

## **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: INSIGHTS FROM UiTM LAW FOUNDATION STUDIES**

**Nor Fadzlina Nawi, PhD**  
**Nurulhuda Adabiah Mustafa, PhD**  
**Norsyazrah Zulkifli**  
**Siti Mariam Melissa Abdullah, PhD**

Centre of Foundation Studies  
Universiti Teknologi MARA  
Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil  
43800 Dengkil  
Selangor  
Malaysia

*This study explores inclusive education for students with disabilities (SWDs) at the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Law Foundation Studies programme, Malaysia. It examines the unique challenges and experiences of SWDs, assesses the effectiveness of inclusive teaching methods and supports, and investigates educators' perspectives on supporting SWDs. Qualitative data from interviews with five SWDs and four educators reveal key challenges and opportunities in fostering inclusive educational practices. The findings highlight discipline-specific barriers such as delayed access to adapted legal materials and gaps in physical accessibility, which persist despite the valued support of the SWD buddy system. The study concludes with practical recommendations centred on systematic support, educator training, and improved accessibility. These contributions aim to foster a more inclusive and empowering foundation for SWDs pursuing legal education in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, students with disabilities, legal education, learning experiences

## **INTRODUCTION**

Inclusive education is widely recognised as a cornerstone of modern educational philosophy, grounded in the principle that all students regardless of their abilities or disabilities should have equitable access to quality learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2024). While significant progress has been made globally, important gaps remain in understanding how inclusion operates within specialised, high-demand academic disciplines. Legal education presents unique challenges due to its intensive reading requirements, dense conceptual content, and emphasis on analytical reasoning. Yet, despite these discipline-specific demands, limited research has examined the experiences and support needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) pursuing introductory legal studies, especially within the Malaysian context.

This study focuses on the Law Foundation Studies programme at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), a significant one-year pre-degree pathway established in 2009 that prepares students from diverse backgrounds for entry into law degrees. The programme's demanding curriculum is designed to build essential foundations for legal training, including the ability to read and comprehend introductory statutes and case materials, memorise legal principles, and develop skills in structured analysis and basic argumentation. UiTM demonstrates a commitment to inclusion by enrolling SWDs in this rigorous preparatory programme. However, these students often encounter unique challenges that can hinder their development of these foundational competencies. Although support mechanisms such as dedicated rooms for the disabled and buddy systems exist, their effectiveness and adequacy in addressing the full spectrum of discipline-specific challenges faced by SWDs remain unclear and unevaluated.

To address this gap, the present study systematically analyses the experiences of both SWDs and educators within the UiTM Law Foundation Studies programme during the 2023/2024 academic year. In contextualising these challenges, the study draws on a comprehensive literature review of existing literature on inclusive education, which helps identify specific gaps pertaining to legal foundation studies. Through qualitative analysis, the study then identifies key challenges, evaluates existing support systems, and explores inclusive teaching practices. The aim is to provide evidence-based, context-specific recommendations to enhance the programme's inclusivity and accessibility.

By doing so, this study contributes to creating an empowering educational foundation where every aspiring lawyer, regardless of ability, can thrive, thereby advancing the principles of inclusive education in the specialised field of legal training. Ultimately, this research supports the vision of an inclusive legal education landscape where every aspiring law student regardless of ability can thrive and participate meaningfully in their academic journey.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Importance and Theoretical Foundations of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is globally recognised as a fundamental right and a cornerstone of quality education, grounded in the principle that all students deserve equitable access to learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2024). Its importance extends beyond access, actively promoting social inclusion, equality, and the holistic development of SWDs. Research indicates that inclusive environments foster a critical sense of belonging and participation, which is essential for the personal and academic growth of SWDs (Ainscow et al., 2006). Furthermore, inclusive education enriches the learning ecosystem for all students by cultivating diversity, mutual respect, and a broader understanding of community (Dessementet et al., 2012). This philosophy is operationalised through frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasises proactive instructional design that accommodates diverse learners through multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (Rose & Meyer, 2002). UDL positions inclusivity as an integral element of curriculum design rather than a secondary accommodation.

The commitment to inclusion is reinforced by international and national mandates. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) enshrines the right to inclusive education. In Malaysia, this is supported by the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 and the Education Act 1996, which collectively emphasise accessible education for all. However, scholars note that translating policy into effective classroom practice within the Malaysian context remains a significant challenge, pointing to a gap between legislative intent and implementation (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014).

The effective practice of inclusive education is underpinned by key educational theories that explain how learning and development are best supported in diverse settings. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978) is particularly salient, as it positions social interaction as the engine of cognitive development. Concepts like the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding illustrate how learning is advanced through guided support from more knowledgeable peers or educators. This theory directly informs inclusive strategies such as collaborative group work, peer tutoring, and mentoring systems—all of which are crucial for providing the social and academic scaffolding SWDs need to thrive. In the context of this study, Vygotsky's theory provides a lens to analyse the function and effectiveness of the SWD buddy system and peer-mediated support within the law foundation programme.

In contrast to stage-based developmental theories, such as Piaget's (1972), which focus on age-appropriate instruction, the principles of UDL provide a more directly applicable and flexible framework for higher education. UDL moves beyond a stage-based model to advocate for flexible pedagogical design that provides multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression.

This approach is essential in a demanding law foundation programme, where providing materials in alternative formats (e.g., digital text, audio), varying teaching methods, and allowing flexible modes for demonstrating understanding are critical adaptations for including SWDs. Therefore, Vygotsky's theory and the UDL framework, together form the primary theoretical foundation for this study. They guide the investigation into how social support systems and intentionally designed instructional practices can address the unique challenges SWDs face in the rigorous academic and social environment of legal education at UiTM.

### **Inclusive Education Practices in Higher Education: Global Benchmarks and Local Challenges**

The implementation of inclusive education varies significantly across educational tiers and national contexts. In higher education globally, particularly in regions such as the United States, Europe, and Australia, established models demonstrate that effective inclusion rests on two pillars: inclusive pedagogical frameworks and comprehensive support services (Shaw, 2024; Seale, 2013). The UDL framework is central to this approach, advocating for the proactive design of flexible teaching methods, accessible materials, and varied assessments to accommodate a wide range of learner needs from the outset, thereby minimising retroactive accommodations (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Complementing UDL, structured support services—such as dedicated disability resource centres, peer mentoring programmes, and provisions for assistive technology—are critical for operationalising inclusion and providing individualised assistance (Shaw, 2024).

Despite these advancements, systemic barriers continue to hinder full participation of SWDs. A recurring challenge across contexts is a lack of awareness and understanding among educators and policymakers regarding the specific needs of SWDs, which can lead to inadequate support and accommodations (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). Furthermore, limited resources and inadequate infrastructure, including physical accessibility issues, persistently hinder full participation (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020). Academically, SWDs frequently face inaccessible learning materials and assessments not designed for their needs, impairing engagement (Lombardi et al., 2011; Arias et al., 2023). Socially, they may experience isolation and difficulty forming peer relationships, which are crucial for well-being and academic integration (Atteng & Osuagwu, 2021). Technological barriers, such as limited access to essential assistive technologies, further compound these challenges (Fichten et al., 2009a; Sharma et al., 2025).

The landscape in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, reflects these global challenges within a distinct context of ongoing development. While Malaysian policy, such as the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 and the Education Act 1996, supports inclusive principles, a significant gap persists between legislative intent and practical implementation in higher education (Jelas, 2010; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014). This policy-implementation gap is not unique to Malaysia but is a common theme across the region. A recent systematic review of inclusive education policies (2015-

2025) found that while countries like Indonesia have established clear and binding legal frameworks, they—alongside Malaysia, Vietnam, and Japan—continue to face profound challenges in implementation, such as limited human resources, insufficient infrastructure, and weak monitoring systems (Kartiko et al., 2025). Only Finland was cited as a consistent benchmark for integrating strong law with effective practice. This regional analysis underscores that the core barriers in Malaysian higher education—including a scarcity of specialised support services, lecturer preparedness, and resource constraints (Lee & Low, 2014; Muhamad Zaki & Ismail, 2021)—are part of a broader systemic struggle to translate inclusive policy into consistent, effective action within specialised academic disciplines.

Studies on the broader Malaysian educational landscape reveal mixed attitudes among educators, concerns over resources, and a noted lag in comprehensive support systems compared to regional neighbours like Singapore and Thailand (Lee & Low, 2018). The core need for enhanced, practical training for educators in inclusive practices is a recurring theme (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014), as is the call for better resources and systemic support (Ahmad et al., 2019; Low, Lee, & Che Ahmad, 2020). In response to these systemic gaps, innovative pedagogical models have emerged internationally that reposition students as partners in educator development. Notably, Dollinger and Hanna (2025) piloted a ‘Students Mentoring Staff’ programme in Australia, where students with disabilities were positioned as mentors to university educators. Their scalable, dialogue-based model demonstrated that structured one-to-one conversations between students and staff can enhance educators’ awareness of accessibility needs, generate practical inclusive strategies, and foster reciprocal learning. This approach aligns with the principles of student voice and co-creation, offering a potential framework for addressing the persistent educator training deficits observed in Malaysian higher education—including within specialised disciplines such as legal studies.

This synthesis underscores that while the blueprint for inclusive higher education exists, its execution—especially in specialised disciplines—is uneven. The Malaysian context, characterised by policy-practice gaps and resource constraints, forms a critical backdrop. This study enters at this juncture, focusing on the under-researched micro-context of a law foundation programme. It seeks to investigate how these global and national-level challenges manifest and are navigated within the unique, demanding environment of legal education at UiTM, where intensive reading, competitive discourse, and specific pedagogies present distinct hurdles for inclusion.

### *Applying Inclusive Support to Legal Education: From Theory to Programme-Specific Practice*

While the combination of UDL and comprehensive support services forms the bedrock of inclusive higher education, their application within specialised, high-demand disciplines requires further examination. Legal education, with its rigorous academic demands, extensive reading requirements, and competitive Socratic traditions, presents a distinct set of challenges that

necessitate tailored accommodations and support systems to ensure the success of SWDs (Anjos et al., 2018). These challenges crystallise around the core competencies the UiTM Law Foundation programme seeks to instill: 1) Statutory and Case Law Literacy: The skill of understanding complex legal texts; 2) Doctrinal Memorisation: The retention of legal rules, exceptions, and key case precedents; and 3) Legal Argumentation: The ability to construct, present, and defend a structured argument. Inclusive practices must therefore address not only general access but the specific pathways to acquiring these foundational legal skills.

Best practices identified in law schools internationally underscore the need for proactive and specialised support. This includes ensuring all course materials are accessible in alternative formats, creating formal and informal mentorship programmes where experienced students or faculty guide SWDs, and rigorously auditing both physical and digital learning environments for full accessibility (Waterstone & Stein, 2008). Crucially, involving SWDs themselves in the planning and evaluation of these initiatives ensures their perspectives and lived experiences directly inform practice (Widyastuti et al., 2021).

The UiTM Law Foundation programme demonstrates institutional commitment to these principles by offering a range of disability support services, alternative-format materials, and peer support structures, including the SWD buddy system. The Disability Support Service Unit coordinates individualised accommodations such as academic advising, peer mentoring, and access to materials in formats such as electronic text and Braille. Nevertheless, challenges remain particularly in ensuring timely access to adapted legal materials, which is essential for students with visual impairment navigating dense legal texts. Difficulties in maintaining accessible physical and digital environments further illustrate the complex interplay between general inclusive education frameworks and the specialised demands of legal training.

Despite this growing understanding of effective support structures, a significant gap persists in the literature. There remains a noticeable absence of context-specific studies focusing on SWDs within the realm of legal education in Malaysia. Specifically, research addressing the unique challenges and support needs of SWDs enrolled in foundational law programmes, such as UiTM's Law Foundation Studies, is critically lacking (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014; Muhamad Zaki & Ismail, 2021). This gap impedes the development of evidence-based, tailored strategies that could effectively support SWDs in achieving academic success and social integration within this unique educational context. To address this gap, the current study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the key academic and social challenges faced by SWDs in the UiTM Law Foundation Studies programme?
- 2) How do educators perceive and adapt their teaching practices to support SWDs in this programme?

- 3) What are the perceived strengths and gaps in the institutional support systems (e.g., SWD buddy system, facilities, Disability Support Service Unit) from the perspectives of both SWDs and educators?

This review has established the theoretical and practical foundations of inclusive education, highlighting the importance of social learning frameworks and universal design. It has outlined the global benchmarks and persistent challenges in implementing inclusive practices in higher education, with a specific focus on the Malaysian context and its policy-practice gap. Finally, it has identified the critical lack of research in the specialised area of legal foundation studies. The insights garnered here form the foundational framework for this study, which aims to provide context-specific, evidence-based insights to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of legal education at UiTM.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the experiences of students with disabilities and educators within the UiTM Law Foundation Studies programme.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting students with disclosed disabilities and educators involved in teaching these students. Recruitment was facilitated through collaboration with the law programme coordinator and the disability support services coordinator. Invitations to participate were sent to students who had disclosed their disabilities and consented to share their experiences. Similarly, educators with experience teaching students with disabilities were invited to participate. This approach ensured that the study captured a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. In total, five students and four educators responded and participated in the study.

The students comprised individuals with diverse disabilities, each presenting unique considerations for their academic participation. Table 1 details the background of the student respondents. The participating educators brought substantial experience in teaching the Law Foundation curriculum. Table 2 provides an overview of the educator participants.

**Table 1**

*Disability Background of the Respondents*

Student	Disability Description
A1	Upper limb difference (absence of left hand since birth), posing challenges in daily tasks requiring manual dexterity.
K2	Complete blindness due to optic nerve damage since age 12, affecting cognitive abilities related to information technology.
13	Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), impacting cognitive and social functioning, preferring interactive and relaxed learning environments.
M4	Unilateral blindness in the right eye due to sports injury in teens, affecting depth perception and focus, particularly in class settings.
Q5	Physical disability from spinal and brain surgeries, resulting in paraplegia, mobility impairment, neurological complications, and chronic pain.

**Table 2**

*Educators' Background*

Educator	Background Description
C1	Senior lecturer with over 13 years of experience teaching foundation law students. Has no formal training in teaching SWD.
N2	Senior lecturer with 10 years of experience teaching foundation law students. Has no formal training in teaching SWD.
M3	Senior lecturer with over 30 years of experience teaching foundation law students. Has no formal training in teaching SWD.
S4	Senior lecturer with 10 years of experience teaching foundation law students. Has no formal training in teaching SWD.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted during the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. The interviews were designed to elicit detailed feedback on the participants' experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improving inclusivity. Key areas of inquiry included:

- Personal experiences of students with disabilities within the Law Foundation Studies programme
- The challenges faced by students with disabilities in their academic pursuits
- Inclusive teaching methods and accommodations provided by educators
- Educators' perceptions of the effectiveness of current support mechanisms and their experiences teaching students with disabilities

## **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify key themes and patterns. The analysis process began with the transcription of all interviews, which were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Following transcription, the data were systematically coded to identify significant segments related to the research questions. These initial codes were then grouped into broader categories that represented recurring themes. The categorised codes underwent thematic analysis to identify overarching themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the research objectives, providing insights into the challenges and opportunities for enhancing inclusivity in the Law Foundation Studies programme.

## **RESULTS**

In this study, participants are identified by code names to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Feedback was submitted by five students with disabilities and four educators experienced in teaching these students. A qualitative content analysis was conducted to extract themes from the information and align them with the research objectives. The analysis revealed a complex interplay between disability, education, and support systems within the context of Law Foundation Studies. The key themes identified include general learning experiences, challenges faced, support systems provided, peer interaction and support, impact on academic performance, and recommendations for improvement. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences and needs of students with disabilities in Law Foundation Studies.

## **Students' Experiences**

The analysis of student interviews yielded seven key themes, summarised in Table 3. The following sections detail these themes, illustrated with participant quotations.

**Table 3**

*Students' Experiences - Main Theme and Sub-Theme*

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. <i>Personal Motivation and Challenges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Motivation to study law</li> <li>- Overcoming personal challenges</li> <li>- Perceptions of the law programme</li> <li>- Academic engagement</li> </ul>
2. <i>Impact of Disability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Types of disabilities</li> <li>- Daily life impacts</li> <li>- Accessibility challenges</li> <li>- Support systems and accommodations</li> </ul>
3. <i>Institutional Support and Inclusivity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support from UiTM</li> <li>- Effectiveness of support systems</li> <li>- Accessibility of facilities</li> <li>- Inclusive teaching methods</li> </ul>
4. <i>Peer Interaction and Social Inclusion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer relationships and support</li> <li>- Social integration</li> </ul>
5. <i>Teaching Approaches and Accessibility</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Methods to enhance learning</li> <li>- Adaptations for disabilities</li> <li>- Feedback and interaction with educators</li> </ul>
6. <i>Academic Performance and Fairness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact on academic performance</li> <li>- Perceived fairness in grading</li> </ul>
7. <i>Recommendations for Improvement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Suggestions for programme improvements</li> </ul>

### *Personal Motivation and Challenges*

Students in the UiTM Law Foundation Studies programme demonstrated strong personal motivations to pursue law despite initial reservations. For instance, K2, who is visually impaired, expressed initial uncertainty but later found the subject intellectually rewarding, echoing sentiments shared by other students. K2 emphasised exploration: "*My choice of law was for me to try something new.*" M4 shared a passion for justice: "*I find myself eager to be a great lawyer in the future.*" Q5 expressed, "I first became interested in law ever since I was diagnosed with my illness," highlighting how personal circumstances influenced their academic pursuits." Q5 further reflected a positive shift in engagement, noting, "*I found it much more interesting and fun,*" despite initial perceptions of the programme as potentially "*boring and dry.*"

Challenges in law studies included workload and adjustment. K2 acknowledged the demanding nature of law studies, describing it as "*demanding and rigorous work.*" K2 noted the challenge of legal theory: "*For the most challenging one for me is the legal theory.*" M4 highlighted the reading requirements: "*It may seem easy, but can you imagine reading hundreds of pages.*"

### *Impact of Disability*

The impact of disability on students' academic experiences varied significantly within the programme. Q5, who experiences mobility impairment due to paraplegia, noted, "*Sometimes I may not be able to go to class due to intense pain.*" Q5 also highlighted the difficulties of navigating crowded spaces and managing consecutive classes. This unpredictability can disrupt the consistent classroom attendance needed for the cumulative building of legal knowledge and participation in routine argument exercises. Similarly, K2, who has a visual impairment, also encounters significant difficulties with mobility. "*My biggest problem is in movement. Without my buddy, it's hard for me to move by myself, except inside the hostel room. This makes it difficult for me to participate at UiTM without my friends.*" K2, also acknowledged the repercussions of activities such as quizzes. "*It makes it hard for me to do quick tasks like quizzes*" and locating information "takes me longer".

### *Institutional Support and Inclusivity*

Institutional support played a crucial role in facilitating an inclusive learning environment at UiTM. Participants valued the SWD buddy system, where UiTM's Disability Support Service Unit assigned peers to give physical assistance and support to SWDs of certain categories. K2 praised the SWD buddy system, noting it "*smoothed my academic journey.*" Both Q5 and K2 appreciated accommodations such as adjusted class locations and extended exam times. Q5 mentioned, "*UiTM has helped me to accommodate my special needs by moving the classes to the nearest location with a wheelchair ramp*" or a location that does not require "*waiting for the lift or walking far*". Q5 states that her class mentor from the educator's team assisted in facilitating a few of these

adjustments. *"The lecturers are also very understanding of my physical limitations."* K2 further stated, *"I was provided with a special room for the disabled which is located on the first floor of the college."* Q5 also expressed gratitude for UiTM's provision of the option to take examination at a different venue and the additional time allocated during the assessment period, saying, *"It helps me with my writing difficulties."*

### *Peer Interaction and Social Inclusion*

Peer interaction was vital to the social inclusion of students in the programme. Participants highlighted supportive peer interactions. M4 shared, *"I interact well with my friend either in the classroom or outside the classroom"*. K2 felt included by classmates who *"always include me in our class activities."* Q5 noted the evolving dynamics of social inclusion, stating, *"After learning about my condition, peers became understanding and helpful."* I3, who has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), particularly benefited from interactive and supportive peer interactions. Q5 appreciated classmates' assistance: *"My classmates are very helpful as well. Sometimes, they would carry my bag for me because they know it might hurt me if I carried it all day. They would hold the door open for me, made sure I was okay throughout the whole class and encourage me to take a break when they saw I couldn't take it anymore. I am extremely lucky to have a mentor and friends as good as they are. It may be simple to people's eyes, but it means a mountain for me."*

### *Teaching Approaches and Accessibility*

The learning experiences of SWDs were significantly shaped by their interactions with educators and the accessibility of course materials. Students consistently highlighted that engaged and responsive teaching was a critical factor in their academic engagement. For instance, I3 valued the dynamic exchange, noting, *"The interactive manner the lecturers are in class while also giving feedback towards any opinions and ideas expressed by students in class."* Similarly, K2 emphasised the importance of approachability, stating educators *"respond to my curious questions in a spontaneous and friendly manner."* For some, like A1, the value of traditional, in-person instruction was paramount: *"The normal face-to-face class is the main reason I can learn this law subject."*

Alongside pedagogical interaction, the provision of accessible learning materials emerged as a fundamental, yet sometimes delayed, component of an inclusive experience. K2's experience underscored this point: while awaiting Braille versions, receiving materials as PDF files was essential, as *"I was given a manual in the form of a PDF file to make it easier for me to study and review."* This highlights how the timely provision of adapted texts is a prerequisite not just for reading, but for the deep engagement required for statutory interpretation and case analysis.

### *Academic Performance and Fairness*

Students affirmed the fairness of grading and treatment. Q5 stated, "*Grading and access are fair for all students without bias.*" Similarly, A1 noted, "*Lecturers treat me the same as any other student,*" highlighting a perception of equitable treatment.

### *Recommendations for Improvement*

Participants provided valuable suggestions for programme improvements, highlighting areas where the UiTM Law Foundation Studies programme could enhance accessibility, inclusivity, and overall support for SWDs. These recommendations are crucial for fostering a more supportive and equitable learning environment. Amongst the suggestions given are as follows:

#### 1. Infrastructure and Facilities

K2 highlighted the need for improved campus infrastructure, specifically for students with visual impairment. "*As a blind student, I think that railings or tactile paving should be built along the path leading to all places,*" K2 suggested. These additions would enhance safety and independence for students with visual impairments. A1 emphasised the importance of having accessible classroom entry points, stating, "*According to my needs, the door can be pushed inward just like any lecture hall from inside.*" Some of them also suggested several other improvements, such as installing ramps and elevators for better accessibility and locating classes for SWDs on the lower ground for easier access. This practical suggestion aims to minimise physical barriers and make it easier for students with mobility impairments to attend classes regularly.

#### 2. Support Services

Enhancing the availability and quality of support services was another key recommendation. K2 reemphasised, "*Every learning material should be prepared in the form of a file and given to students to make it easier for students with disabilities to follow whatever is presented by the lecturer.*" This ensures that students receive the materials in a format that best suits their needs. K2 also praised UiTM's SWD buddy system and was of the view that expanding and improving this system could further aid SWDs.

#### 3. Inclusive Teaching Methods

Q5 proposed incorporating more diverse teaching methods to cater to different learning styles. "*I think that giving lessons through various methods like audio readings and written materials is what makes teaching much more inclusive,*". This approach ensures that all students, regardless of their disabilities, can equally access the complex language of statutes

and case judgments, a fundamental step before legal analysis can begin. Another student, I3 appreciated the interactive and responsive nature of the lecturers, stating, "*It does help me a lot especially when the lecturers are interactive and can respond to my curious questions in a spontaneous and friendly manner.*" This highlights the importance of adaptive teaching strategies that cater to students' needs. I3 also highlights that the lecturers may need to adapt certain assessments to be fair to SWDs, depending on their category of disability.

### **Educators' Perspectives**

Educators' perspectives were analysed and summarised in Table 4, illuminate key themes around teaching practices, challenges, support strategies, and interactions within the programme. The following sections elaborate on these themes to demonstrate how educators navigate inclusive support for SWDs.

**Table 4**

*Educators' Perspectives - Main Theme and Sub-Theme*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub Themes</b>
<i>1. Inclusive Teaching Methods and Strategies</i>	- Accommodations for disabilities - Teaching adjustments
<i>2. Challenges Faced by SWD</i>	- Accessibility of materials - Participation in activities
<i>3. Impact on Academic Performance</i>	- Academic support - Achievement and outcomes
<i>4. Peer Interaction and Support</i>	- Role of peers - Social integration and support
<i>5. Enhancing Inclusivity</i>	- Recommendations for improvement

#### *Inclusive Teaching Methods and Strategies*

Accommodating SWDs is essential for creating an inclusive learning environment. Educators emphasise the importance of providing equal opportunities and ensuring that teaching methods and materials are accessible to all students. One educator, N3, stressed, "*It is pivotal that students with disabilities are given equal opportunity to study law.*" This underscores the commitment to equitable access to legal education.

N3 also shared, *"To ensure the suitability of my teaching method, I devise appropriate assignments to cater to the needs of SWDs."* This highlights the tailored approach taken to accommodate diverse learning needs.

Educators also noted specific adjustments made to their pedagogy to better meet the requirements of SWDs. For instance, an educator, M2 described how they provide detailed descriptions of visual content for a student with visual impairment: *"I always describe what's on the board using my words so that K2 can imagine it in his mind."* Additionally, another educator, S4 ensured that *"Materials are provided in advance for the blind student to convert into braille."* These examples illustrate the proactive measures taken to make learning accessible.

### *Challenges Faced by Educators*

One of the primary challenges highlighted in the interviews is the accessibility of learning materials. Educators discuss the logistical difficulties in preparing and delivering materials in formats that are accessible to SWDs, such as braille or audio formats.

*"Preparing suitable materials like law reports and legislation for braille translation has been a challenge,"* emphasised one educator, N3, illustrating the practical difficulties faced in adapting materials. N3 also pointed out that *"Students with disabilities need materials early to convert into accessible formats,"* highlighting the need for a proactive approach to ensure timely access to learning resources.

Educators also address challenges SWDs face in participating in class activities or assignments that may require physical movement or spontaneous interaction. Strategies include group assistance, avoiding last-minute assignments, providing physical assistance, and adapting teaching methods to accommodate diverse needs. For example, one educator S4, noted, *"For client counselling activities involving movement, group members assist the mobility-impaired student."* Another, N3 stated, *"Spontaneous assignments are avoided due to the need for time to convert materials into accessible formats."* These strategies are crucial in ensuring SWDs can participate fully in their education.

### *Impact on Academic Performance*

Educators note the role of assigned buddies and adapted teaching methods in enhancing understanding and participation among SWDs. They acknowledge that supportive measures have a positive impact on the academic performance of SWDs. One educator, N3 observed, *"Supportive gestures have been beneficial, evidenced by excellent academic results of SWDs,"* indicating the correlation between support and academic achievement. Another educator, C1 expressed a similar viewpoint.

S4, another educator, highlighted, "*Assigned buddies provide physical assistance and emotional support,*" illustrating how peer support systems contribute to academic success. They further observed that SWDs can achieve academic success comparable to their peers when provided with appropriate accommodations and support. Feedback from SWDs indicates their appreciation and understanding of the learning materials. "*SWDs have equal chances like normal students to perform well in assignments and exams,*" noted one educator, N3. Additionally, M2 stated, "*Positive feedback from SWD indicates their understanding and participation,*" reflecting the effectiveness of inclusive teaching practices.

### *Peer Interaction and Support*

Peer interaction plays a crucial role in the social and academic integration of SWDs. Educators highlight how classmates assist SWDs in navigating daily activities and understanding class content, fostering a supportive learning environment. One educator, N3, noted, "*Peers assist in moving around and understanding class content,*" emphasising the practical support provided by peers.

During presentations, peers support SWDs in answering questions, as illustrated by another educator, C1's, observation: "*During presentations, peers support SWDs in answering questions.*" This demonstrates how peer interaction enhances academic participation and integration.

Peer support contributes to the overall well-being and acceptance of SWDs within the student community. One educator, N3 mentioned, "*Classmates assist in daily activities like moving between classes and to the cafeteria,*" highlighting the holistic support system. Another S4, noted, "*Peer support fosters teamwork and respect among students,*" underscoring the positive social dynamics that enhance inclusivity.

### *Enhancing Inclusivity*

Educators provide recommendations for enhancing inclusivity in law education, emphasising the need for lecturer training, institutional readiness, and actively engaging with students to increase awareness of the needs and concerns of SWDs. These steps are crucial for creating an educational environment where every student, regardless of disability, can thrive.

An educator, S4 stressed, "*Lecturers need training on how to effectively engage with SWDs,*" advocating for professional development in inclusive teaching practices. Another, N3 highlighted the importance of organisational support: "*Institutional readiness and awareness are crucial for accommodating SWDs.*" These recommendations are essential for ensuring that educators and institutions are well-prepared to support all students effectively.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings from both SWDs and educators within the Law Foundation Studies programme at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) provided integrated insights into the complex reality of inclusive legal education. This discussion synthesises these insights by directly addressing the three research questions, contextualising the findings within the established literature on inclusive education (Ainscow et al., 2006; Rose & Meyer, 2002).

### **Addressing Academic and Social Challenges**

The academic and social challenges reported by SWDs align with and extend the barriers documented in broader higher education literature, but are uniquely intensified by the specific skill-building demands of foundational legal training. Students described significant obstacles related to accessing and processing substantial reading materials, which resonates with the well-documented infrastructural and resource constraints in Malaysian higher education (Lee & Low, 2014; Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020). The delay in receiving accessible formats for introductory legal texts directly impedes the ability to keep pace with coursework—a critical issue highlighting the policy-implementation gap often noted in the Malaysian context (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014). For instance, the challenge of managing extensive reading loads and rapid-paced quizzes, as noted by students, underscores the unique demands of legal education where mastery of voluminous statutes and analytical recall are foundational competencies.

Socially, while positive peer interactions were reported, the inherent risk of isolation and dependency reflects the broader social integration challenges faced by SWDs in higher education (Atteng & Osuagwu, 2021). This study therefore confirms that SWDs in this programme encounter a compounded set of barriers: the universal challenges of accessibility within Malaysian Higher Education, intensified by the preparatory demands of building a foundational legal knowledge base and engaging in the collaborative, discourse-heavy learning essential for developing argumentation and communication skills.

### **Educator Adaptations and Perceptions of Efficacy**

Educators' approaches to supporting SWDs revealed a practice of responsive adaptation, demonstrating an applied understanding of core inclusive principles. Their strategies—such as providing advance materials and detailed verbal descriptions—align with the principles of scaffolding from Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory and the proactive design of UDL (Rose & Meyer, 2002). These adaptations are particularly crucial in a law foundation context, where educators must support SWDs not only with general content but with the specific cognitive tasks of legal analysis, such as case briefing and statutory interpretation. However, the findings indicate a gap between intent and consistent execution. For instance, while educators

advocated for early material provision to aid in memorisation of legal principles, students still experienced delays. This discrepancy echoes observations in the literature regarding the gap between educator awareness and the consistent implementation of effective accommodations (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Getzel & Thoma, 2008). Recent models suggest that bridging this gap may require more than traditional training. Dollinger and Hanna (2025) found that structured, reciprocal dialogue between students and staff—where students mentor educators—can lead to more authentic and immediately applicable pedagogical adjustments. This approach could inform how UiTM supports law lecturers, moving beyond one-off workshops toward ongoing, student-partnered reflective practice tailored to legal education.

### **Evaluating Institutional Support Systems: Strengths and Persistent Gaps**

The evaluation of institutional support presents a paradox: a system with clear foundational strengths is compromised by critical gaps in implementation. The SWD buddy system was universally praised, functioning as an operational example of peer-mediated support, a concept central to Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory. This system, alongside the dedicated Disability Support Service Unit (DSSU), represents UiTM's commitment to the kind of support services noted in successful models (Shaw, 2024). However, the support ecosystem showed significant fissures. Challenges with physical infrastructure and inconsistent access to adapted materials highlight a persistent policy-implementation gap—a well-documented issue in Malaysian inclusive education (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014; Lee & Low, 2018). This implementation gap is a global challenge. Comparative studies, such as those in Nigeria, similarly reveal that supportive laws are often hindered by systemic barriers like inadequate infrastructure and training (Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2025). These cross-context parallels underscore that advancing inclusive education requires moving beyond policy formulation to address entrenched institutional and attitudinal barriers globally.

The reported lack of tactile paving or ramps, for example, directly conflicts with the need for a learning environment that supports the mobility required for participatory class activities. Furthermore, educators identified a lack of formal training on inclusive legal pedagogy, aligning with literature emphasising that without systemic professional development, inclusive practices remain inconsistent (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Waterstone & Stein, 2008). Therefore, the institutional framework at UiTM provides a crucial platform, but its effectiveness is moderated by the very resource and training constraints identified in broader Malaysian Higher Education research (Muhamad Zaki & Ismail, 2021).

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings lead to the following consolidated, recommendations to enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of the UiTM Law Foundation Studies programme:

1.     Systematise Accessibility and UDL Implementation in Curriculum Design

Integrate UDL principles mandatorily, ensuring all core legal materials (cases, statutes, problem scenarios) are prepared in multiple accessible formats *before* the semester begins to support timely engagement with foundational legal texts (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

2.     Institutionalise Discipline-Specific Educator Training

Implement mandatory training for law lecturers on inclusive legal pedagogy, focusing on adapting assessments for legal argumentation, case analysis and statutory interpretation, and using assistive technologies relevant to legal research (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014). Such training should incorporate structured student voice mechanisms, inspired by models like the ‘Students Mentoring Staff’ programme (Dollinger & Hanna, 2025).

3.     Enhance Physical and Digital Infrastructure

Conduct regular accessibility audits and install necessary infrastructure (tactile paths, ramps) to ensure full participation in all programme activities, including those requiring movement and collaboration (Jelas & Mohd Ali, 2014; Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020).

4.     Strengthen and Formalise the Peer Support Ecosystem

Expand and structure the SWD buddy system with training, leveraging its success to better foster the social integration and collaborative learning vital for legal training (Vygotsky, 1978; Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006).

5.     Establish a Participatory Governance and Continuous Evaluation Mechanism

Create a formal committee including SWDs, educators, and DSSU staff to co-design and evaluate initiatives, ensuring support remains responsive to the evolving needs of legal education (Widyastuti et al., 2021).

## **DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research should build upon this foundational case study. Longitudinal studies tracking the academic and professional trajectories of SWDs from foundation through legal degree programmes and into practice are needed. Additionally, action research projects evaluating the effectiveness of specific interventions—such as a UDL-based module for legal writing or a structured peer-mentor training programme—would provide valuable evidence for refining practice. Comparative studies across different Malaysian universities offering legal studies could also identify and disseminate systemic best practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the experiences of SWDs and their educators within the UiTM Law Foundation Studies programme. The findings reveal a landscape characterised by student resilience and educator commitment, yet challenged by systemic inconsistencies that directly impact the development of foundational legal competencies—namely, statutory interpretation, case law retention, and structured argumentation.

SWDs navigate significant academic and social hurdles, many of which are intensified by the unique demands of legal education. Educators demonstrate a willingness to adapt their teaching, yet their efforts are often constrained by limited specialised training in inclusive legal pedagogy and a lack of consistent institutional support.

While the SWD buddy system stands as a notable strength, gaps remain in areas such as timely access to adapted legal materials, physical accessibility for law-specific activities, and proactive pedagogical accommodations.

The recommendations emerging from this study centered on the systematic integration of UDL into the legal curriculum, institutionalised educator training in inclusive legal instruction, and enhanced participatory governance, provide a practical pathway for translating UiTM's commitment to inclusion into sustained, effective practice.

Overall, this research contributes a valuable, context-specific evidence base to the broader field of inclusive higher education. It underscores that equitable access to legal training cannot rely solely on generic accommodations but requires intentionally designed, discipline-sensitive frameworks that adequately address the specialised cognitive and pedagogical demands of legal education. Advancing such frameworks is essential to ensuring that every aspiring legal professional, regardless of disability, can participate fully and thrive within the foundational stages of their legal education journey.

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