated that key policymakers strategically injected ideas like "social justice and humanistic-driven actions" which originated from the West into the Zero Reject policy to gain political credibility with the public. While their inclusion was strategically executed to create "moments of emancipatory ruptures" in the existing cultural condition (i.e., the increasing focus of disability through normalisation in Malaysia), the medical gaze of educational inclusion is reproduced. The analyses reveal that the reproduction of "old ways of doing things" ensures that *Pakatan Harapan* gains ongoing political support from civil servants who served the previous government. Importantly, such a move ensures that the government retains the power to determine who is in and out of the education system in support of its neoliberal agenda.

## **7.5 Chapter Summary**

Overall, chapter 7 drew attention to the privileging of some key strategies over others employed by different MMoE key policy actors over different phases within their "structural selectivity" that enabled and/or constrained their ability to advance particular agendas in IE policy documents. By considering the wider cultural, political, and economic conditions, such a finding demonstrates how contextual structures work discriminately through these relationships to either limit or afford the policymakers' access to opportunities and resources. This finding brings a unique perspective to our understanding of IE policymaking in the

Malaysian context and it sheds light on the pushes and pulls of different underlying ideologies that drive the shifting conceptualisation of IE in policy documents over time.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

This study is based on the premise that global IE agendas that have “travelled” far are translated, rearticulated, and adopted in diverse ways in different low- and middle-income countries as filtered by policymakers in response to local political, economic, and cultural contexts and needs (Kamenopoulou, 2020; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014). Consequently, this study took an in-depth look at how IE policies have been recontextualised across space and morphed over time within the Malaysian landscape. Specifically, the study aimed to gain insights into IE policymaking which has an impact on the conceptualisations and discourses of IE, particularly in the provision of education support services for children with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN). Critical realism was selected as the ontological orientation that frames this study to understand the invisible “mechanisms” or “causal powers” (Sayer, 1992, p. 107) that influence the processes of IE policymaking in a particular local context (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006; Danermark, 2002). Furthermore, critical realism’s emphasis on the identification of sources of ideology and domination embedded in policy documents and a call to rise against these discrete structures and mechanisms as a necessary step in the emancipation of PWDs correspond with the implications this study aims to put forward in chapter 9 (Fairclough, 1995). This study took critical realist discourse analysis as a conceptual and analytical lens and used the discourse-historical and strategic-relational approaches to achieve that aim. The research employed document analysis and elite interviews with key policymakers to critically examine these areas of interest.

The findings chapters (i.e., chapters 5, 6 and 7) were iterative and comprised careful constructions of the readings of the five key IE policy documents—the Education Act 1996, the 1997 Special Education Regulations, the Education (Amended) Act 1996, the 2013 Special Education Regulations, and the Zero Reject policy—over the three phases of IE policy development in Malaysia. They were initially read with an eye for textual, interdiscursivity, and intertextuality analyses, again iteratively, until a coherent analysis was developed that allowed a reading of what was felt as coherent and which met quality criteria of good critical realist discourse analysis (Sims-Schouten & Riley, 2014). In addition, following Jessop’s (2005) SRA has effectively provided layers to the policy documents analysis. The interview data with key policymakers regarding their knowledge, experiences, and reflections on the policymaking processes of IE policy during a specific reform period in which each interviewee was intimately

involved were analysed using the SRA method. Underpinned by the pairing of the DHA and SRA, a multidimensional *critique* that wove in interdisciplinary focal points that have influenced the local IE policymaking processes was formed.

Against this background, this chapter first highlights the key findings presented in the previous three chapters, then discusses what they suggest, and finally argues why they matter in relation to the study's overarching research question: What are the factors that have shaped the Malaysian inclusive education policy over time from 1996 to 2018? The ontological foundation and tools employed in this study are then revisited in the remainder of this chapter.

Based on the research data findings, this chapter argues that there are subtle shifts in the directions, discourses, and decisions relating to IE policymaking in the Malaysian key education policies between 1996 and 2018. However, the key findings reveal that the subtle changes in the IE policy texts act as a guise to regulate the disabled population and mobilise neoliberalist and neocolonial ideologies with the purpose of continuously serving wider political interests of the MMoE. Five key findings stand out as being particularly relevant to supporting this understanding. These key findings are organised into three areas: directions, discourses, and decisions. They make several noteworthy contributions to the existing body of literature on IE policy development in an MIC context. These individual themes were congruent with and emerged from the three levels of analyses of the IE policy documents under study. They include:

- *Directions*
  - 1) From othering to selective inclusionism
- *Discourses*
  - 2) Interplay of competing discourses
- *Decisions*
  - 3) Best practices from the West
  - 4) Modern apparatus to regulate people with disabilities
  - 5) Selective inclusion shaped by neoliberal-ableist ideologies.

Each of these key findings is sequentially explored within this chapter with respect to relevant literature. The discussions of the key findings show how they are interrelated and contribute to answering the overarching research question of the thesis.

## **8.1 Directions**

This section discusses how IE policy direction in Malaysia moves away from othering to selective inclusion in its conceptualisation of IE within the key policy documents from 1996 to 2018.

### **8.1.1 *From othering to selective inclusionism***

This study makes an original contribution to the body of PWD knowledge by providing a new understanding of how access to education for children with disabilities in Malaysia remains continually selective and conditional in IE policy documents. While there seems to be a subtle shift in conceptualisation away from an othering framework to advocating for a more inclusive educational environment over time, chapter 5's textual analysis (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016) demonstrates that IE policies in Malaysia continued to adopt a two-track integration policy in three reform periods, where the two parallel school systems—special and mainstream schools—exist and work independently of each other. Little emphasis is therefore given to equal educational access and participation in the mainstream learning environment.

As illustrated in chapter 5, the initial conceptualisation of inclusion in the Malaysian IE policy documents in phase one (1996 to 2012) appears to be constituted within the powerful othering framework advanced through a two-track approach. This finding corroborates Liasidou's (2017) study that states that IE policies that adopted a dual-track system, which typically involves specialised teachers, pull-out programmes in mainstream settings, and education placements based on disability categories, frequently establish an "otherness" image which is then imputed to pupils with disabilities. Moreover, Dunne (2009) found that IE policies that coalesced around the theme of othering have a tendency to homogenise the majority of students and to set up a division between the majority (the "us" or the unnamed) and a minority that was presented as other, or as special (the "them"). Chapter 5's analysis of the 1996 Education Act and the 1997 Special Education Regulations shows that special school

and integration programmes in mainstream settings were the two highlighted placement options for students with SEN. These key IE policy documents not only heavily emphasised the process of othering by means of suitable placements according to labels and educational needs categories, but also marked out children with disabilities who were unable to 'manage himself' as not 'educable'. As a result, this group of children were placed in community rehabilitation centres to be 'taken care of' by the Social Welfare Department. These findings demonstrate how such discursive and spatial configurations shaped a reified 'us' and 'them' division, statutorily depriving children with disabilities of education in the mainstream setting.

The textual analyses of key policy documents in phases two (2013 to 2017) and three (2018 to the present day) showed that the conceptualisation has shifted its focus from "othering" to what Waitoller (2020) refers to as "selective inclusion". Mitchell (2005) points out that such a form of inclusion is selective in the way that it quietly provides access for those bodies whose differences are integrable to normative practices through constitutional and legislative conditions. Furthermore, Waitoller (2020) maintains that selective inclusionism does not disrupt the existing normative frameworks in special education institutions. This study affirms Mitchell's (2005) and Waitoller's (2020) findings in that the key Malaysian IE policy documents in phases two and three attempt to selectively include children with disabilities in educational institutions without altering the institutions' norms of belonging and being. While progress is observed in the evolution of IE in the 1996 Education (Amended) Act and the 2013 Special Education Regulations (phase two) by including more categories of children with disabilities and in the Zero Reject policy (phase three) by attempting to eliminate barriers to educational access for children with all types of disabilities, the textual analysis reveals that classist assumptions about the disabilities of students remain. The study demonstrates that policies' discursive rhetoric such as "suitable placement" and "reasonable accommodation", which has driven the justification of IE policies in Malaysia, has efficiently masked this subtle exclusion of children with differences who are deemed not so integrable. Sheltered behind a more inclusive smokescreen, children with disabilities who are included continue to be subjected to mandates, requirements, and regulations according to their designated categories of disabilities. While this study did not explore the extent to which these policies are put into practice, what is well-documented in the literature is that selective forms of inclusion are prone to reproducing the exclusionary procedures within schools and the education system

(Dunne, 2009; Hornby, 2015; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Kamenopoulou, 2020; Lee, 2010; Liasidou, 2012; Mitchell, 2005).

Despite the subtle shifts in conceptualisation, what is alarming about these findings is that the different notions of inclusion that have been applied within the Malaysian education context are stitched together by a linguistic paradox of inclusion. Like EFA, IE in Malaysia is paradoxically presented as a fundamentally moral commitment to enable PWDs to exercise the same educational rights as other citizens in society (Shevlin, 2019; Skrtic, 1991) and yet simultaneously its policy signifies that inclusion is not for everyone. Chapter 2 drew attention to how IE policies in many different parts of the world practise explicit naming and identification of particular groups or individuals to demonstrate inclusion and functions both to locate or point out perceived differences (Graham & Slee, 2008). However, each time a difference is named, made visible or created by professionals, the normalised ways of perceiving disability, and of hegemony, are strengthened and secured. In this respect, this research provides new understandings of IE in Malaysia in that inclusion is moulded into an idea that IE is not for all but only for children whose differences are integrable to normative practices. Thus, even if the IE policy documents in Malaysia envision a more equal and just society, they concomitantly perpetuate the status quo and the unequal power relations that tend to work to the detriment of children with disabilities.

Although alarming, this finding is not unique. It adds to a body of literature that has lent credence to the notion that educational inclusion in many countries carries contradictory ideologies and is still prominently based on segregated educational provision (Göransson et al., 2020; Hosshan et al., 2019; Lee, 2010). This key finding provides strong insight and awareness not only into the ways in which IE within key Malaysian policy documents exist alongside, and are subsumed under, the paradigm of special education, but also how this framework continues to govern the way a country or era approaches and understands IE. This study's investigation of each of the IE policy reformation processes suggests that the approach IE in Malaysia is first one of identifying barriers to IE in its earlier reform periods and then one of developing strengths in its successive system to facilitate greater access to education. On the other hand, the analysis demonstrates that IE in Malaysia continues to adopt selective and

conditional systems of mainstream and special education despite being discursively repackaged in different brands in different reform periods. Shevlin (2019) affirms the findings of this study in that he argues that this ambivalent view of inclusion has continuously reproduced educational inequalities towards a select group of children with disabilities through little focus on inclusion in a mainstream environment. This understanding necessitates a discussion of the interdiscursive and intertextual relationships that the policy documents of interest drew on to conceptualise this muddled concept of IE. The next section addresses these relationships.

## **8.2 Discourses**

Following on from 8.1, this section discusses how Malaysia's subtle shift in its conceptualisation of IE away from othering towards selective inclusion is impacted by multiple discourses and intertextual references to various documents.

### ***8.2.1 Interplay of competing discourses***

As chapter 6 revealed, IE policy in Malaysia is driven by pluralised shifting discourses—the medical, charity, lay, rights, and neoliberal discourses—that were constantly embodied within conflicts, consumptions, and in competition with one another. The study's application of Reisigl and Wodak (2009) second level of interdiscursive and intertextual analyses demonstrated that these conflicts resulted in small progressions and diminutions of certain intertextualities and regimes of truth about how IE is conceptualised in the national IE policy documents over time.

As shown in chapter 6, the medical, lay, and charitable discourses operate hand in hand to influence key policy actors in their attempts to reinforce exclusionary procedures related to schooling opportunities and access for pupils with disabilities in Malaysia in phase one (1996 to 2013). It was subsequently found that neoliberal state forms of IE that reinforce educational placements according to academic potentials are present in phase three (2018 onwards). Because the neoliberal discourse seems to hold an implicit presence in the analysed IE policy text, the findings on the second and current phases of IE policy reforms revealed the emergence of the rights discourse. The analysis further demonstrates that the infiltration of

such discourse has direct and indirect intertextual relations to the 1994 Salamanca Statement, the 2008 UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, and the 2001 No Child left Behind Act from the USA. This rights discourse appears to offer some resistance to the existing discourses, which have been described as dominant ideologies of IE, in protecting the rights of children with disabilities to education (Chong, 2016; van Aswegen, 2020; van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019). As a result, the impression that the rights model of disability is potentially capable of fighting and winning certain battles against the medical, charity, lay and neoliberal discourses has been created. However, the findings also reveal strong intertextual references to the 2011 Guidelines for Registration of Persons with Disabilities, Public Law 94-142, the 1978 Warnock Report, and Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 in the IE policy documents across the three reform periods. In other words, despite the rights discourse's attempt to combat the medical, charity, lay, and neoliberal discourses, the discursive orientations alluded to in these landmark documents have gained a considerable growth in power/knowledge in Malaysia's IE system that supplants the interaction of the country's own regimes of truth about IE in the selected policies.

Perhaps what is surprising about these findings is that the metanarratives of neoliberalism in combination with the medical, lay, and charity discourses in the Malaysian IE policy documents have significantly conceptualised and reconceptualised IE. As Davies and Bansel (2007) assert, neoliberalism works with other discourses to "cannibalise" the rights discourse in such a way that "neoliberalism itself appears more desirable" (p. 258). Their assertion is substantiated by the findings in this study where the rights discourse was seemingly cannibalised to fit neoliberalism's power/knowledge through the subtle integration of only select groups of children with disabilities in the education system observed in the Malaysian IE policy documents throughout the three phases. As chapter 6 demonstrates, medical classifications used in SEN diagnosis have attached a label of incompetence and abnormality to identified students (Farrell, 2010; Florian, 2014). When analysing Malaysia's IE context, the system appears to be additionally embedded within the charitable discourse. This approach, Islam (2005) argues, tends to treat children with disabilities as dependents, always in need of support which society will give as and when it chooses. As demonstrated in the intertextual analysis of the IE policy texts in phase three, the neoliberal wave from the Malaysian Education Blueprint has also partially swept across IE policymaking within Malaysian

governmentality since 2018. However, the findings that emerged from the examination of the IE policy in phase three indicate that the rights discourse has not been consumed by its rival discourses of IE. Although the neoliberal, medical, lay, and charity discourses gained power/knowledge as a consequence of this particular occurrence, they did not emerge as an "inevitable" way of living, as Davies and Bansel (2007) had stated. The contradictory position of the human rights framing of disability and inclusion in the Zero Reject policy of phase three reveals that the rights discourse may constitute and disguise itself within other discourses and that these compete with each other. This finding adds to a growing body of literature that has also shed light on the plural interaction and fluidity of different discourses in influencing local IE policy imperatives (Chong, 2016; Farrell, 2010; Florian, 2014; Islam, 2015; Thapaliya, 2018; van Aswegen, 2020; van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019).

Nevertheless, Chong (2016) raises concerns about the fluidity of multiple discourses in shaping the nature of IE in different localities across time. The mixture of contending discourses identified in this research reveals that the diverse and complex façades of IE are sometimes hidden behind a single and static representation of inclusion. When re-analysing the literature in chapter 2, what often emerged was the narrow representations of IE and which obscured the complexities of a multitude of discourses and intertextual links that were transmitted through policymaking decisions (Chong, 2016; Farrell, 2010; van Aswegen, 2020; van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019). The complexity revealed in this study runs parallel to several studies that also contradict such black-and-white definitudes of educational inclusion (Florian, 2014; Islam, 2015; Thapaliya, 2018). This research reveals a mosaic of power, truths, and knowledges situated within the IE policy documents. Very importantly, this study highlights that dismissing this diversity of discourses could be potentially detrimental thereby possibly diminishing the complexity, competitiveness, and conflicts that exist in IE policy texts. Disregarding such an interplay of plural discourses would likely result in the neglect of structural and agential barriers to educational access and participation for every child. For this reason, chapter 9 puts forward a recommendation that corresponds with this challenging aspect of IE policymaking.

To recap, analysing IE policy texts through a lens of interdiscursivity and intertextuality has enabled this study to better understand the conceptualisation, intertextual, and

interdiscursive regimes of truth about IE. In so doing, this study is able to put forward new and unique evidence of competition that illustrates the pushes and pulls of different discourses and intertextual references present in the selected IE policy documents. As Fulcher (1989) suggests, the multiplicity of discourses and intertextual relations is likely to have affected the policy's composition. This multiplicity, which cannot be reduced to singular governmentality, has resulted in contradictory and competing standards of IE, as well as goals for the development and provision of services for children with disabilities. This understanding serves as a pathway to explore why Malaysia draws on competing discourses and intertextualities that have given shape to its key IE policy texts over time.

### **8.3 Decisions**

Building on sections 8.1 and 8.2, this section discusses the extra-discursive variables that influence IE policy decisionmaking. It considers how historical, political, economic, and cultural realities in the Malaysian context continuously enable and constrain the agency of key policymakers in facilitating these pluralised shifting discourses and intertextualities in IE policy documents.

#### ***8.3.1 Mobilisation of neocolonialism through best practices from the West***

Chapter 7 reveals that IE policy in Malaysia significantly draws on best practices from the West that re-enact neocolonial agendas throughout the three reform periods. The use of Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) third level of analysis in conjunction with Jessop's (2005) SRA provides insight into why Western knowledge and management of disability and IE are translated, recontextualised, and reproduced in Malaysian policy documents.

As chapter 7 revealed, the influence of Western ideologies on the educational management of children with disabilities has dominated Malaysian educational policies through a history of political and social control that constructs educational thought on how and where children with disabilities should be educated. This study shows that reliance on best practices from the West carries assumptions of universality and objectivity and subconsciously reinforces Western knowledge as a universal way to address system failure and individual disadvantage. This influence is evident across the three phases of IE policy reforms. The analysis shows that

initial IE policies were driven by institutional ideologies of “benevolent humanitarianism” brought in by Anglican missionaries from the West through the establishment of various special institutions for hearing and visually impaired children. It is also significant that within this period the policymakers saw community-rehabilitation centres through the trajectories of Western imperialism and so saw them as an effective solution to rehabilitate children with disabilities who were considered to be ‘ineducable’ in mainstream educational institutions. In phase two, the biomedical practices of governing disability within specific contexts of Western societies to facilitate the gradual acceptance of children with disabilities in the mainstream schooling system—namely the UK (e.g., 1994 Education Act) and the USA (1975 Public Law 94-142), as well as influential international organisations such as the World Health Organization (e.g., the 2001 International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) and United Nations (e.g., the 2008 Conventions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)—were increasingly adopted as a ‘soft landing’ approach in the Malaysian IE policies. Finally, in phase three (in 2018 to the present day), the rise of social justice in the approach to disability which emanated from the USA (i.e., 2004 Individual with Disabilities Education Act) marked a subtle change through its zero-exclusion policy for children with all types of disabilities. This historical account illuminates the considerable influence global and Western ideologies have on the local politics of inclusion, which affirms Kamenopoulou’s (2018b) argument that Western theories and discourses of disability often stake their claim to forms of truth and universality. This idea draws attention to the question of why local policy actors borrow Western laws of inclusion.

As demonstrated in chapter 7, the possible underlying purposes for borrowing IE policies from the West can be determined by understanding the strategic actions employed by Malaysian policymakers in response to its: 1) history of colonialism, and 2) geopolitical power relations. Both of these possibilities are explored and critically discussed next.

The likelihood that the legacies of colonialism and colonality of knowledge in shaping Malaysian policymakers’ normative thinking about IE and disability is high. Andreotti (2011) argues that education systems in postcolonial societies are frequently shaped by colonial histories. Mukhopadhyay (2015) brings a similarly critical perspective on the complexities

inherent in the postcolonial nations. He argues that postcolonial conditions can unconsciously lead to the continued existence of colonialism in the conceptual, institutional, and cultural ideologies of IE. Drawing on his analysis of IE policy in Botswana, the author found that the remnants of colonialism, the reconstruction of postcolonial curricula and educational infrastructures, national cultural politics, and globalisation continue to exert complex push-and-pull demands on governance and IE education systems. The findings from Mukhopadhyay's (2015) study support the possibility presented in this thesis that the belief that the "West knows best" perspective held by Malaysian IE policymakers have been shaped by Western ways of seeing inherited from Malaysia's British colonial era. Although the policies were predominantly authored and reviewed by local policymakers, these key actors have either lived through the colonial era, been educated in and/or worked alongside Western education institutions, and have therefore possibly imbibed Western beliefs and values. Their own behaviours and attitudes as products of Western culture undoubtedly shaped the local IE policies in one way or another, especially when it comes to the desire to view progress and modernisation as following a Western perspective. They may perceive policies and programmes developed in Western countries as "an indicator of quality" (Kalyanpur, 2014, p. 84) or "internationally recognised" (Portnoi, 2016, p. 161) and consequently see that their role as policymakers is to steer the nation towards modernity by adopting Western versions of IE. This study provides an example of why Western forms of IE policy are adopted, not because they are necessarily the best policy option, but because they are perceived *as such* by key policymakers (Verger, 2014). In this manner, this research adds to a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between educational inclusion and disability through the complex histories of coloniality within the postcolonial context of Malaysia.

A further and interrelated possibility as to why IE policy texts in Malaysia have largely been infiltrated by a Western philosophy of IE relates to the geopolitical powers that often rest with high-income nations and, more prominently, international organisations. Studies have long acknowledged the significant role international organisations play in the successful expansion of Western normative frameworks and values (Ball, 1990; Grek et al., 2009; Olmedo, 2013; Resnik, 2012; Verger, 2014). These Western models of IE that work well in some high-income nations tend to be packaged and disseminated effectively to policymakers as a solution for global education problems popularised by UN mandates. Such efficient policy dissemination is

compounded by the dependence on investments by the UK, the USA, and Australia, as revealed in chapter 7, which contributed to the maintenance of a Eurocentric model of IE in Malaysian IE policy documents. By using the SRA as an analytic tool, this research has identified how MMoE policymakers are unintentionally constrained in terms of their agency to develop an “indigenised” version of their own policies and programmes. The findings have shown how these wider political structural influences which have been transmitted through several international conventions organised by the UN may have instigated the need for Malaysian policymakers to align to international mandates as well as best practices adopted throughout the globe. These findings are consistent with King’s (2007) and Meyer et al.’s (1997) studies which found that Western education frameworks have been adopted as the result of the legitimisation pressures that governments receive—especially in MICs as well as in post-colonial settings—as a way to demonstrate to the international community that they are building a ‘modern state’. The strong evidence of intertextual references to Western knowledge, ideas, and practices of IE throughout the Malaysian IE policy documents reveals how the stature and geopolitical position of high-income nations and international organisations have an impact on whether local policymakers have the luxury of choosing to borrow or indigenise a policy.

What is disconcerting about these findings is that these hegemonic ways of thinking about IE in policy texts that have been applied to the Malaysian context by policymakers have unintentionally minimised local, indigenous, and culturally-relevant knowledge and contextual needs. As pointed out in chapter 2, local definitions of and terms for IE and SEN are absent in Malaysia. In another instance, the Malaysian IE policy documents fail to consider their financial implications for a resource-strapped country within the context of a limited pool of trained personnel and limited physical infrastructure. Despite having different sociocultural, economic, and political fabrics, Malaysia appears to have given primacy to borrowing IE policies from high-income countries like the USA and the UK which are often viewed as superior in their educational and cultural practices (Kamenopoulou, 2018a; Walton, 2018). This thesis adds voice to the existing body of knowledge that coloniality of knowledge has reproduced structures from high-income nations to maintain this epistemic and material superiority and the exportation of its IE knowledge, methods (e.g., the social model of disability), and practice to a space seen to be perpetually deficient. Consequently, while there

is evidence of increased educational rights and access for children with disabilities in Malaysia over time, the country's IE policies provide few opportunities to address local economics, politics, and culture of inclusion, potentially exacerbating support and equity in schooling. These findings also demonstrate how borrowing Western approaches to IE has not only unintentionally neglected local structural influences, but also marginalised local ideas, thoughts, and practices. Chapter 9 puts forward several recommendations that correspond with this policy gap.

### **8.3.2 Modern apparatus to regulate people with disabilities**

This subsection continues to build on the previous discussion to explore why IE policy in Malaysia continuously draws on different IE practices from the West. The findings chapters have revealed that the Malaysian IE policy documents from 1996 to 2018 are subsumed under special education thinking. Connor et al. (2008) claimed that the idea of special education functions as an apparatus vital to produce compliant individuals with disabilities and to safeguard mainstream education through the use of "machine bureaucracy and professional bureaucracy" (p. 319). As this subsection will show, the IE policy initiatives in Malaysia have contributed to the maintenance of mainstream and special education discourses through the incorporation of bureaucratic processes and procedures enacted by the MMoE and federal government to monitor and discipline pupils with disabilities.

Skrtic (1991) draws attention to the ways in which mainstream and special schooling systems have been managed and governed as separate machine bureaucracies, which are defined as "the pyramid-shaped, top-down structure of control relations common to the mass production firm" (p. 104). The internal structures of each machine bureaucracy are operated by separate professional bureaucracies comprised of a large number of highly specialised professional individuals such as teachers, specialised medical officers, government officials, and others. As discussed in subsection 8.1.1, this two-track organisational system which predetermines the roles of specific professions, student classifications, educational placements, curricular content, instructional procedures, supervision, and competency testing appears to have been established within the Malaysian IE policy. This regulative discourse may seek to regulate and/or discipline human action for the purposes of uniformity, conformity,

and control. Drawing on Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) theorising of the ideology of control, this thesis suggests that the bureaucracies within mainstream and special education are effective in making those who serve, and those who receive, subservient to, and unquestioning of, the system. Chapter 5's textual analysis of the key IE policies suggests that this end is accomplished by employing modes of diagnosis, treatment, and surveillance legitimised through rationalisation and mandates of law. In this way, the IE policy in Malaysia is likely to produce students with disabilities, teachers, medical professionals, and government representatives that are, as Allan (1999) puts it, "willing agents in their own discipline" (p. 24). This result shows how bureaucracies play an important role in establishing, socialising, and legitimating actors into a social order. Rather than maximising the locus of control and decisionmaking of an individual with disabilities (Connor et al., 2008), this study demonstrates that such bureaucracies will ensure the production of passive citizens rather than social actors.

Connor et al. (2008) raises concern about the ability of the bureaucracies in a two-track integration approach to IE to resist policy change. They further assert that such resilience to change is made possible, because the two-track approaches within education organisations are disconnected but, paradoxically, mutually reinforcing. In this study, this concern is evident in the way that neither the mainstream nor the special schooling system in Malaysia accommodates heterogeneity, thus normalising educational placement of students according to their academic, social, emotional, behavioural, and physical potentials. Perhaps more significantly, Cuban (1993) claims that machine bureaucracies are often viewed by people within them as nonadaptable structures, even though they portray themselves otherwise. Cuban's (1993) observations that when the public demands change, the outer machine bureaucracy deflects demands and responds that change has occurred in order to ensure its own survival *as is* within a dynamic environment. Thus, Cuban's observation affirms the findings of this study which have shown that, despite the many rounds of IE policy formulation and, more unexpectedly, the change in government within the Malaysian political scene in phase three, the need for labels, disability categorisations, rationalisation of placement, and the upholding of exclusive educational settings remain. This research provides a clear example of how the development and transformation of IE policy over the span of more than two decades can "create the illusion that they have changed when, in fact, they remain largely the same" (Skrtic, 1991, p. 166).

Another troubling aspect about this form of bureaucracy is its ability to stay hidden. Such mechanisms of power remain invisible, undetected, and safely obscured behind the foundations of special education. The findings in chapter 7 reveal that it is in the acts of locating, examining, evaluating, and labelling an individual child that professionals contribute to the production of the student as disabled, while the unquestioned bureaucracies that permit them to enact certain educational processes remain unnoticed. These processes are based on examinations performed with 'scientifically validated' tools of testing and instruments claimed to be objective and therefore perceived as more trustworthy and neutral. While concern has been raised about special education practices' and paradigms' being embedded within IE policy documents and uncritically adopted by many MICs (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2012; Kamenopoulou, 2018b), little research has considered the use of special education under the guise of IE as a carrier of a regulative tool and "discourse of control" (Vlachou, 2004, p. 14). This study has consequently added new knowledge and understanding of the ideology of control by showing how special education has legitimated a nexus of power and knowledge in the processes that subjugate people with disabilities within the education system are hidden through IE policy discourse. Given this understanding, it is necessary to ponder who benefits from these arrangements.

Responding to this question of "who benefits?" requires returning to Collins' (2000) concern about the growing importance of bureaucracies as a mode of modern social organisation. Collins claims countries depend on bureaucracies because "this style of organisation [is] highly efficient in both reproducing intersecting oppressions and in masking their effects" (p. 281). This claim aligns with Foucault's (1994) argument that bureaucracies in education reduce the need to solve actual problems and inhibit a population's thinking critically about itself individually and collectively. His suggestion that bureaucracies can transform individuals into "docile bodies" (p. 135) who are compliant and subordinate within the schooling structure goes some way to explaining why the Malaysian IE in policy documents are imbricated with powerful bureaucratic structures. This thesis suggests that the complex bureaucracy of special education in IE policy documents may serve to create disciplined and docile bodies of citizens and thus eases the process of determining who holds the power to decide who is disabled, who belongs, and who stays in the special education system and therefore who is, and is not,

entitled to services, support, and benefits. When categorisations of individuals with SEN are still structured around a normative conception of human functioning, this approach could further reinforce the displacement, and therefore the disempowerment, of those who deviate from that norm (Pinto, 2011). In this way, the key IE policy documents under study might have either consciously or subconsciously exerted power to manipulate students with disabilities and their parents into surrendering to their role as, what Liasidou (2012) refers to as, passive recipients of the assemblage of bureaucratic rules and actions. This study shows bureaucracies embedded within the key IE policy documents play a pivotal role in conceptualising IE in Malaysia. Such administrative methods appear to serve the interests of the government and the MMoE, which is responsible for enforcing them as an effective mode of political and social control in regulating and differentiating bodies in the education sphere.

### ***8.3.3 A selective inclusion shaped by neoliberal-ableist ideologies***

This study reveals that IE policies in Malaysia facilitate a selective inclusion that is shaped by neoliberal-ableist ideologies. The analysis showed how key policy actors in each of the policymaking reform periods configured and reshaped the education policy directions for students with disabilities in line with their own sense of agency and structural influences, in particular, neoliberalism. As demonstrated in chapter 7, neoliberalism has facilitated selective inclusion that prioritises the educational access and participation of a select group of students with disabilities.

This research has shown that the formation and transformation of IE policy frameworks in Malaysia that have continuously selected who is 'in' and who is 'out' in a mainstream learning environment are driven by neoliberal-ableist forces. This IE policy discourse seems to be imbricated by a few features characterising neoliberal ideologies that aim to safeguard educational standards. Such findings echo Hursh's (2005) earlier concerns that neoliberalism has resulted in policymakers' deploying expansion of standardised testing, institutional competition, accountability measures, performative steering, and curricula fundamentalism that are compliant with central targets, strict guidelines, and standards. Chong (2013) also raised concerns that such accountability mechanisms born out of neoliberal ideas have directly and indirectly threatened the principles of inclusion and equity. This present research

demonstrates how IE policymakers in Malaysia are caught between the disparate agendas of neoliberalism and inclusion in the domain of education, thus having to constantly decide how to strike a balance between equity and competition. Thus, this study has uncovered that accountability mechanisms that are established for the promotion of academic standards can lead to some undesirable side effects as regards the development of IE. Therefore, despite implementing IE policies informed by principles emphasising human rights, rights to participate, and zero exclusion ideas, students with additional support needs at the lowest end of the spectrum are deemed less 'educable' and placed in community-based rehabilitation centres, special schools or classes. This situation draws attention to the question of why IE policies over the years have been infused with neoliberal-ableist assumptions about how students with disabilities should participate within the education domain.

As chapter 7 found, the possible underlying triggers behind this situation can be determined by understanding the strategic decisions taken by Malaysian policymakers in response to the: 1) international standards assessments, and 2) need to produce human capital to meet the needs of market-driven education governance. Both of these triggers are examined and critically discussed below.

As chapter 2 indicated, the competition mechanism has recently been given more importance in academic literature and has been seen as one of the driving forces behind IE policy configuration. Maggetti and Gilardi (2016) describe the competition mechanism as evident when countries compete with one another in an attempt to "gain international reputation" (p. 5). Chong (2013) further argues that this form of competition between countries has been clearly triggered by the performance comparisons produced by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), whose first report was released in 2001. This argument goes some way to supporting the findings of this study, which has also suggested that by putting comparative pressure on education systems, PISA and other international assessments have disposed Malaysia's education system to be receptive to various accountability mechanisms. The analysis in chapter 7 demonstrates that when academic achievements are safeguarded to ensure that the country climbs up the global league tables, precious resources and time are concentrated on the 'hopefuls' and high-functioning students

with disabilities. This element of competition, in turn, appears to have restrained key IE policymakers' ability in their attempt to make IE policy more inclusive in Malaysia. The research provides a clear case that illustrates how neoliberal measures create tensions between prioritising the academic outputs of schools and the position of vulnerable pupils.

This research has also uncovered how neoliberalism that serves as an economic and political ideology for human capital and resource expansion has permeated into IE policy documents in Malaysia. Like many other MICs such as Cambodia (Kalyanpur, 2014), India (Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014), and Bangladesh (Rahaman, 2017), Malaysia's education has been transformed as it takes on a new role in the local Malaysian context to gain the status of a developed nation. Ball (1998) cautions that the effect of economic competition and market forces can build pressure towards common policy agendas and consequently opens the door for reshaping the discourse of justice based on distribution, recognition, and representation in IE movement. In the present study, the role of education in Malaysia is observed to be structured around the purpose of creating a "globally competitive" society through the "Look East" policy stemming from Malaysia's bilateral ties with Japan. The analysis has shown how such an neoliberal-ableist assumption held by the central government in Malaysia since the early 1980s has the capacity to transform education into a "commodity" (Ball, 1998, p. 348) that serves an interest to produce human capital to meet the needs of the labour market. When ableism clings to this neoliberal condition, we can see how by-products of education such as cleverness, achievement, and success are equated to valuable qualities of human capital evinced through the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MMoE, 2013b). Waitoller's (2020) argument that treating education as a commodity to resolve economic problems in many MICs would likely lead to the selection, division, and exclusion of pupils with disabilities makes sense when considered in light of the findings of this study. His assertion that education spaces that are restructured for capital accumulation cause the neglect of pupils who are less likely to contribute to a nation's economy goes some way to explaining why IE policy documents are indirectly affected by neoliberal ideologies. Collectively, the exploration of both triggers—international assessments and producing valuable sources of human capital—in this research brings a critical voice to the developing body of knowledge that has studied how mechanisms of global influences interact with endogenous factors to shape IE policy discourse.

Chapter 7's analysis of the strategic actions employed in response to the local political and economic contexts reveals that Malaysian IE key policymakers are constrained in their ability to both formulate and act on their strategies to resist neoliberalism imposed by the central government. Rather, the policymakers are encouraged to review, adopt, and prioritise IE practices and processes that would more likely yield a higher return on investments in terms of international ranking and producing high-quality human capital. These findings add to a developing body of research that shows how the central government plays a part in establishing national standards, indicators, and rankings that enable education to contribute to the development of "social and economic capital" in an MIC like Malaysia (MMoE, 2013b). More importantly, this study also draws attention to how common education policy agendas have been continuously oriented towards economic interests and thereby indirectly contributed to the segregation and/or exclusion of children with disabilities in IE policy (van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019).

As Burch (2018) explains, the aspiration to produce neoliberal-ableist citizens who are responsible, active, and work-ready citizen has come to dominate IE policy discourse "in subtle but alarming ways" (p. 96-97). Erevelles (2011) goes further to expose neoliberalism's internal paradox in the sense that it redistributes quality educational choice and freedom for all students, yet methodically measures and moulds students with disabilities in line with ableist expectations. In this study, this concern is evident in the way that the IE policy across two recent reform periods (i.e., phases two and three) during which the 1996 Education (Amended) Act, the 2013 Special Education Regulations, and the Zero Reject policy create the impression of promoting choice through educational placement while activating conditions and bureaucratic practices underpinned by ableist understandings in subtle and regulated ways. This finding supports Waitoller's (2020) claim that neoliberalism's economic, cultural, and political ideology for capital expansion has seeped into the educational aspect of human lives in many MICs. Waitoller's (2020) observations that neoliberal ideas have "shaped inclusive education's radical agenda into a selective inclusionism" (p. 96) affirms the findings of this study which have shown how neoliberal globalisation has worked through the IE policy documents in Malaysia to redefine educational inclusion. This assertion affirms van Aswegen and Shevlin's (2019) earlier argument, that the role of IE is reconstituted "as an adjunct of the economy" (p. 4). This research provides a clear example of how neoliberalism has discreetly

facilitated the formulation and reproduction of IE policy to promote selective forms of inclusion in Malaysia.

Nonetheless, the mechanisms of external influence do not provoke policy change in isolation. Verger (2020) points out that mechanisms of external influence such as neoliberalism interact with endogenous factors and that strategic actions are responsible for shaping the development of an education policy. Thus, key policymakers' roles need to be understood within the context of this much broader neoliberal project. Chapter 7's analysis of structural influences embedded within the Malaysian landscape has shown how neoliberal ideologies have governed economic, political, and cultural conditions over time within the IE policymaking and how these have, in turn, influenced key policymakers' responses within these processes. This finding not only demonstrates how neoliberalism has structured the field of IE policymaking through the establishment of certain economic, political, and cultural conditions, but also demonstrates how policy actors' own strategic responses have been responsible for further reproducing an intersection of inclusive and a neoliberal agenda in Malaysia. This finding shows how both the SRA (Jessop, 2005) and DHA have been valuable in identifying the interactions between neoliberal ideologies and IE agendas and how key policy actors have used their own agency to transform how these IE policies are translated. Kamenopoulou's (2019, 2021) argument that the analysis of national IE education policy needs to go beyond the theorising of global influences as an exogenous notion that acts upon the shaping of endogenous or local education policymaking has been addressed in this study. By applying analytic tools that have enabled the role of agents and their agency to be considered, this research has demonstrated how both structure and agency have worked within the field of IE to transform the way in which neoliberal ideologies are advanced and reproduced through IE policies.

#### **8.4 Revisiting Ontological Foundation and Tools Employed**

The present chapter brings new theoretical and methodological insights to the field of IE and policy studies by advancing a critical realist discourse analysis approach in the investigation of IE policy development in Malaysia. Returning to its critical realist discourse analysis conceptual framework through the novel combination of the DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) in conjunction

with the SRA (Jessop, 2005) the following section will discuss how this framework has enabled this research to unmask economic, political, and cultural agendas embedded within the IE policies from 1996 to 2018. This section argues that critical realist discourse analysis helps provide an effective conceptual framework that goes some way towards explaining not only the power of language inscribed in policy texts, but also the researching of the complex interplay of agency and structure across time within the field of IE. It also suggests that critical realist discourse analysis informs the present study about the nature of IE policymaking processes and vice versa.

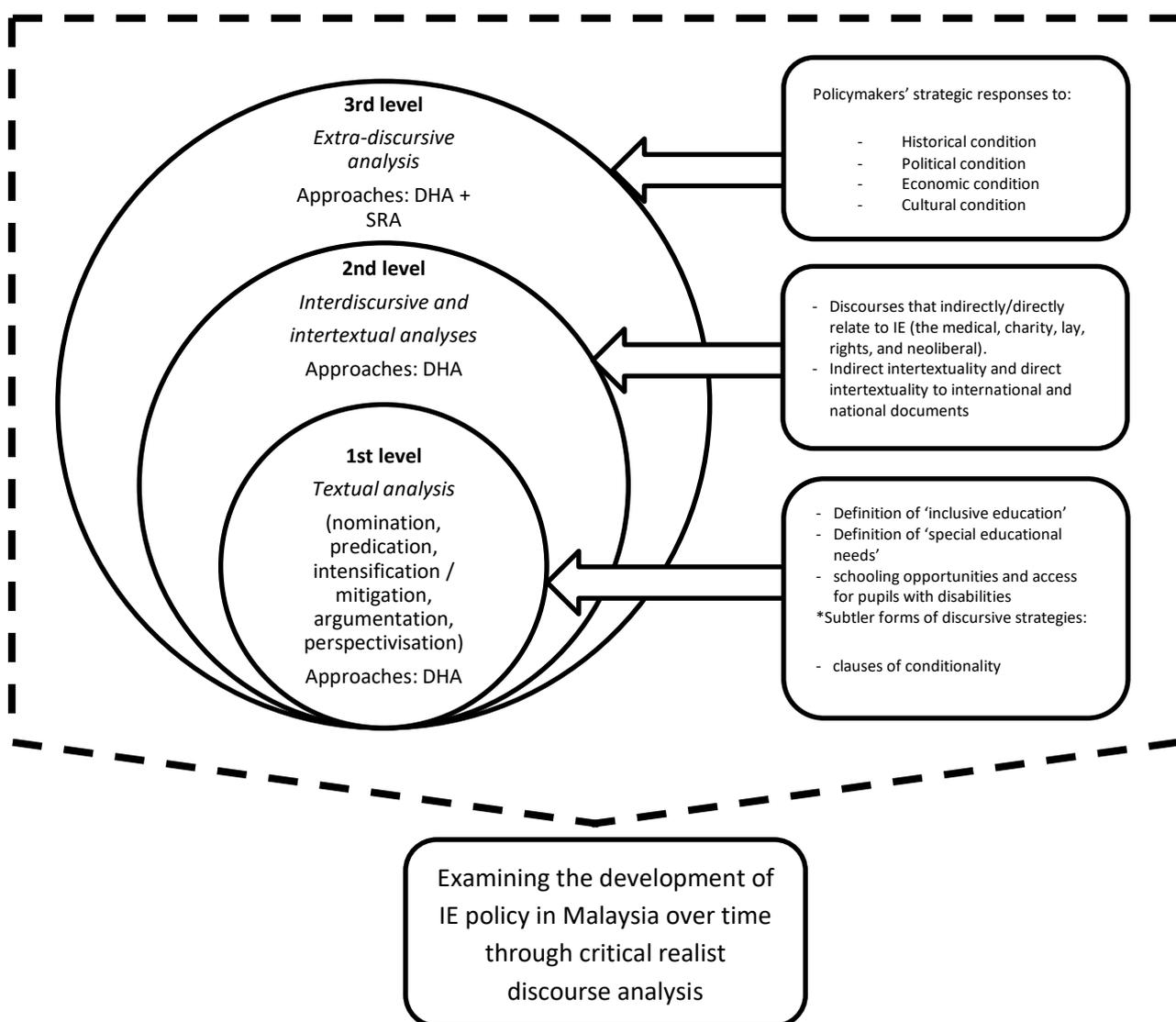
The ontological foundation on which critical realist discourse analysis is based has been instrumental in enabling this research to critically examine the several rounds of IE policy creation and change from 1996 to 2018. Drawing on a critical realist ontology has positioned this research to make visible the invisible constitution and construction of regimes of truth about IE. Critical theory has revealed the subtle power relations and knowledge inscribed in IE policy documents. This relationship between structure and agency has been thoroughly examined by using critical realist discourse analysis, which has brought greater clarity to the critical realist approach that underpinned this research. This conceptual application of the DHA has made an important contribution to the body of knowledge by examining the use of language within policies in relation to the wider structural contexts with a diachronic relevance (across time). By using the DHA in this way, local historical, economic, political, and social-cultural contexts were acknowledged and identified as mechanisms that influence the formative processes of IE policy documents. This thesis has also employed the SRA to challenge concerns of presenting the field as overly structuralist. This combination of relational approaches has enabled the interplay of structure and agency to be examined within the field of IE, and it has identified how key policymakers such as the MMoE utilise agency to either reproduce or resist the structural conditions that govern the field of IE policymaking. Therefore, this research demonstrates how the DHA and SRA can be used concurrently to bring greater insight to the relationship between structure and agency and thus facilitate a critical analysis of IE policies in Malaysia over time.

As conceptual approaches, the DHA and SRA have provided tools to enable this study to interrogate the processes and motivations behind IE policy articulations, grounded in considerations of the relationships and flows between language, discourse, structure, and agency. In doing so, the interwoven and complex relationship that each element brings helped to unveil the hidden power relations and knowledge to some degree. As such and within the context of IE policy formation and movement, an examination of language, discourse, structure, and agency reveals how these forces are inextricably linked and significantly influence how IE policy is conceived and transformed across time. On the other hand, the present study also informs critical realist discourse analysis, as it complements the approaches with details in each level of analysis: textual analysis, interdiscursive and intertextual analyses, and extra-discursive analysis. This three-level approach enables the present study to contribute to the unique pairing of the DHA and SRA as an effective and systematic conceptual and analytical tool. This unique framework allows for in-depth insight into understanding the IE policymaking processes for children with disabilities. The outline of how the present study informs critical realist discourse analysis is illustrated in Figure 8.1.

As pointed out earlier, the DHA also provided a methodological framework to investigate the research questions in a way that encouraged analysing IE policymaking processes on different levels. Chapter 5's first level of analysis of the key IE policy documents in Malaysia examined how language is employed in shaping the ways education for children with disabilities are envisioned over time, from 1996 to 2018. In the present study, this area was explored through the first research question: How has inclusive education been conceptualised in policy documents over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia? As shown in Figure 8.1, this study found that IE policies in Malaysia conceptualise the notion of inclusion in terms of their: (a) definition of IE; (b) definition of special educational needs (SEN); and (c) schooling opportunities and access for pupils with disabilities in Malaysia. This textual analysis illustrated different linguistic, pragmatic, and rhetorical strategies and devices that are used to conceptualise IE depending on the policymakers' aims. Chapter 5 demonstrated that strategies such as nomination, predication, intensification/mitigation, argumentation, and perspectivisation provide the necessary discursive system to legitimatise what counts as inclusion and what works within the field of IE. In addition to the existing list of discursive strategies put forward by (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009), this study extends the body of knowledge on identifying linguistic

absences (Foucault, 1972) and clauses of conditionality (Slee, 1996) embedded in IE policy texts. Identifying these nuanced and subtler forms of discursive strategies allowed the researcher to peel back layers of meaning to expose how powerful social actors, through policies, act as gatekeepers to establish who is “in” and who is “out” of the education system and consequently to determine the educational fate of children with disabilities. This analysis proved critical in understanding the role of discourse in the (re)production of marginalisation, exclusion, and discrimination in disability-related education policy discourses. This textual analysis not only provided the necessary understanding of the policy content, but also unpacked how language is manipulated as a means to gain and maintain power through the use that powerful social actors make of it.

**Figure 8.1** *Theoretical Contribution of the Study*



Subsequently, chapter 6's second level of interdiscursive and intertextual analyses investigated the relationships between the key IE policy documents of interest and other texts and discourses from the local and international contexts. These were explored through the second research question: How have the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships governed the conceptualisation of inclusive education in policy documents over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia? As presented in Figure 8.1, the interdiscursive analysis enhances the understanding of the intersecting presence of multiple and competing discourses in the Malaysian IE policy documents. These discourses included the medical, charity, lay, and rights discourses as well as the neoliberal discourse which emerged and was reproduced during the second and third phases of the policy change. Meanwhile, the intertextual analysis shows that the IE policy documents had direct and indirect links with policy documents from the international (i.e., UNESCO's 2008 Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2014 Salamanca Statement, UN's 2015 Sustainable Development Goal 4, 1994 Education Act, 1978 Warnock Report, No Child Left Behind Act 2001, and Public Law 94-142) and local context (i.e., Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, Education Act 1996, Guidelines for Registration of Persons with Disabilities 2011, and Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025). These findings suggest that the discursive and intertextual influences have been primarily transnational in nature, although with some local influence, and that they function as conditions of possibilities and limitations to the IE policy formation processes interrogated in the next level of analysis.

Chapter 7's third level of extra-discursive elements analyses the contextual structural and agential realities that influence IE policy development over time. This influence was explored through the third research question: To what extent have the economic, political, and cultural factors influenced key policy actors' decisionmaking in the development of IE policy over time from 1996 to 2018 in Malaysia? As depicted in Figure 8.1 and through the use of strategic-relational approach within the third level of the DHA's analysis, this conceptual framework has demonstrated, for the first time, how policy actors strategically responded in relation to the local historical, economic, political, and cultural contexts to influence the formative processes of IE policy documents. This thesis' argument is premised on three major points. First, the evolution of IE policy in Malaysia reflects coloniality of knowledge inherited from its colonial past and which is amplified by the influential geopolitical positioning of high-income nations

(i.e., the UK, the USA, and Australia) and international organisations (i.e., UN). Second, IE policy has been developed as an effective mode of governance to manipulate and control disabled bodies and the population to serve the interests of the government and the MMoE. Finally, IE policy in Malaysia has been framed within competing agendas: the neoliberal regime of development vis-a-vis existing ideologies of inclusion such as the biomedical and human rights framework. This argument raises questions about the nexus of power and knowledge hidden within IE policy discourse and, in doing so, identifies tensions and contradictions.

Finally, this chapter explored the ways in which IE policy in Malaysia evolved from 1996 to 2018 by drawing together the key findings from this research and considering these in light of the underlying neoliberal and neocolonial ideologies through the axis of power and knowledge. This exploration reveals that key IE policy documents facilitate a shift from othering towards selective inclusionism and in so doing draws attention to the heightened role of different discourses and intertextual relations with local and international policy pronouncements in local IE politics. Importantly, this investigation illustrates the complexities entangled in the Malaysian IE policy formation and movement processes as constrained and enabled in part by the interaction between the structural ability of international organisations as well as other transnational states and the endogenous conditions. Intertwined in this understanding of the trajectory of the key IE policies over time is that regulation of disabled bodies and neoliberal and neocolonial agendas were found to influence economic, political, and cultural outcomes which favour the Malaysian federal government and the MMoE. Therefore, each of the preceding analyses in this approach has enabled this research to expose assumptions regarding IE governance in the Malaysian context.

As this section has detailed, it is believed that this research has brought new methodological insights to the field of critical policy analysis and IE by advancing a critical realist discourse analysis approach in the investigation of IE policy development in a particular local context. This study has shown that the use of critical realist discourse analysis provides the present study with an effective and systematic conceptual framework through which to answer its overarching research question: What are the factors that have shaped the Malaysian inclusive education policy over time from 1996 to 2018? The critical realist discourse analysis in this

study has proved useful for understanding how and why, through certain mechanisms, IE policies are borrowed and developed in Malaysia. Moreover, the present study contributes to the establishment of the use of DHA as a conceptual framework that allows for an in-depth insight into understanding the use of language in articulating certain ideological positions in the IE policy. Additionally, this study proposes the pairing of the DHA and SRA, within a critical realist ontology, to provide a more nuanced explanation of policy movement over time by making visible the unobservable structures and mechanisms entrenched within policy texts and the strategies engaged in by policy actors in influencing the trajectory of IE policy development. In so doing, it is hoped that a critical realist discourse analysis framework could in some ways help to fill in the methodological gaps in IE policy analysis and allow researchers to understand the policymaking processes from a context-sensitive perspective (Kamenopoulou, 2020; Walton, 2018). This perspective is especially important in analysing policy development that generally pivots around the (re)production of educational marginalisation of children with disabilities within MICs context.

## **8.5 Conclusion**

This thesis set out to understand how IE policy in Malaysia has evolved over time. The formation and transformation of the Malaysian IE policy from 1996 to 2018 provided an insightful case through which to interrogate how actors and mechanisms associated with both wider and local structural forces interact in the trajectory of a local IE policy. The analysis revealed that IE policies in Malaysia are not formulated within an objective, value-free, and unchanging system. Rather, the evolution of the IE policy in Malaysia works in tandem with the strategic decisions taken by local policymakers in response to the complex and evolving local historical, economic, political, and cultural conditions in which the policy is situated. Furthermore, this research has demonstrated that structural and agentic forces did facilitate the dynamic interplay of multiple discourses and intertextualities embedded into the key IE policy documents. This multiplicity has subsequently shaped the multifaceted conceptualisation of IE—that IE is fundamentally good, but not for everyone yet—carved into the key IE policy documents under investigation. This thesis has also provided an internal analysis of the contextual structures at work in policymaking and shown not only that the development of IE policy in Malaysia over time reflects coloniality of knowledge inherited

from its colonial past, but also that it is influenced by the geopolitical positioning of high-income nations (i.e., the UK, the USA, and Australia) and global development institutions (i.e., United Nations). The study has revealed that IE policy has been developed as an effective mode of governance to regulate disabled bodies and populations in advancing a neoliberal agenda. Additionally, this investigation has shown how the rise of neoliberalism, triggered by the need to gain international reputation, has continually aided policy shifts in the conceptualisation of IE away from othering towards selective inclusion. Therefore, this thesis suggests that the evolution of IE policy in Malaysia is influenced by the strategic decisions employed by powerful social actors in legitimising their perceived optimal ways to meet learner diversity to fulfil the wider as well as local cultural, political, and economic conditions.

## **CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION**

This chapter concludes the study by restating the central aim of the thesis, reiterating the methodology used to answer the research questions, and summarising the key findings. Having done so, this chapter then puts forward some recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, the chapter reviews the limitations of this study and proposes areas that the next stage of research might focus on.

### **9.1 Central Aim of the Thesis and Summary of Main Findings**

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the IE policy formation processes in Malaysia from 1996 to 2018. This study employed critical realist discourse analysis as a conceptual and analytical framework to examine the key IE policy documents of interest: the 1996 Education Act, the 2013 Special Education Regulations, the 1996 Education (Amended) Act, the 2013 Special Education Regulations, and the 2018 Zero Reject policy. The critical realist discourse analysis approach, which hinges on a critical realist paradigm, was employed to answer the research questions through the combination of the DHA and SRA.

The overarching question aimed to explore the factors that have shaped IE policy in Malaysia over time. This question was also intended to interrogate the underlying reasons why the Malaysian IE policy documents are borrowed, developed, and enacted in the ways they are. From this main question, three subquestions were formulated to help address the main research question. The first subquestion examined how the notion of educational inclusion has been conceptualised in IE policy documents within the Malaysian context over time. By exploring the discursive strategies employed, the thesis unpacked the ways in which language is strategically used to define IE and SEN, as well as what schooling opportunities look like for children with disabilities. The second subquestion considered the ways in which the interdiscursive and intertextual relations that emerged have governed the conceptualisation of IE in the key policy documents over time. This analysis disentangled the intersecting discourses that might be associated with inclusion. Furthermore, it sought to uncover the implicit and explicit relations that the key IE policy documents have to other local and international documents related to the provision of IE. Finally, the third subquestion considered the extent to which contextual structures have influenced Malaysian policymakers'

IE policymaking decisions over time. The study interrogated the role structural and agentic forces play in influencing the conceptualisation and discourses of IE in the policy documents under study.

The key findings of each research question in this study revealed that the development of IE policy in Malaysia is enmeshed and situated within the historical and contemporary local political, economic, and cultural context. The findings showed that IE is discursively conceptualised in terms of schooling access, opportunities, and procedures for children with disabilities. Specifically, the study demonstrated that the conceptualisation of IE in policy documents has evolved from a special education framework to one of selective inclusionism over time. This study further indicated that the interplay of the different discourses (i.e., the medical, lay, charity, and neoliberal) and intertextual relations with different local and international policy documents as competing and battling through the amendments are being continually carved into the IE policy documents. The analyses of these documents were corroborated by the interviews with key policy actors. Through the interviews, this study has gained insights into the knowledge, experiences, and reflections on the policymaking processes of IE policy during a specific reform period. The analysis demonstrated that several exogenous mechanisms have interacted with the contextual structures to influence the trajectory of IE policy in Malaysia. These triggers—the desire to achieve Western modernity, the use of policy as a tool of social control, and the reproduction of neocolonial and neoliberal-ableist ideologies—were identified and explored as mechanisms of IE policy formation and change. Perhaps more significantly, these analyses have highlighted the policy gaps and challenges in the government’s plan to achieve zero exclusion of children with disabilities in the education domain.

Against this background, and underpinned by the current IE system, its trickle-down policy documents, and an understanding of Malaysia’s contemporary endogenous education policymaking landscape, this next part of the chapter subsequently puts forward some policy and practical recommendations to enable children with more types of disabilities to receive quality and equitable education in prospective IE policies in Malaysia.

## **9.2 Recommendations for policy and practice**

The section is organised into three parts. The first set of recommendations concern policymakers engaged in disability and educational inclusion policies. Recommendations include imposing mechanisms for noncompliance with disability regulations, enhancing collaboration and partnership, and embracing the capabilities approach as an alternative discourse. The next set of proposed recommendations are for academics and researchers working in the field of disability and inclusion. These include un-silencing local epistemologies of IE and setting up policy engagement bodies within local universities. Relatedly, the final set of recommendations relate to key stakeholders such as schools and teachers that are directly impacted by the IE policy. These recommendations include providing professional support for preservice and in-service mainstream teachers and promoting close collaboration between special and mainstream schools. Although these recommendations are put forward to improve IE in the Malaysian context, their significance can be applied to inclusion in education generally, and so they are relevant to other contexts that share similar challenges to those faced by Malaysia regarding IE.

### **9.2.1 Policymakers**

#### **9.2.1.1 Imposing measures for noncompliance with disability laws and regulations**

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reaffirms that people with disabilities have the right to education (UN, 2006). In support of this right, the treaty requires governments to recognise that “discrimination against any person on the basis of disability is a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person” and that governments should “prohibit all discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee to persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds” (Article 5, para 2). Despite Malaysia’s being a signatory nation of the UN CRPD in 2008 and later ratifying it in 2010, the findings in chapter 5 revealed that Malaysia has expressed its reservations on two of the CRPD’s articles: Article 15 (freedom of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment) and Article 18 (liberty of movement and nationality). Nor did Malaysia sign the Optional Protocol, which permits individuals and groups to file complaints with the CRPD Committee if an Act or rule is violated. This omission may likely have resulted in the continuous absence of appropriate measures in educational policies to

eliminate discrimination based on disability by any person or organisation. As a result, individuals with disabilities continue to encounter discrimination in educational settings. To overcome this issue, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure compliance with laws and regulations to prevent discriminatory attitudes against people with disabilities.

A government-mandated fine or penalties for noncompliance with law that requires individuals and educational institutions to offer equal opportunity and access to people with disabilities may be an effective solution. According to Bilz and Nadler (2014), laws tend to be more effective when they are enforced through punitive threats. They maintain that penalties “prompt individuals to make judgments about risk and reward before deciding whether to engage in a prohibited activity” (p. 245). Such interventions not only aim to change individuals' behaviour, but also create a shift in attitudes and beliefs. Put simply, when the law imposes punishment based on the principles of social justice, people are more likely to regard the law as a code of morality. The threat of penalties may also serve as a window of opportunity for others to understand that no one should be discriminated against because of their disability. To this end, an emphasis could be placed on devising and enforcing strong compliance procedures for educational institutions to guarantee that persons with disabilities are effectively protected.

#### **9.2.1.2 Enhancing policymaking through collaboration and partnership**

There is a substantial body of literature that highlights the importance of collaboration and partnership in the ideation of policies (U. Sharma et al., 2017; Williams, 2013). However, this study reveals that there is somewhat of a lack of evidence on effective collaboration between the special education division and different education sectors within the MMoE as well as other government departments within the Malaysian IE policymaking context. As a result, many intended and unintended effects of the dynamic policy trajectories on IE remain invisible to non-IE policymakers and politicians, a situation which may hinder improvements in educational provision for children with disabilities. This study further shows that the cultural, political, economic, and historical realities that surround various key stakeholders have had great relevance in terms of how the policy intentions are played out in official documents. Similar to other studies (Koloto, 2021), this study thus argues that it is important for

policymakers from different sectors within the central government to be actively involved in the IE policy decisionmaking processes.

Hence, the study proposes that IE policymaking should take place within a framework of collaboration and partnership among various key stakeholders within the government, and that doing so might help services and various stakeholders better fulfil the educational needs of children with disabilities and their families. For instance, in the Malaysian context, such collaboration entails a deeper collaboration among various divisions and units under the MME, as well as various system stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Works, and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. The bringing together of various stakeholders needs to be done in the ways whereby an agreement on the desired goals can be obtained, and joint strategies for achieving those outcomes and joint monitoring and evaluation processes for implementing rules and legislation concerning IE can be formulated. As some of the participants' reflections in this study strongly suggested, the collaborative development of the IE policy will create a sense of "unity and collegiality" within the historically divided sector, support people with disabilities, and make these communities feel "welcomed", "valued", and "belonged".

### **9.2.1.3 Embracing capabilities approach as an alternative policy discourse**

The outcomes of this research raise concerns regarding the existence and intensity of medical and neoliberal discourses in Malaysian educational policy. It contends that both discourses cast a clinical and regulatory gaze on the IE sector from a medical and economic standpoint. From this discursive aspect, principles and values underpinning the IE policies appear to have resulted in the adoption of selective inclusion that restricts access and participation of children with disabilities in mainstream education system. Illich (2016, as cited in Springer, 2016) asserts that if one seeks to transform a culture, one has to "tell an alternative story" (p. 2). Therefore, in the quest for an "alternative story" to neoliberal-ableism and the medical model of disability, a capabilities approach has the potential to create different ways of thinking about IE for children with disabilities (Orton, 2011).

A capabilities approach has the capacity to encourage policymakers and educational leaders to

enhance the focus on a fully inclusive policy framework rather than emphasising segregated educational institutions and their provision. This approach embraces within it an understanding of human diversity and converts this into valued achievements and goals. To do so, Nussbaum (2011) suggests that it must begin with the identification of deep-seated causes impeding inclusive growth in education stemming from sociocultural, historical, political, and economic structures that engender capability failures through discrimination or exclusion. In this way, such an approach places the responsibility for overcoming structural impediments that prevent certain groups of individuals in a society from realising their full potential on the government and IE policymakers. This process redirects focus away from the debilitating conditions of disability towards attaining equality in terms of educational possibilities and choices (Trani et al., 2011). As such, a capabilities perspective not only values individual differences, but also enables people with disabilities to enjoy educational resources and opportunities (Gale & Molla, 2015).

## **9.2.2 Academics and researchers**

### **9.2.2.1 Un-silencing of local epistemologies on IE**

Grech and Soldatic (2015) note that Western epistemology's hegemonic position has resulted in the disavowal of other "knowledges" and endogenous epistemology of IE in many low-and middle-income countries. For instance, Kalyanpur (2014) argues that the inclusion agenda, as well as IE programmes supported by international organisations and Education for All aims, tend to depict children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries as politically weak and fragmented, overlooking the cultural embeddedness of the lives of people with disabilities. The key findings in chapter 8 illustrate the gaps that arise when global IE agendas from Western contexts are adopted with limited consideration given to the local Malaysian context. In the race to transfer policies, the conceptualisation of IE as envisioned in the West is often incompatible with the lived realities of people with disabilities in Malaysia, contributing to the exclusion of certain disability categories. Thus, to ensure that children with disabilities in Malaysia receive the educational support and services they need in a culturally responsive manner, key stakeholders should consider the use of local understandings of inclusion and disability in policymaking and academic terrains. This goal can be achieved by allotting local

stakeholders time and space to navigate structures that emerge from their own realities, rather than responding to top-down directives and imposing externally derived constructs.

In this regard, researchers play critical roles in potentially acting as the intermediary between international organisations, national governments, and people with disabilities to protect the interests of these parties. Alongside this role, researchers can utilise this vantage point to foster the emergence of indigenous knowledges in their research. Following Peters and Chimedza (2000), who capitalise on Freire's (1970) idea of conscientisation, researchers may act as the *catalysts* and engage in dialogues with marginalised communities to increase awareness of the educational inequities often exacerbated by postcolonial hegemony. Adding to this approach, Kalyanpur (2016) proposes the use of cultural reciprocity, whereby key policymakers, researchers, and the oppressed groups learn from one another via reciprocal dialogue that identifies the underlying values of the local community. This process of identifying the embedded values that underpin the lives of people with disabilities provides a frame of reference for researchers to identify alternative knowledges about disability in Malaysia. This process could be used for the purpose of influencing government policy, as it can dramatise existing discriminatory societal practices in educational policies or best practice recommendations. When local epistemologies of IE are un-silenced in issues concerning educational access and participation in a paradigm normally dominated by Western knowledges and practices, a greater sensitivity to these highly nuanced differences could likely facilitate a "goodness of fit" IE policy (Kalyanpur, 2016, p. 16).

#### **9.2.2.1 Policy engagement bodies in local universities**

Literature indicates that evidence-based policymaking can compel policymakers to rely on best available local research evidence to see how existing policies can be modified and adjusted to ensure that children with all types of disabilities will have access to an education-based programme. Despite the critical role local research plays in influencing IE policy, academia and government in Malaysia are found to operate in silos, as highlighted in chapter 8. Thus, a reasonable approach to tackle this issue could be to set up policy engagement bodies related to education inclusion within local universities. This model allows for the creation of a knowledge brokerage space by championing policy-relevant evidence to local

and national policymakers through its policy engagement network programme (Oliver & Cairney, 2019). Policymakers may not necessarily have a wide range of expertise in the subject of disability; thus, the opinions of researchers can potentially influence their decisions and, consequently, the policy itself. By engaging with policymakers, academics can help to “co-produce knowledge and policy” meaningfully, a strategy which could be more expedient in affecting positive policy change (Cairney & Oliver, 2019, p. 236).

There are several strategies within this knowledge exchange framework that could facilitate better engagement between academics and policymakers and also with each other. First, this model can offer support packages for academics who are willing to engage IE policy with research. In particular, this study suggests that policy engagement training programmes could be offered to provide academics with the relevant information about the more complex aspects of the task of influencing policy. Training programmes may include information about broader policymaking dynamics, ways to develop professional networks with a relevant policymaking audience working on IE, techniques to better communicate scientific evidence, and others. Second, it is necessary for academics to locate their work in the political environment just as they skilfully situate their work within the academic literature. To do so, academics need to respond to imagined government demands for research evidence and work at the boundary between research and policy to overcome educational barriers to inclusion. Therefore, this study recommends that policy engagement programmes include collaborative relationships that involve policymakers as coauthors of papers where possible. Therefore, it is vital these policy engagement bodies nurture and build relationships between researchers and policymakers to facilitate knowledge transfer and policy reforms in terms of IE advocacy projects. Such knowledge exchange and network platforms could potentially aid the transformative roles of local universities and their relationship with IE policymaking.

### ***9.2.3 Schools, teachers, and parents of children with disabilities***

In examining the evolution of IE policy in Malaysia, this study also raises an important question: how can the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MMoE) extend its support to schools and teachers in relation to approaches in the education of children with SEN? To answer this question, this subsection now turns to discussing several implications for these stakeholders.

### **9.2.3.1 Providing professional support for preservice and in-service mainstream teachers**

In order to include as many children as possible in mainstream school settings, it is essential for mainstream school teachers in Malaysia to have a sound knowledge of different types of disabilities and/or learning disabilities as well as the practical teaching strategies needed to teach students with these disabilities effectively in mainstream classrooms. However, as mentioned several times in this study, the problem with many current mainstream teacher training programmes is that they are primarily designed based on the learning trajectory of a typically developing child (Lee & Low, 2013). This situation appears to have created a scenario of “unconscious inclusion” whereby most mainstream teachers do not have prior conscious knowledge and experience in IE, resulting in the lack of acceptance and understanding of students with disabilities (Low et al., 2017). Therefore, the MMoE and schools need to have in place policies and practices to provide professional support for preservice and in-service mainstream teachers.

There have been some initial teacher education programmes on IE for preservice mainstream teachers organised by the MMoE (MMoE, 2018b). Yet, IE is taught as a stand-alone subject and often not linked to other specialised subjects such as English, Malay, mathematics, science, and many others. To be effective, training programmes that are based on the concept of differentiation should be included in other specialised subject courses on a regular basis. For example, systematic synthetic phonics, which is argued to be an effective instruction in helping children with dyslexia and others with reading difficulties, can be introduced in the field of teaching English and Malay (Chin, 2014; Chin et al., 2019; Yap & Chin, 2020). Similarly for in-service teachers, state and district education offices and schools can organise ongoing school-centred professional development and provide ongoing assistance after they attend training (Hornby, 2015). Although teachers may comprehend and agree with new IE concepts, they frequently require support in their day-to-day work.

The inadequate and challenging working environment that in-service teachers work in tends to inhibit inclusion and diversity and often results in their low motivation and poor performance (Low et al., 2017). Teachers must be recognised as catalysts for IE practices and their working environment must be prioritised if the government is serious about

implementing IE. Therefore, factors found to be essential in studies of mainstream schools that have successfully included children with SEN in other middle-income countries such as Vietnam could be considered and be put in place in Malaysian schools. The factors used to implement effective IE were: having high expectations and focusing on meeting the needs of all students at the school; using collaboration and differentiation to provide high-quality instruction for all students; ensuring efficient and flexible use of resources; utilising distributed leadership and shared decisionmaking; and adapting existing data systems to monitor student progress.

### **9.2.3.2 Close collaboration between mainstream and special schools and classes**

The key findings of this study drew attention to the rigid bureaucracies of the twin-track approach adopted by the current IE policy in Malaysia. It contends that the dual approaches to IE managed independently by special and mainstream school systems are disconnected. As both systems continue to work in isolation, this unintentionally renders many mainstream teachers ill-equipped to understand and deal with students with specific learning needs. As a result, there is a risk that the needs of students with SEN may be overlooked in mainstream classrooms. To ensure that mainstream teachers are supported in developing the knowledge and skills essential for working effectively with children with disabilities, the MMoE and schools can create collaborative platforms for mainstream school teachers to work effectively with special education teachers.

Within this collaborative approach, special schools can provide education for children who have more severe levels of SEN and whose needs cannot be met effectively in mainstream schools. Second and more importantly, special schools can provide guidance and support to assist mainstream school teachers to effectively educate children with more moderate levels of SEN (Ekins, 2012). Alongside the recommendation proposed in 9.2.3.1, special schools are well-placed to fulfil this second aspect of their role because they have specialist staff who have expertise in handling higher levels of SEN that mainstream schools typically do not have. The collaboration between special and mainstream schools is a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness of education for children with SEN in mainstream schools and is an important element towards achieving a more inclusive educational system in the future. Therefore,

emphasis is placed on special and mainstream education teachers' developing the interpersonal skills necessary for effective consultation and collaboration, including counselling and assertiveness skills, as well as the skills needed for mentoring, empowering, and facilitating the development of colleagues (Hornby, 2014).

### **9.3 Limitations of research and future research focus**

Despite efforts to conduct a rigorous examination of original scholarship, this study acknowledges some limitations that impact the researcher's ability to successfully generalise the findings. First, the Malaysian IE policy has been considered only in the policy ideation processes context across three different reform periods. While the ideation of the IE policy across time has provided a rich case to explore this phenomenon, more research can be done to understand how policies are enacted. The scope of this study in combination with border closures and travel bans amidst the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the researcher was not able to travel to Malaysia to interview and/or observe state education officers, district education officers, and school communities (i.e., school administrators, teachers, parents of children with and without disabilities) with regard to the implementation of IE which this study originally intended to examine. Similarly, this study only begins to reveal the perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes of national policy actors who used to work with or are still working for the government. Therefore, it has limited understanding of how these policies are formulated. It is equally necessary to consider the perspectives and influence of other groups such as international and multilateral organisations (i.e., UN, UNESCO, UNICEF) to gain a robust understanding of the transnational economic, political, and cultural elements that have been influential in the processes and outcomes of IE policymaking in Malaysia. For these reasons, the next stage of the research focus can consider the use of a vertical case study design (Vavrus & Barlett, 2009) to ethnographically examine the IE policy at macro and micro levels. Such research would offer a more complete picture of the enactment of this IE policy and its trajectory at different scalar levels.

Despite successfully gaining interview access to several government officials, the small participant sample ( $n=6$ ) limited the researcher's ability to gain a more comprehensive insight into the development of the IE policy under investigation. Therefore, future research would

benefit from interviewing other key policy actors and policy authors. Having a larger sample would help pick up more nuanced perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes on IE policymaking. Such insight would also have enabled the personal perspectives of other policy authors to be identified and the extent to which these perspectives have influenced the writing of these policies to be recognised. Additional perspectives would further strengthen current research findings and bring greater clarity to the IE policy formation processes. However, the limited number of participants has encouraged this researcher to seek alternative methodological ways of using interviews to triangulate research findings. Nevertheless, this research has demonstrated how interviews can be used in conjunction with policy document analysis to signal agreement, suggest changes, disagree about interpretations, supplement information, or clarify obscure points between the interviewee and the researcher's interpretation. In this regard, this limitation has provided an avenue for seeking different methodological possibilities for the way that interviews are used in social research.

In a similar vein, a further limitation of this study is the noninvolvement of people with disabilities. The absence of the voice of people with disabilities in this research has limited the researcher's ability to gain a greater understanding of the perspectives of individuals who experience disability (Castrodale, 2017; Kitchin, 2000). As concerns of disability-related education policy discourses are addressed from able-bodied perspectives, there is a potential risk that this study may unintentionally (re)produce marginalisation, exclusion, and discrimination. In this case, future research would benefit from applying the principles of participatory action research that prioritise collaboration with "insiders, people who are part of the phenomenon being studied" (Stahl & King, 2019, p. 26), as briefly discussed in 9.2.1.1. For example, the direct involvement of individuals with disabilities who are key policymakers and policy champions related to IE policymaking would help generate research that aims to bring to the forefront the perspectives of persons too often marginalised and silenced in society. In this way, such a research design can act as a potential vehicle to inform future IE policymaking decisions in Malaysia, resulting in societal change and the creation of accessible educational environments for all children.

Furthermore, employing online interviews posed some limitations regarding data collection in

this study. While every effort has been made to ensure smoother interview processes, online interviews have resulted in the lowering of vocal clarity and transcript word counts, possibly reducing interview data and rich nuances. The sole use of online interviewing also created a barrier to recruiting potential participants from the rural areas—participants that the original study had intended to include—due to a lack of technological access. Johnson et al. (2021) caution that, while remote online interviews may be essential or advantageous in certain circumstances and in the case of the present study because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they frequently come at a cost in terms of the scope and depth of information supplied by interviewees. It is for this reason, given the right opportunity and timing, future research based on the recommendations above might benefit from conducting in-person face-to-face interviews to generate data. In-person interviews may be seen as more useful because they provide the most natural conversational setting, a greater basis for establishing rapport, and a better opportunity to make notes of visual and emotional cues (Johnson et al., 2021). However, this research has also demonstrated how remote interviews via Zoom can be a convenient and cost-effective interviewing tool, and how they can be used during unprecedented times such as when the COVID-19 pandemic restricted in-person interviews. In this sense, this constraint has opened the door to new methodological options for the use of online interviews in social research.

Finally, a considered limitation in the use of critical realist discourse analysis in this study lies in the comprehensive nature of its analysis. While it allows for analysis of the relationships between text, social cognition, and social structures from various angles, as Sabido (2019) cautions, its multidisciplinary approach could potentially be devoid of the richer and deeper nuances that this approach was intended to identify and comprehend. For example, the contribution of critical realist discourse analysis to this research is significant in that it has enabled an exploration of the “problems of oppression, injustice and inequality” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 253) embedded within IE policy texts. However, it is recognised that the presentation of this analysis is limited within the confines of the thesis, posing possible dangers of dismissing more in-depth links with other discourses such as those from a postcolonial perspective. It is for this reason that the researcher’s future research might benefit from using a more specific rubric within the DHA such as the postcolonial critical discourse analysis to examine the nature of existing relations of power in the field of IE and critical policy analysis.

As this approach extends and integrates the theoretical and methodological approaches of the DHA, postcolonial critical discourse analysis provides an elaborate theoretical and methodological framework for analysing such knowledge situated within postcolonial settings. As this framework was developed for a specific context, adding this perspective would reduce the impression of reductionism that the analytic application of the discourse-historical approach may create. This postcolonial theoretical knowledge may be useful for the researcher or future research to further expose underlying structures and how these influence the trajectories of a global education policy like IE, nationally and internationally, in a postcolonial context. Therefore, postcolonial critical discourse analysis may be a valuable theoretical framework to explore the legitimisation of past events of educational inclusion constructed in more current policy discourses.

#### **9.4 Departing thoughts**

This thesis began its trajectory through an intellectual inquiry into the development of the Malaysian IE policy from 1996 to 2018. While IE is rooted in the concept of rights, equity, and quality in education, Malaysia appears to have its own conceptualisation of inclusion and perceived optimal ways to meet learner diversity through selective inclusion. This thesis has shown that the conceptualisation of IE in key policy documents within the Malaysian landscape has been shaped and reshaped by an amalgam of IE ideals driven by multiple discourses and intertextualities over time. These multiplicities attached to the notion of inclusion are further filtered through the complex political, cultural, and economic landscapes where the policies are embedded. Throughout this inquiry, the study aimed to invite able-bodied readers like me to rethink inclusion and exclusion with a sense of critical consciousness. This critical awareness allows us to re-theorise the inclusion discourse within the fluid and contemporary context of policy change. That is, while every discourse or theory is constructed and constricted within the confines of time, space, and power (Said, 1983), it is possible to reconstruct it through critical engagement to “unsettle power, trouble consensus, and challenge common sense” (Giroux, 2014, p. 52). The possible alternative ways of understanding inclusion are beneficial in assisting us in interrogating law and education policy through the workings of power in relation to the multiple forms of injustices (Nguyen, 2015), as well as reconstructing IE, not only as a mainstreaming politics, but also as an attempt to

uncover the problems of power and domination within the symbolic structure of educational spheres (Slee, 2001). By rethinking the politics of educational inclusion, it is intended that studies like this can make sense of how those patterns of power relations have reshaped educational injustice and justice. In this manner, this study, to a certain extent, gives voice to those who are subtly “dominated, displaced, or silenced by textuality of texts” (Said, 1983, p. 53). It is envisaged that the critical engagement with IE policy in this thesis has opened up a space for policy conversation, as demonstrated in this chapter, that may contribute to the improvement of prospective education policies for all children in Malaysia.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Ethical Approval from the Division of Education (University of Waikato)

*Te Kura Toi Tangata*  
**Division of Education**  
The University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton, New Zealand, 3240

DivEd Ethics Committee  
fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz  
07 8384500 ext. 7870  
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

14/8/2020

Dear Mellisa Chin Lee Lee

#### **Division of Education Ethics Application Approved FEDU050/20**

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled "Between the lines: A critical realist's critical discourse analysis of inclusive education policy in Malaysia" was approved by Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee on August 14th, 2020.

Please be aware that the Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mellisa'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ravi'.

Co-chair

Te Kura Toi Tangata Division of Education Ethics Committee

## Appendix B: Ethical Approval from the Economic Planning Unit, Malaysia



**KEMENTERIAN PENDIDIKAN MALAYSIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION MALAYSIA  
BAHAGIAN PERANCANGAN DAN PENYELIDIKAN DASAR PENDIDIKAN  
EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH DIVISION**

Aras 1-4, Blok E8  
Kompleks Kerajaan Parcel E  
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan  
62604 Putrajaya

Telefon : 03-8884 6500  
Faks : 03-8884 6439  
Laman Web : www.moe.gov.my

**Ruj. Kami** : KPM.600-3/2/3( 76)  
**Tarikh** : 11 November 2020

Ketua Pengarah  
Bahagian Ekonomi Makro  
Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ekonomi  
Kompleks Jabatan Perdana Menteri  
Blok B5 dan B6  
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan  
62502 PUTRAJAYA  
**(u.p.: En. Muhammad Jawad bin Tajuddin)**

Tuan,

**Permohonan Untuk Menjalankan Penyelidikan di Malaysia: "Between the lines:  
A critical realist's critical discourse analysis of inclusive education policy in Malaysia"**  
**Nama: Mellisa Chin Lee Lee**

Dengan hormatnya saya merujuk kepada perkara di atas.

- Adalah saya diarahkan memaklumkan bahawa permohonan tuan untuk menjalankan kajian seperti yang tersebut di atas **diluluskan**.
- Bersama-sama ini disertakan ulasan Bahagian ini ke atas cadangan penyelidikan yang dikemukakan.

Sekian dimaklumkan, terima kasih.

**" BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA "**

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

**(DR. VASUNDHARA VASUDEVAN)**  
Ketua Penolong Pengarah Kanan  
Sektor Penyelidikan Dan Penilaian Dasar  
Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Dasar Pendidikan  
b.p. Ketua Setiausaha  
Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia



CERTIFIED TO ISO 9001:2015  
CERT.NO.: QMS 1222

## **Appendix C1: Letter to the Economic Planning Unit (Malaysia) in English**

Economic Planning Unit,  
Setia Perdana 5 & 6, Setia Perdana Complex,  
Federal Government Administrative Centre,  
62502 Putrajaya Malaysia.

Sir/Madam,

### **RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY IN MALAYSIA**

My name is Mellisa Chin Lee Lee. I am currently undertaking a research project in fulfilment of a Doctor of Philosophy degree through the University of Waikato's School of Education. The title of my research is 'Between the lines: A critical realist discourse analysis of inclusive education policy in Malaysia'.

This research aims to examine the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia. In particular, I am interested in investigating the influences that have shaped the inclusive education policy and any tensions that might exist within the policy. I am requesting a letter of approval to invite policymakers from the Malaysian Ministry of Education that are currently engaged with inclusive education policy development in Malaysia to participate in my research study between 01/09/2020-31/01/2021. I am also requesting access to documents that are specific to policy and/or planning for inclusion from the participants. With their consent, I would like to have electronic copies of the documents to look through these documentations.

If they are interested in participating, their participation will involve a 30-minute online interview via Zoom/Skype. With their permission, the interview will be recorded. In that case, they may request that the recorder be switched off at any time during the interview. During the interview, participants may leave the interview at any time, or not answer a question if they wish. Participants will have the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure that the transcripts reflect their intended meaning. This will take approximately 15 minutes. In total, it will require a maximum of 45 minutes from each participant. With their consent, participants will also be asked to provide access to specific policy and/or planning documents.

Please note that because I am only interviewing a handful of people who are/have been involved with the development of Malaysia's inclusive education policy, there is a slight possibility that a few people may be able to guess their identities. However, I will be very careful to preserve their anonymity in the project and ensure that their identities will not be reported in the research or any presentations/publications. Pseudonyms for individual participants that avoid identification will be used in writing up the research. However, data will be shared in academic publications and presentations, and for this reason, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. All participants may withdraw from the study at any stage up until the final interview transcripts are verified. All participants have the right to withdraw or amend any information of the transcripts within 7 days on the receipt of their transcripts. A one-page

summary of the research findings will also be shared with all the participants at the conclusion of the research via email. The final thesis report will be accessible electronically at University of Waikato's Research Commons. Findings will also be used for scholarly publications and conference presentations.

Should you wish to find out further details about this study, please contact me via email at [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz). If you have any concerns that are unable to be resolved by speaking with me directly, you can contact my research supervisors, Dr. Donella Cobb and Dr. Nadine Ballam. Their contact details are as follows:

**Chief Supervisor**

Dr. Donella Cobb  
School of Education  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
[donella.cobb@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:donella.cobb@waikato.ac.nz)

**Supervisor**

Dr. Nadine Ballam  
School of Education (Tauranga)  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
[nballam@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nballam@waikato.ac.nz)

Thank you for your anticipated support.

Kindest regards,



.....

Mellisa Chin Lee Lee

Email: [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz)

*This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 14/08/2022. Approval number: FEDU050/20.*

## **Appendix C2: Letter to the Economic Planning Unit (Malaysia) in English**

Unit Perancangan Ekonomi,  
Jabatan Perdana Menteri,  
Setia Perdana 5 & 6, Kompleks Setia Perdana,  
Pusat Pentadbiran Kerajaan Persekutuan,  
62502 Putrajaya Malaysia.

Tuan/Puan,

### **RE: KEBENARAN MENJALANKAN PENYELIDIKAN KAJIAN DI MALAYSIA**

Nama saya ialah Mellisa Chin Lee Lee. Saya sedang menjalankan projek penyelidikan untuk memenuhi pendidikan Doktor Falsafah melalui Sekolah Pendidikan di Universiti Waikato. Tajuk penyelidikan saya adalah 'Isi Tersirat: Analisis wacana realis kritikal dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia'.

Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perkembangan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia. Khususnya, saya berminat untuk menyelidiki faktor yang telah membentuk dasar pendidikan inklusif dan sebarang ketegangan yang mungkin wujud dalam polisi tersebut. Saya meminta surat kelulusan untuk menjemput individu dari Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia yang sedang terlibat dengan pembangunan dasar pendidikan inklusif untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian penyelidikan saya antara 01/09/2020 - 31/01/2021. Saya juga ingin meminta akses kepada dokumen yang berkaitan dengan dasar pendidikan inklusif dan/atau dokumen perancangan pendidikan inklusif daripada individu tersebut. Dengan kebenaran mereka, saya ingin salinan document elektronik untuk melihat dokumentasi ini.

Sekiranya mereka berminat untuk mengambil bahagian, penyertaan mereka akan melibatkan satu temu bual atas talian selama 30 minit. Dengan izin mereka temu bual tersebut akan dirakam. Semasa temu bual, peserta boleh meninggalkan temu bual pada bila-bila masa, atau tidak menjawab soalan jika mereka mahu. Peserta berpeluang untuk menyemak transkrip temu bual mereka untuk memastikan transkrip tersebut mencerminkan maksudnya. Ini akan mengambil masa lebih kurang 10 minit. Secara keseluruhan, ia memerlukan maksimum 40 minit dari setiap peserta. Dengan persetujuan mereka, peserta juga akan diminta untuk memberikan akses kepada dokumen dasar dan/atau perancangan tertentu.

Sila ambil maklum bahawa kerana saya akan menemu bual segelintir orang yang telah terlibat dengan pembangunan dasar pendidikan inklusif Malaysia dan ada kemungkinan beberapa orang dapat meneka identiti mereka. Walau bagaimanapun, saya akan sangat berhati-hati untuk memastikan bahawa identiti mereka tidak akan dikenalpasti dalam projek ini dan memastikan bahawa identiti mereka tidak akan dilaporkan dalam penyelidikan atau sebarang pembentangan / penerbitan. Nama samaran untuk setiap peserta untuk mengelakkan pengenalan diri akan digunakan dalam menulis penyelidikan. Walau bagaimanapun, data akan dikongsi dalam penerbitan dan persembahan akademik dan, untuk alasan ini, kerahsiaan tidak dapat dijamin.

Penyertaan dalam kajian ini adalah secara sukarela. Semua peserta boleh menarik diri dari kajian ini pada mana-mana peringkat sehingga transkrip temu bual akhir disahkan. Semua peserta mempunyai hak untuk menarik balik atau meminda apa-apa maklumat daripada transkrip dalam masa 7 hari dari hari penerimaan transkrip mereka. Ringkasan satu halaman daripada dapatan penyelidikan juga akan dikongsi dengan semua peserta yang terlibat pada akhir penyelidikan melalui emel. Laporan tesis akhir akan dapat diakses secara elektronik di *Research Commons University Waikato*. Penemuan juga akan digunakan untuk penerbitan ilmiah dan persidangan.

Sekiranya anda ingin mengetahui maklumat lanjut tentang kajian ini, sila hubungi saya melalui emel [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz). Jika anda mempunyai apa-apa kebimbangan yang tidak dapat diselesaikan dengan berhubung dengan saya, anda boleh menghubungi penyelia kajian saya, Dr. Donella Cobb dan Dr. Nadine Ballam. Butiran kenalan mereka adalah seperti berikut:

**Ketua Penyelia**

Dr. Donella Cobb  
School of Education  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
[donella.cobb@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:donella.cobb@waikato.ac.nz)

**Penyelia**

Dr. Nadine Ballam  
School of Education (Tauranga)  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
[nballam@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nballam@waikato.ac.nz)

Terima kasih atas sokongan anda.

Yang benar,



.....

Mellisa Chin Lee Lee

Emel: [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz)

*Penyelidikan ini telah diluluskan oleh Jawatankuasa Etika Pendidikan Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Waikato pada 14/08/2020. Nombor kelulusan: FEDU050/20.*

## Appendix D1: Letter to Participant in English



University of Waikato  
Te Whare Wananga o Waikato  
Gate 1, Knighton Road  
Hamilton 3240  
Telephone: +64 7 8384466  
Fax: +64 7 8384504

Dear Sir or Madam:

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

**Project Title:** Between the lines: A critical realist discourse analysis of inclusive education policy in Malaysia

My name is Mellisa Chin Lee Lee. I am currently undertaking a research project in fulfilment of a Doctor of Philosophy degree through the University of Waikato's School of Education.

This research aims to examine the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia. In particular, I am interested in investigating the influences that have shaped the inclusive education policy and any tensions that might exist within the policy. I respectfully invite you to be part of my research. In no way this research is intended as an evaluation of your leadership, management or the progress being made in this area.

If you are interested in participating, your participation would involve:

- a 30-minute online interview via Zoom/Skype to discuss about your understanding, experiences, and reflections on the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia. The interview will be conducted at a date and time suitable to you. With your permission the interview will be recorded. In that case, you may request that the recorder be switched off at any time during the interview. During the interview you may leave the interview at any time, or not answer a question if you wish. A copy of the interview transcript will be sent to you after the interview to review and/or edit to ensure that it is an accurate record of your intended meaning. This will take approximately 15 minutes.
- access to documents that are specific to policy and/or planning for inclusion. With your consent, I would like to have electronic copies of the documents to look through these documentations.

Please note that because I am only interviewing a handful of people who are/have been involved with the development of Malaysia's inclusive education policy, there is a slight possibility that a few people may be able to guess your identity. However, I will be very careful to preserve your anonymity in the project and ensure that your identity will not be reported in the research or any presentations/publications. Pseudonyms for individual participants that avoids identification will be used in writing up the research. However, data will be shared in academic publications and presentations, and for this reason, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any stage up until the final interview transcript is verified and withdraw or amend any information of the transcript within 7 days on the receipt of your transcript. A one-page summary of the research findings will also be shared with all the participants at the conclusion of the research via email. The final thesis report will be

accessible electronically at University of Waikato's Research Commons. Findings will also be used for scholarly publications and conference presentations.

Should you wish to find out further details about this study, please contact me via email at [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz). If you have any concerns that are unable to be resolved by speaking with me directly, you can contact my research supervisors, Dr. Donella Cobb and Dr. Nadine Ballam. Their contact details are as follows:

**Chief Supervisor**

Dr. Donella Cobb  
School of Education  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
[donella.cobb@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:donella.cobb@waikato.ac.nz)

**Supervisor**

Dr. Nadine Ballam  
School of Education (Tauranga Campus)  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
[nballam@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nballam@waikato.ac.nz)

If you are willing to be part of this research, please complete the attached consent form and email it to me at [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz) before or latest by 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

Thank you for your anticipated support.

Kindest regards,



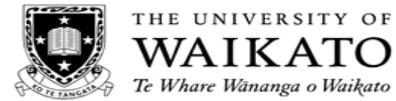
.....

Mellisa Chin Lee Lee

Email: [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz)

*This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 14/08/2022. Approval number: FEDU050/20.*

## Appendix D2: Letter to Participant in Bahasa Malaysia



University of Waikato  
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato  
Gate 1, Knighton Road  
Hamilton 3240  
Telephone: +64 7 8384466  
Fax: +64 7 8384504

Tuan/Puan:

### LEMBARAN MAKLUMAT PESERTA

**Tajuk projek:** Isi Tersirat: Analisis wacana realis kritikal dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia

Nama saya ialah Mellisa Chin Lee Lee. Saya sedang menjalankan projek penyelidikan untuk memenuhi pendidikan Doktor Falsafah melalui Sekolah Pendidikan di Universiti Waikato.

Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perkembangan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia. Khususnya, saya berminat untuk menyelidiki faktor yang telah membentuk dasar pendidikan inklusif dan sebarang ketegangan yang mungkin wujud dalam polisi tersebut. Dengan hormatnya saya ingin menjemput anda untuk menjadi sebahagian daripada penyelidikan saya. Penyelidikan ini tidak sama sekali dimaksudkan sebagai penilaian kepemimpinan, pengurusan anda atau kemajuan yang dicapai dalam bidang ini.

Sekiranya anda berminat untuk menyertai, penyertaan anda akan melibatkan:

- 30 minit temu bual bersemuka atas talian melalui Zoom/Skype untuk membincangkan tentang pemahaman, pengalaman dan refleksi anda tentang pembangunan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia. Temu bual akan dijalankan pada tarikh dan masa yang sesuai untuk anda. Dengan izin mereka temu bual tersebut akan dirakam. Anda boleh meminta perakam dihentikan pada bila-bila masa semasa temu bual. Semasa temu bual, anda boleh meninggalkan temu bual pada bila-bila masa, atau tidak menjawab soalan jika anda mahu. Salinan transkrip temu bual itu akan dihantar kepada anda selepas temu bual untuk semakan dan/atau dipinda untuk memastikan bahawa ia adalah satu rekod yang tepat. Ini akan mengambil masa lebih kurang 10 minit.
- akses kepada dokumen yang berkaitan dengan dasar pendidikan inklusif dan/atau dokumen perancangan pendidikan inklusif. Dengan kebenaran, saya ingin salinan document elektronik untuk melihat dokumentasi ini.

Sila ambil maklum bahawa kerana saya akan menemu bual segelintir orang yang telah terlibat dengan pembangunan dasar pendidikan inklusif Malaysia dan ada kemungkinan beberapa orang dapat meneka identiti anda. Walau bagaimanapun, saya akan berhati-hati untuk memastikan bahawa identiti anda tidak akan dikenalpasti dalam projek ini dan memastikan bahawa identiti anda tidak akan dilaporkan dalam penyelidikan atau sebarang pembentangan / penerbitan. Nama samaran untuk setiap peserta untuk mengelakkan pengenalan diri akan digunakan dalam menulis penyelidikan. Walau bagaimanapun, data akan dikongsi dalam penerbitan dan persembahan akademik dan, untuk alasan ini, kerahsiaan tidak dapat dijamin.

Penyertaan dalam kajian ini adalah secara sukarela. Anda boleh menarik diri daripada kajian ini pada

mana-mana peringkat sehingga transkrip temu bual terakhir disahkan dan menarik balik atau meminda mana-mana maklumat transkrip dalam tempoh 7 hari dari hari penerimaan transkrip anda. Ringkasan satu halaman daripada dapatan penyelidikan yang akan dikongsi pada akhir penyelidikan melalui emel. Laporan tesis akhir akan dapat diakses secara elektronik di *Research Commons University Waikato*. Penemuan juga akan digunakan untuk penerbitan ilmiah dan persidangan.

Sekiranya anda ingin mengetahui maklumat lanjut tentang kajian ini, sila hubungi saya melalui emel [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz). Jika anda mempunyai apa-apa kebimbangan yang tidak dapat diselesaikan dengan berhubung dengan saya, anda boleh menghubungi penyelia kajian saya, Dr. Donella Cobb dan Dr. Nadine Ballam. Butiran kenalan mereka adalah seperti berikut:

**Ketua Penyelia**

Dr. Donella Cobb  
School of Education  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
[donella.cobb@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:donella.cobb@waikato.ac.nz)

**Penyelia**

Dr. Nadine Ballam  
School of Education (Tauranga)  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
[nballam@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:nballam@waikato.ac.nz)

Jika anda sudi untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini, sila lengkapkan borang persetujuan yang dilampirkan dan emel kepada saya di [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz) sebelum atau selewat-lewatnya pada 10 September 2020.

Terima kasih atas sokongan anda.

Yang benar,



.....  
Mellisa Chin Lee Lee

Emel: [mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mc287@students.waikato.ac.nz)

*Penyelidikan ini telah diluluskan oleh Jawatankuasa Etika Pendidikan Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Waikato pada 14/08/2020. Nombor kelulusan: FEDU050/20.*

## Appendix E1: Participant's Consent Form in English



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### CONSENT FORM

**Project Title:** Between the lines: A critical realist discourse analysis of inclusive education policy in Malaysia

**Researcher:** Mellisa Chin Lee Lee

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and I understand the nature of this study. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered to my satisfaction. (Kindly tick the box to indicate that you have read and agreed to the terms described in this consent form.)

- I agree to participate in this study.
- I agree to participate in a 30-minute interview via Zoom/Skype with the research at a date and time suitable to me.
- I agree to provide access to documents used for planning for inclusive education policy.
- I agree to have the research interview recorded. I understand that I can request that the recorder be switched off at any time throughout the interview.
- I understand that participation in the study is voluntary. During the interview, I can refuse to answer any questions, or leave the interview at any time. I can withdraw from the study at any stage up until the final interview transcript is verified.
- I understand that I can withdraw or amend any information of the transcript within 7 days on the receipt of the transcript.
- I am aware that, due to the public nature of my position, I may be identified.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 14/08/2022. Approval number: FEDU050/20.*

## Appendix E2: Participant's Consent Form in Bahasa Malaysia



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### BORANG KEBENARAN

**Tajuk projek:** Isi Tersirat: Analisis wacana realis kritikal dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia  
**Penyelidik:** Mellisa Chin Lee Lee

Saya telah membaca Lembaran Maklumat Peserta dan saya memahami sifat kajian ini. Saya telah diberi peluang untuk mengajukan soalan dan soalan telah dijawab dengan memuaskan. (Sila tandakan kotak dibawah untuk menunjukkan bahawa anda telah membaca dan bersetuju dengan terma yang dinyatakan dalam borang persetujuan ini.)

- Saya bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini.
- Saya bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian dalam 30 minit temu bual melalui Zoom/Skype pada tarikh dan masa yang sesuai dengan saya.
- Saya bersetuju untuk memberikan akses kepada dokumen yang digunakan untuk merancang dasar pendidikan inklusif.
- Saya bersetuju untuk mempunyai temu bual kajian dirakamkan. Saya faham bahawa saya boleh memohon untuk perakam dihentikan pada bila-bila masa sepanjang temu bual.
- Saya faham bahawa penyertaan dalam kajian ini adalah secara sukarela. Semasa temu bual, saya boleh menolak untuk menjawab sebarang pertanyaan, atau meninggalkan temu bual pada bila-bila masa. Saya boleh menarik diri daripada kajian di mana-mana peringkat sehingga transkrip temu bual terakhir disahkan.
- Saya boleh menarik balik atau meminda mana-mana maklumat transkrip dalam tempoh 7 hari dari hari penerimaan transkrip.
- Saya menyedari bahawa, kerana sifat umum peranan saya, saya mungkin dikenali.

---

Nama Peserta

Tarikh

Tanda Tangan

*Penyelidikan ini telah diluluskan oleh Jawatankuasa Etika Pendidikan Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Waikato pada 14/08/2020. Nombor kelulusan: FEDU050/20.*

## **Appendix F1: Interview Guide for Individual Interviews with Participants in English**

### **Opening questions:**

- Can you tell me something about yourself and your education/professional background?
- Can you tell me about your role in the current/former organisation and your experiences that relate to the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia?

### **Key interview questions:**

#### ***(i) The construction of inclusive education***

- In your opinion, what does inclusive education mean to you?
- What is the purpose and aims of the inclusive education policy in Malaysia that you are/were engaged in?
- In your opinion, to what extent have the policies significantly changed the participation and inclusion of students with special educational needs in Malaysia during your time? (in terms of:)
  - a. intervention, placement, and assessment
  - b. supports and resource allocation
  - c. accessibility issues
  - d. curriculum
  - e. schools' responsiveness (school administrators and teachers)
  - f. public acceptance

#### ***(ii) Factors that might have influenced policymaking***

- Can you walk me through the ideation/process of consultation behind the development of inclusive education policy that you are/were engaged in (e.g., the Zero Reject policy)?
- To what extent are/were national and international organisations included in the process of policy formulation?
- In what ways have international inclusive agendas affected inclusive education policymaking in Malaysia?
- In what ways have local ideological, political, economic or any other factors influenced the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia?

#### ***(iii) Tensions***

- In what ways if any, are international inclusive agendas and local inclusive education policies contradictory?
- From your experience, what are/were the challenges/dilemmas/tensions when it comes to inclusive education policymaking at the national level? How did you deal with it?

- In your opinion, what do you see as the major ideological and institutional impediments to the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia?

**Closing questions/comments:**

- In your opinion, what is your overall evaluation concerning the current inclusive education policy in Malaysia? Where we are and what is the way forward for inclusive education policy in Malaysia?
- What reports or documents would you recommend for getting a clearer picture of the development of inclusive education policy in Malaysia?
- Is there anything else that you would like to comment on?

## Appendix F2: Interview Guide for Individual Interviews with Participants in English

### Soalan pembukaan:

- Bolehkah anda memberitahu saya tentang diri anda dan latar belakang pendidikan / profesional anda?
- Tolong beritahu saya tentang peranan anda dalam bekas/organisasi semasa dan pengalaman anda yang berkaitan dengan pembangunan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia.

### Soalan temu bual utama:

#### *(i) Pembinaan pendidikan inklusif*

- Pada pendapat anda, bagaimana anda mendefinisikan pendidikan inklusif?
- Apakah tujuan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia yang telah digubal oleh anda?
- Pada pendapat anda, sejauh manakah dasar pendidikan inklusif telah mengubah penyertaan dan penglibatan anak-anak dengan berkeperluan khas di Malaysia pada masa anda? (dari segi:)
  - a. Intervensi, penempatan dan penilaian
  - b. sokongan dan peruntukan sumber
  - c. isu kebolehcapaian
  - d. kurikulum
  - e. respon sekolah (pentadbir dan guru sekolah)
  - f. penerimaan masyarakat

#### *(ii) Faktor-faktor yang mungkin mempengaruhi pembuatan dasar*

- Bolehkah anda ceritakan tentang proses konsultasi/idea di sebalik pengembangan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia (contoh: Zero Reject policy)?
- Sejauh manakah organisasi nasional dan antarabangsa menyertai dalam proses penggubalan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia?
- Bagaimanakah agenda inklusif antarabangsa mempengaruhi penggubalan dasar pendidikan inklusif negara di Malaysia?
- Bagaimanakah faktor-faktor ideologi, politik, ekonomi tempatan mempengaruhi perkembangan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia?

#### *(iii) Ketegangan*

- Pada pendapat anda, bagaimanakah agenda inklusif antarabangsa dan dasar pendidikan inklusif tempatan bertentangan?
- Dari pengalaman anda, apakah cabaran/dilema/ketegangan dalam hal penggubalan dasar pendidikan inklusif di peringkat negara? Bagaimanakah anda menanganinya?
- Pada pendapat anda, apakah yang anda lihat sebagai halangan ideologi dan institusi utama terhadap pengembangan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia?

**Soalan/komen penutup:**

- Pada pendapat anda, apakah penilaian keseluruhan anda mengenai dasar pendidikan inklusif semasa di Malaysia? Dimanakah kita berada dan apakah hala tujuan untuk dasar pendidikan inklusif di masa hadapan di Malaysia?
- Laporan atau dokumen apa yang akan anda sarankan untuk mendapatkan gambaran yang lebih jelas mengenai perkembangan dasar pendidikan inklusif di Malaysia?
- Adakah anda mempunyai perkara lain yang ingin anda komen?