



Developing Synergy Between Special Education Teachers and Therapists at Private Rehabilitation Centre: A Study on Collaborative Training

Siti Shafiqah Rafiquddin¹, Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak^{2*}, Madhya Zhagan A/L Ganesan³
Department of Educational Management, Planning and Policy, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur
17004094@siswa.um.edu.my, zabidi@um.edu.my*, madhya@um.edu.my

Abstract: Training plays a crucial role in maintaining continuous professionalism. However, there is a notable gap where the training provided does not fully address the needs of special education needs teachers in early intervention program at private rehabilitation centre . To address this, a collaborative training approach, involving instructional mentoring, where teachers and therapists work together, sharing best practices and ensuring professional standards are upheld. This synergy between teachers and therapists enhances the learning process, enabling educators to adopt effective classroom strategies. This paper will explore the collaborative training approach, focusing on its impact on special education teachers, therapists, students, and the overall program. The study underscores the benefits of this collaboration, particularly in ensuring that all staff members adopt inclusive and effective teaching techniques that cater to the diverse needs of students, driven by the shared expertise of teachers and therapists.

Keyword: Collaborative Training, Special Education Teacher, Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, Behavioural Therapist, Continuous Professional Development

Introduction

In the field of special education, students with diverse special needs require tailored interventions that address their unique academic, social, emotional, and developmental challenges (Abdullah, 2020) . For these interventions to be effective, collaboration between teachers and therapists is essential (Ndou & Omidire, 2022) . Teachers, with their expertise in curriculum delivery and classroom management, and therapists, with specialized knowledge in areas such as occupational, speech, or cognitive behavioural therapy, must work together to provide comprehensive multidisciplinary support that meets the multifaceted needs of students (Ghosh et al., 2020)

Synergy between teachers and therapists ensures that educational and therapeutic strategies are aligned, preventing fragmented approaches that may hinder a student's progress (Ghosh et al., 2020). For example, when a teacher is aware of a therapist's specific goals for a student, whether related to speech development, sensory integration, or motor skills, they can incorporate these goals into daily lessons, creating a more holistic and cohesive intervention. Similarly, therapists who understand the educational objectives can tailor their therapeutic interventions to complement the academic requirements.

Problem Statement

Most training for teachers in the private special need's rehabilitation centre follows a conventional approach, involving attendance at workshops or seminars facilitated by experienced therapists, senior teachers, or facilitators in specific fields (Law et al., 2019).



The objective of this training is to assist teachers in better planning interventions. However, due to a lack of confidence among teachers in applying the knowledge gained from the training, there has been no significant change in intervention practices for students (Sidek & Abd.Wahab, 2023)

Furthermore, teachers' understanding of the training they receive varies. Although supervisor offers training to these teachers to enhance their comprehension and teach them the latest intervention techniques to create high-quality educators, differences in understanding persist. Teachers often lack of confidence in implementing intervention sessions effectively without the guidance of a supervisor (Jaafar et al., 2021; Law et al., 2019). The limited practice in planning and applying learned knowledge may contribute to this issue. When teachers attend courses or workshops, the knowledge they acquire is not consistently implemented or considered. Moreover, those administering the courses, training, or programs offer little support to teachers in the classroom. Additionally, the context and culture do not adequately emphasize the implementation of new practices and ideas learned from the attended courses. Implementing these practices is a critical element that needs careful consideration (Beamish et al., 2021). Self-confidence also plays a significant role in the transfer of knowledge (Alatifi et al., 2023)

Therefore, based on the above discussion, this gap and issues could be addressed by collaborate between interdisciplinary of therapist and teacher to fill the knowledge gaps. A study by (Kasimun & Abdul Majid, 2020) suggests that training aligned with the needs of teachers is essential to support high-quality teaching practices more specifically. This article explores the critical role of collaborative training programs in fostering this essential synergy. By focusing on how these programs can bridge the gap between education and therapy, the study highlights the potential to enhance student outcomes, promote professional development, and create a more integrated approach to special education interventions.

Concept of Collaborative Training

Training is the systematic process of engaging in Teaching and Learning (T&L) activities designed to improve knowledge and develop new skills (Borosh, Newson, Mason, Richards, & Collins Crosley, 2023; Joyce & Showers, 2002). For training to be truly effective, it must not only provide theoretical insights into the skills being taught but also incorporate experiential learning approaches. These approaches include coaching, modelling, active skill demonstrations, and the opportunity for practice in both real-world and simulated environments. In addition to hands-on learning, robust performance evaluations play a key role in ensuring that the training is both practical and effective (Borosh et al., 2023; Dunst et al., 2010; Parsons et al., 2012). This combination of theoretical foundation and experiential learning is especially crucial for Special Education teachers, who are tasked with addressing the unique educational requirements of students with special needs.

Special Education teachers are central to the delivery of high-fidelity, evidence-based educational practices. Comprehensive and tailored training programs are vital for equipping these educators with the skills they need to successfully implement such practices. While Special Education teachers predominantly operate in school environments, their influence extends beyond these settings, with many working in private early intervention centres. In such centres, Special Education teachers collaborate closely with



other professionals, including therapists, to provide multidisciplinary support that caters to the diverse needs of children with disabilities (Ndou & Omidire, 2022)

In recent years, the importance of collaboration between teachers and therapists in the context of special education has gained increasing recognition. Collaborative training programs, which bring together teachers and therapists, offer a unique opportunity to develop a synergy that enhances the effectiveness of interventions and treatment for students with special education needs. By integrating the expertise of both professions, these programs can provide holistic training that focuses not only on academic strategies but also on therapeutic approaches. This collaborative effort helps ensure that students with special needs receive well-rounded support tailored to their individual learning and developmental needs. Collaborative training programs, therefore, are instrumental in breaking down between educational and therapeutic practices, allowing for a more integrated approach to student support. This integration is particularly critical in special education, where the needs of students often span multiple domains, requiring input from various experts to create a comprehensive intervention plan.

Collaboration with various therapists, such as occupational therapists, speech therapists, and physiotherapists, is essential in the field of special education. One effective approach to fostering this collaboration is the implementation of Continuing Medical Education (CME). CME is any educational activity designed to maintain, enhance, or develop the knowledge, skills, and professional performance of healthcare providers, enabling them to deliver the highest quality services to their clients. This concept, widely used in the health sciences, ensures that professionals stay updated with the latest knowledge and innovations, while also promoting the efficient use of healthcare resources (Spence & Santos, 2019). CME has been proven to improve knowledge, skills, attitudes, and clinical outcomes in the medical field, making it an invaluable tool for continuous learning and professional development.

While traditionally associated with healthcare professionals, the principles of CME can be adapted to the special education field, where collaboration between teachers and therapists is vital. CME often involves professionals, either from the same discipline or from multi-professional teams, attending presentations or sessions led by peers on the latest advancements, interventions, and treatment strategies. The content of CME programs typically includes new developments in medical and therapeutic interventions, professional theories, the management of children with special needs, and legal or policy updates relevant to the field. This format could be highly beneficial in special education settings, where staying abreast of the latest intervention methods and therapeutic strategies is crucial for SEN teachers and therapists alike (Gevarter et al., 2022)

However, implementing CME sessions in educational environments comes with certain challenges. For instance, these sessions often require teachers to take time away from their regular teaching duties, which may disrupt the educational process. When teachers are pulled away from their classrooms for training, their instructional time is reduced, potentially affecting the continuity of student learning. Despite this drawback, CME sessions can still be integrated into the school day in a way that minimizes disruption. For example, training sessions can be scheduled during non-teaching hours or integrated into professional development days.

Moreover, a more flexible approach to CME can involve not only teachers but also parents and caregivers. Organizing CME sessions during working hours, where teachers, parents, and therapists participate together, fosters a collaborative environment that strengthens the understanding of intervention strategies across all parties involved in a child's development. These knowledge-sharing sessions led by senior teachers or



therapists can be instrumental in improving the continuity and effectiveness of intervention sessions, as they allow both teachers and parents to better understand their respective roles in managing and supporting the child's progress (Spence & Santos, 2019).

When teachers and therapists work together to align educational goals with therapeutic interventions, they create a more cohesive approach to addressing the complex needs of students with disabilities (Ndou & Omidire, 2022). This collaborative approaches not only enriches the learning environment but also ensures that all stakeholders are working toward common Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG), objectives, resulting in improved educational and therapeutic outcomes for students. In conclusion, adapting CME to the special education context can be a powerful tool for fostering collaboration between teachers, therapists, and parents. By integrating CME into regular working hours and involving multiple stakeholders, special education professionals can stay informed about the latest intervention methods while enhancing their ability to deliver high-quality, individualized support to students with special needs. This approach underscores the importance of continuous learning and collaboration in creating an effective support system for children with disabilities.

Beside CME as one of the element in collaborative training, another element according to (Sundqvist et al., 2023), is co-teaching. Co-teaching in the classroom is an approach where teachers and therapists share responsibilities for planning, instruction, and assessment, resulting in positive impacts on student achievement. Furthermore, a study by (Roy, 2023) suggests that interventions planned and implemented collaboratively are more effective in addressing the diverse needs of students.

Co-teaching in the classroom is an inclusive instructional approach where teachers and therapists collaborate to share the responsibilities of planning, delivering instruction, and assessing students. This method leverages the expertise of both educators and therapists to create a learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of all students, particularly those with special educational teacher. By integrating multiple perspectives and skill sets, co-teaching fosters a more holistic approach to education, ultimately resulting in improved student achievement and better educational outcomes (Albahusain, 2022)

The co-teaching involves both professionals taking an active role in the classroom, whether through co-planning lessons, jointly delivering instruction, or collaboratively assessing student progress. Teachers typically provide the instructional strategies that focus on curriculum standards, while therapists, such as speech, occupational, or physical therapists, bring specialized knowledge in addressing the cognitive, physical, or emotional needs of students. This combination ensures that interventions are tailored to meet each student's unique challenges, providing both academic and therapeutic support in a cohesive manner (Albahusain, 2022)

The benefits of co-teaching are numerous. First and foremost, it allows for a more individualized approach to learning. With two professionals in the classroom, there is more opportunity to differentiate instruction and provide targeted support to students who may struggle with traditional teaching methods. A teacher may focus on delivering content while a therapist works one-on-one with a student to reinforce specific skills, such as fine motor control or communication techniques. This division of labour not only ensures that students' academic needs are met but also addresses their therapeutic goals in real-time, reducing the need for pull-out services that may interrupt learning (Razalli et al., 2020)

A study by Roy (2023) emphasizes the effectiveness of interventions that are planned and implemented collaboratively, noting that co-teaching has a positive impact



on student outcomes, especially for those with special needs. According to the study, when teachers and therapists work together to design and execute interventions, they are better able to address the diverse range of needs in the classroom. This collaborative approach enhances the quality of instruction, as it encourages the sharing of ideas and best practices between professionals from different fields. Furthermore, students benefit from a more seamless learning experience, as they receive consistent support from both their teachers and therapists.

Another advantage of co-teaching is its potential to embedded and reduce burnout among educators and therapists. By sharing the workload, both professionals can avoid the overwhelming demands that often accompany working with students with complex needs. Co-teaching allows for more manageable workloads, as teachers and therapists can divide responsibilities based on their expertise. This collaboration also creates opportunities for professional growth, as teachers and therapists learn from one another and gain new skills and insights from their co-teaching experiences (Borosh et al., 2023)

However, co-teaching is not without its challenges. Effective collaboration requires open communication, mutual respect, and a clear understanding of each professional's role in the classroom. Teachers and therapists must invest time in co-planning and coordinating their efforts, which can be difficult in already demanding schedules. Additionally, schools must provide adequate professional development and support to help educators and therapists build strong co-teaching partnerships (Sundqvist et al., 2023)

Despite these challenges, the benefits of co-teaching make it a promising approach for supporting students with special needs. By combining the expertise of teachers and therapists, co-teaching can create a more inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment. As more schools adopt this model, it is crucial to continue exploring strategies for improving collaboration and ensuring that both educators and students reap the full benefits of this approach. Ultimately, co-teaching holds the potential to transform special education by fostering a team-based approach that enhances the educational experiences and outcomes of all students, regardless of their needs (Sundqvist et al., 2023)

The next critical element in collaborative training is the designing IEP based on case study. From the case based the teacher and therapist will first design and Individual Education Plan (IEP) student. IEPs serve as tailored educational roadmaps designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. In collaborative training, reflection on the case based through IEP process plays a vital role in ensuring that both teachers and therapists are aligned in their approach to supporting students. This reflection allows both professionals to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, identify areas for improvement, and adjust strategies to better meet the student's needs (Blasko et al., 2024)

Designing IEPs together encourages a deeper understanding of each student's strengths, challenges, and progress. Through regular collaboration, teachers and therapists can share their observations and insights, ensuring that all aspects of the student's development academic, physical, cognitive, and social are being addressed comprehensively. For instance, a teacher may provide feedback on a student's progress in meeting academic goals, while a therapist might offer insights into how the student is responding to therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing communication or motor skills. This reflective practice ensures that the IEP remains a dynamic, living document, adapted to the student's evolving needs (Kozikoğlu & Albayrak, 2022)

Additionally, designing IEPs during collaborative training fosters accountability. Both teachers and therapists are responsible for implementing the strategies outlined in the IEP, and by regularly revisiting the plan, they can ensure that each professional is fulfilling their role. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate successes, adjust



interventions, and introduce new goals or strategies as necessary. In essence, reflective IEP practices promote a student-centered approach that values the insights of both educators and therapists. This collaboration not only enhances the effectiveness of interventions but also ensures that students with special needs receive the personalized support they require to succeed in both academic and developmental areas (Ibrahim & Toran, 2023)

Teachers gain insights into the therapeutic techniques that support cognitive and physical development, while therapists become more aware of the educational strategies used to support academic achievement. Through this exchange of knowledge, both professions are better equipped to create an integrated and supportive environment for students. Thus, collaborative training programs are key to developing a comprehensive, student-centered approach to special education, which can significantly improve outcomes for children with diverse learning needs.

And last element in this collaborative training is reflection. The study by Tan Ai Lee et al. (2020), an instructional mentor assigned to oversee teachers under guidance, highlights that the mentoring process provides ample opportunities for both the mentor and the teacher to engage in deep reflection on the entire process. Numerous aspects reflected upon contribute to the metacognitive process of both parties, ultimately enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom.

By exploring these elements in collaborative training, schools and early intervention centres can ensure that SEN teachers and therapists work in unison to optimize the educational and developmental progress of students with special needs. This collaborative framework highlights the importance of integrating interdisciplinary skills in training programs to build a more cohesive and effective support system for special education.

Proposed Model in Collaborative Training

Team Teaching Model (J.T Shaplin,1964)

The proposed model in this study is team teaching model. This model is an instructional approach where two or more educators collaborate to deliver lessons and enhance student learning. The process begins with collaborative planning, where teachers jointly design lesson plans, set educational goals, and strategize how to utilize their individual strengths. This stage is critical for establishing clear roles and responsibilities, ensuring that each educator knows their specific contributions to the lesson.

During instruction, both teachers engage in co-teaching, actively sharing the delivery of content and facilitating student activities. This might involve alternating roles or simultaneously teaching different aspects of a lesson. Classroom management is also a shared responsibility, requiring both educators to coordinate on rules, routines, and behaviour management to maintain a positive learning environment.

Assessment and feedback are integral to the team-teaching model. Teachers work together to evaluate student performance through various assessments and use the data to refine their instructional strategies. After each lesson or unit, they reflect on their collaborative efforts, discussing what was successful and identifying areas for improvement. This continuous reflection helps in adjusting teaching practices and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the team-teaching approach.

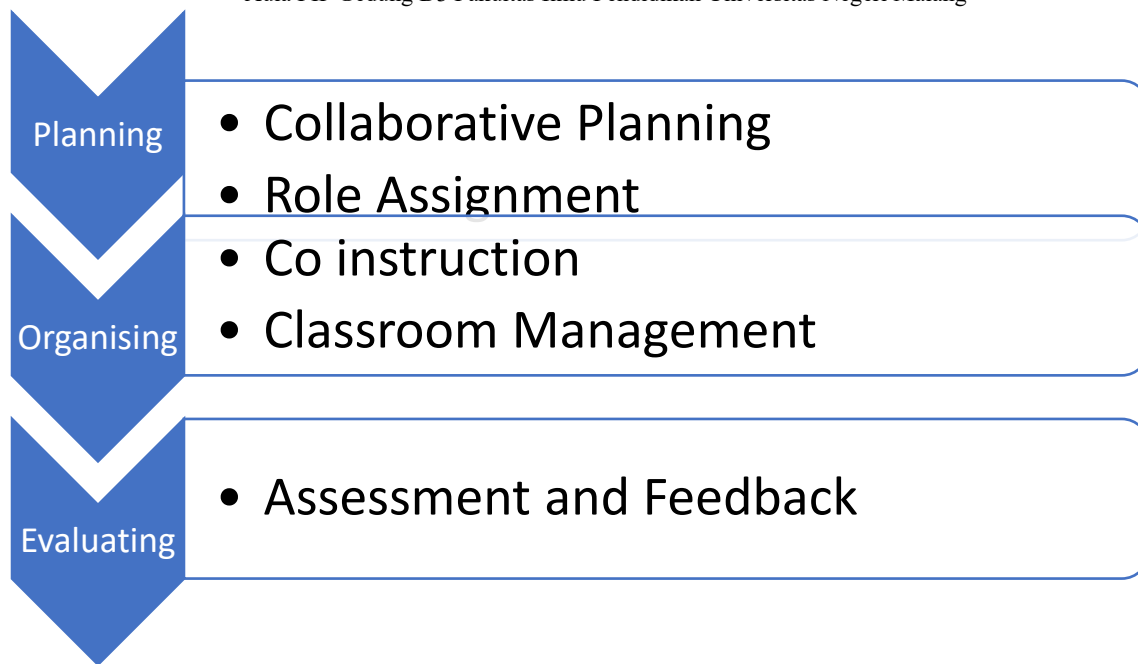


Figure 1.1 Team Teaching Model

Implementation of Collaborative Training

In this study, we examine various elements of collaborative training that can enhance the synergy between teachers and therapists in special education. One of the key approaches is implementation of Continuing Medical Education (CME). Collaboration between teachers and various therapists, such as occupational, speech, and physiotherapists, is critical in special education. One key approach to fostering this collaboration is the implementation of Continuing Medical Education (CME). Traditionally used in the health sciences, CME involves educational activities designed to enhance knowledge, skills, and professional performance, ensuring that healthcare providers deliver the highest quality services. CME has proven effective in improving clinical outcomes, making it a valuable tool for continuous learning and professional development (Spence & Santos, 2019).

After that, teachers and therapists collaborate to analyse and plan intervention strategies based on real student case studies in case-based study. This method facilitates a shared understanding of student needs and fosters collaborative problem-solving. As teachers and therapists engage in joint case analysis, their professional relationship strengthens, allowing for more cohesive and effective interventions. In this process, all parties involved in a student's education coordinate strategies to achieve the best outcomes. The therapist and teacher will sit down together and designing and IEP process based from case-based study and this IEP is central to special education, and effective collaboration between teachers and therapists ensures that all aspects of a student's needs are addressed. Joint workshops are often held, where teachers and therapists learn to align their goals and methodologies, ensuring that the educational and therapeutic components of the IEP complement one another (Ibrahim & Toran, 2023)

Co-teaching training is another critical aspect, where teachers and therapists prepare to work simultaneously in the classroom. Together, they plan and deliver lessons that integrate both educational and therapeutic goals. This holistic approach benefits students

by combining academic instruction with necessary therapeutic support. For instance, a co-teaching session on fine motor skills might involve both a teacher and an occupational therapist. The therapist focuses on the physical mechanics of writing, while the teacher emphasizes the cognitive aspects, offering students a well-rounded learning experience (Sundqvist et al., 2023).

Reflective practice within IEP training is also crucial. Through reflective IEP sessions, teachers and therapists discuss the challenges they face and collaborate on problem-solving. This process promotes continuous improvement and enhances the effectiveness of interventions. For example, during a reflective session, a teacher might share a successful behaviour management strategy, which a therapist can then adapt to their own practice. This shared knowledge creates a unified approach to addressing student behaviour, ultimately improving outcomes for the students (Sidek & Abd. Wahab, 2023; Spence & Santos, 2019).

By implementing these collaborative training approaches, teachers and therapists not only enhance their individual competencies but also foster a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement within the educational environment.

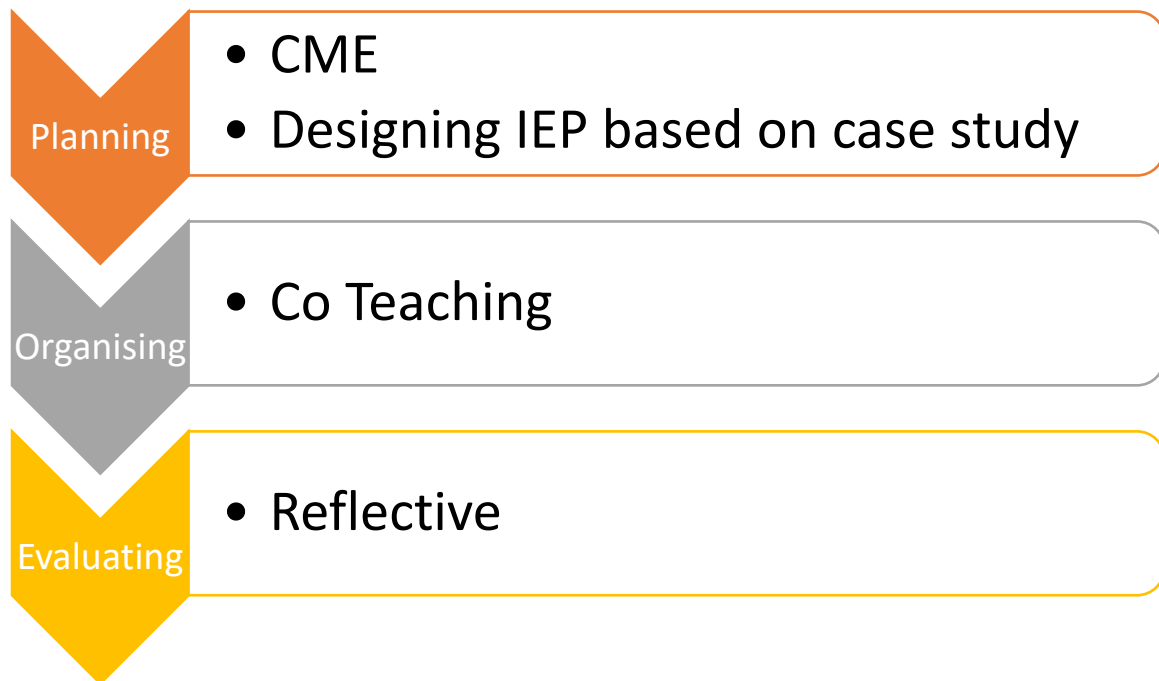


Figure 1.2 Proposed Conceptual Framework for Collaborative Training

Practical Implications

The implementation of these collaborative training methods is expected to yield several positive outcomes. Firstly, it is anticipated that students who receive interventions from teachers and therapists working in synergy will demonstrate significant improvements in academic, social, and motor skills. For example, a student with autism who receives coordinated support in both communication and social skills is more likely to make meaningful progress in these areas than a student who receives disjointed interventions from separate professionals.

Secondly, it is expected that collaborative training will boost the confidence and skills of both teachers and therapists, making them more effective in addressing the needs



of students with special needs. This, in turn, can lead to higher job satisfaction and reduced workplace stress, as professionals feel more supported and capable in their roles. The sharing of responsibilities and knowledge through collaborative training can alleviate the sense of isolation that some teachers and therapists might feel when working independently, leading to a more positive and supportive work environment.

Furthermore, the study may reveal that such training enhances the quality and effectiveness of IEP planning and implementation, with more coordinated and comprehensive plans being developed for students. Improved IEPs can lead to better educational outcomes, as all aspects of a student's development are addressed in a unified manner. Additionally, this approach can foster stronger relationships between educators, therapists, and parents, as they work together more effectively to support the student's progress.

Conclusion

Synergy between teachers and therapists is a critical component of effective special education. Through well-designed collaborative training programs, both parties can enhance their skills, ensure more effective interventions, and ultimately provide better support for students with special needs. This study emphasizes the importance of a collaborative approach in achieving comprehensive and effective special education, highlighting the need for continued research and development in this area.

References

- Abdullah, S. A. K. (2020). Keperluan Kemahiran Intervensi Awal Bagi Murid Berkeperluan Khas. *Jurnal Kurikulum, Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum*, 3(1), 58–69.
- Ahmad, M. T., Razalli, A. R., Shaffeei, K., Manusia, F. P., Pendidikan, U., & Idris, S. (2023). *Çkhas*. 16, 92–104.
- Alatifi, N. M., Gray, K. M., & Hastings, R. P. (2023). Knowledge and reported use of evidence-based practices by early intervention professionals working with autistic children in Saudi Arabia. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 105(November 2022), 102182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2023.102182>
- Albahusain, W. (2022). A Co-Teaching Training Program's Impact on Female Student Teachers: Department of Special Education, King Saud University. *SAGE Open*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221079883>
- Beamish, W., Taylor, A., Macdonald, L., Hay, S., Tucker, M., & Paynter, J. (2021). Field testing an Australian model of practice for teaching young school-age students on the autism spectrum. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 113(March), 103942. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2021.103942>
- Blasko, A., Morin, K., Lindström, E. R., Murphy, G., & Squitieri, M. D. (2024). Special Educators' Training and Preparedness to Write Individualized Education Programs. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 47(2), 161–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08884064241234616>
- Gevarter, C., Siciliano, M. G., & Stone, E. (2022). Early Interventionists' Knowledge of Evidence-Based Practices for Autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 37(4), 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10883576221099895>
- Ghosh, R., Palanivelu, V., Tebbutt, E., & Deepak, S. (2020). Training of mid-level



- rehabilitation workers for community-based rehabilitation programmes. *Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development*, 31(4), 191–216. <https://doi.org/10.47985/dcidj.431>
- Ibrahim, Z. B., & Toran, H. B. (2023). Accommodation and Modification in the Individual Education Plan of Secondary Schools in Selangor, Malaysia. *Proceeding of International Conference on Special Education in South East Asia Region*, 2(1), 73–95. <https://doi.org/10.57142/picsar.v2i1.70>
- Jaafar, N. A., Mohd Nordin, N. A., & Aljunid, S. M. (2021). Outcome of Community-based Rehabilitation and its Associated Factors among Children with Disability in East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. *Jurnal Sains Kesihatan Malaysia*, 19(01), 177–185. <https://doi.org/10.17576/jskm-2021-1901-19>
- Kozikoğlu, İ., & Albayrak, E. N. (2022). Teachers' attitudes and the challenges they experience concerning individualized education program (Iep): A mixed method study. *Participatory Educational Research*, 9(1), 98–115. <https://doi.org/10.17275/per.22.6.9.1>
- Law, G. C., Dutt, A., & Neihart, M. (2019). Increasing intervention fidelity among special education teachers for autism intervention: A pilot study of utilizing a mobile-app-enabled training program. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 67(September 2018), 101411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2019.101411>
- Ndou, N. N., & Omidire, M. F. (2022). Systemic support for learners with developmental language disorders in Zimbabwe and South Africa. *South African Journal of Communication Disorders*, 69(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajcd.v69i1.850>
- Roy, S. (2023). *Individualized Education Plan, Process of IEP With Special Reference To Its Development and Implementation*. October. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374660928>
- Sidek, S., & Abd.Wahab, H. (2023). *Pemulihan Dalam Komuniti Intervensi Orang Kurang Upaya Melakukan Aktiviti Harian*.
- Spence, C. M., & Santos, R. M. (2019). Multi-component professional development for early interventionists. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, 11(1), 52–63. <https://doi.org/10.20489/intjecse.585390>
- Sundqvist, C., Björk-Åman, C., & Ström, K. (2023). Co-Teaching During Teacher Training Periods: Experiences of Finnish Special Education and General Education Teacher Candidates. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 67(1), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2021.1983648>
- Tan Ai Lee, Zulkufli Mahayudin, Ooi Soo Yuan, Mooi, O. Y., & Ng Lai Teng. (2020). Pengalaman pembimbing instruksional dan guru dalam proses bimbingan instruksional pentaksiran bilik darjah di sebuah sekolah rendah. *Jurnal Penyelidikan Dedikasi Jilid 18*, 18(2), 2020.