

Building Inclusive Communities: Examining Expert Perspectives on Support Systems for Families with Autistic Children in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research survey seeks to establish the views of the key stakeholders on community support structures for families of autistic children in Malaysia. Using semi-structured interviews of four specialists in autism, the study identifies the factors that enable and hinder access to community support, noting the importance of raising the level of acceptance and knowledge amongst ordinary citizens. Such analysis led the identification of themes like: Societal awareness unknowns, support systems' deficits, and communalism calls. It fills the gap in theory by providing preliminary indicators to develop a theoretical Community Support Integration Framework (CSIF), underlining the organisation of the support systems with the principles of inclusive communities. This research affirms to recent occurrences asserting the exigent need to raise community awareness and acceptance for families with autistic persons.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by developing the first integrated theoretical Community Support Integration Framework (CSIF) for autism support in Malaysia. This study is one of very few studies which have investigated expert perspectives on support systems for families with autistic children in the Malaysian cultural context.

1. Introduction

Recent events in Malaysia, particularly the significant incident in December 2023, have heightened awareness about the challenges faced by families with autistic children, drawing national attention to this critical issue. This increased focus comes at a time when global autism prevalence has risen dramatically, with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC, 2022\)](#) reporting a 178% increase since 2000. In the Malaysian context specifically, the [Ministry of Health Malaysia \(2019\)](#) has documented a significant rise in childhood ASD diagnoses, from 1/600 children to approximately 1.6% in recent years, underlining the growing need for comprehensive community support systems.

The challenges faced by families with autistic children extend far beyond clinical considerations, encompassing broader social and practical support needs. [Karst and Van Hecke \(2012\)](#) have documented significant impacts on family functioning, stress levels, and overall quality of life, highlighting the multifaceted nature of required support. This understanding is further developed by [Hassan et al. \(2024a\)](#), who emphasize that effective support systems must integrate both formal care and informal community resources, while adapting to specific cultural and social contexts. Such integration is crucial for addressing the complex needs of families and ensuring engagement with available support services.

As the number of children diagnosed with autism in Malaysia has grown over the years, families with such children are still struggling to access adequate comprehensive community support. These challenges are problem statement and compounded by:

- a. Limited public understanding of autism characteristics and family needs
- b. Inadequate coordination between support services
- c. Social stigma and misconceptions
- d. Limited resources for family support programs

1.1. Research Objectives

- i. To examine barriers and facilitators to effective community support for families with autistic children
- ii. To analyze expert perspectives on current support systems and their effectiveness
- iii. To develop an integrated framework for community support implementation
- iv. To identify strategies for enhancing public awareness and empathy

2. Literature Review

Available literature on family support systems for children with autism demonstrates intertwining relationships between support structures, awareness, and cultural context. This paper synthesizes knowledge from various disciplines relevant to support structures

for families with autism in Malaysia. The complexity of support needs is further highlighted by [Lai and Oei \(2014\)](#), who identify multiple coping mechanisms required by parents and caregivers. This is particularly evident in Asian contexts, where [Ang and Loh \(2019\)](#) found distinct gender-based differences in caring roles and support needs.

2.1. Comprehensive Support Systems and Family Outcomes

Evidence-based practice data confirms that extensive family and community support are key to enhancing outcomes for families with autistic children. Recent systematic reviews by [Anderson et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasize that support systems should encompass multiple domains of need, including emotional, practical, and social support. Their meta-analysis of 45 studies demonstrates that integrated support models yield better outcomes than siloed interventions. [Hassan et al. \(2024b\)](#) assert that support systems should encompass assessment of multiple domains of need and combined models of support. This aligns with [Samson et al.'s \(2015\)](#) findings that comprehensive community support enhances protective factors for well-being outcomes, particularly in rural contexts, correlating positively with stress management and improved family functioning.

2.2. Public Awareness and Education

Support effectiveness is heavily influenced by public awareness and education in the context of autism support systems. Recent research in Southeast Asia ([Ting & Chuah, 2020](#)) reveals significant variations in public understanding and acceptance of autism across different communities. This is further supported by [Ilias et al. \(2018\)](#) who documented how social support and awareness levels significantly impact family experiences. Besides, [Derguy et al. \(2016\)](#) demonstrate that limited public understanding often leads to social exclusion and restricted ability to access community resources, a finding that aligns with [Alsehemi et al.'s \(2017\)](#) research showing how public awareness directly impacts service utilization and community support outcomes.

[Thompson et al. \(2023\)](#) further validate these findings, providing evidence that enhanced community knowledge directly improves resource utilization and support availability for families with autistic children. In the Malaysian context specifically, while the [Ministry of Health Malaysia \(2019\)](#) has documented increased autism awareness over recent years, key knowledge deficits continue to hinder proper family support services utilization. This observation is reinforced by [Sahril et al. \(2024\)](#) recent study, which identifies persistent knowledge gaps affecting service delivery in Malaysian communities, particularly in understanding the diverse needs of families with autistic children.

2.3. Integrated Service Delivery Models

Support systems represent a crucial dimension of comprehensive solutions for families with autistic children. [Wong et al. \(2015\)](#) provide evidence for integrated service delivery models encompassing healthcare services, educational assistance, community orientation, and family support services. [Tan, Lyu and Lu \(2024\)](#) found that families benefit most when professional services are combined with community-based support, which creates more sustainable and accessible support networks.

2.4. Cultural Considerations and Local Context

The cultural factor is paramount, particularly in the Malaysian setting. [Lee, Lee and Park \(2023\)](#) demonstrate how cultural processes affect help-seeking behavior, family adaptation, and community participation in Southeast Asian communities. This aligns with [Hassan et al.'s \(2023\)](#) work exploring how cultural processes influence family adaptation and community participation. Their research shows that culturally tailored support structures must factor in local culture for effectiveness, particularly in considering children's sensory and learning profiles during interventions.

Cultural perspectives significantly influence how autism is understood and supported within communities. [Ravindran and Myers \(2012\)](#) demonstrate how cultural beliefs shape perceptions of health, illness, and disability, particularly in relation to autism. This is especially relevant in Southeast Asian contexts, where [Riany et al. \(2016\)](#) found that cultural beliefs significantly impact help-seeking behaviors and treatment preferences. In Malaysia specifically, [Ibrahim and Wong \(2023\)](#) highlight how family resilience is shaped by cultural values and community support systems

2.5. Technology and Modern Support Approaches

[Neik et al. \(2014\)](#) document the evolving role of interventions in Asian autism support contexts, while [Low et al. \(2018\)](#) examine the effectiveness of various support approaches in Malaysian systems. The VARK model implementation ([Hassan et al., 2023](#)) demonstrates the effectiveness of integrated approaches combining visual/written, auditory/verbal, and kinesthetic learning with children's emotional growth considerations, leading to improved communication and pro-social behavior.

In this paper, several research drawbacks are discussed based on current literature review and it clearly demonstrated that there are still some limitations to the studies, especially focusing the implementation integrated support systems in Malaysian settings. Nevertheless, despite this fact that the significance of numerous support components is vigorous, there is a lack of studies on the subject of how these components can and should be coordinated and supported appropriate to concrete cultural and social conditions. Such gaps indicate the need for further specific research regarding the construction of culturally sensitive and comprehensive services for Malaysian families with an autistic child.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine expert perspectives on community support systems for families with autistic children in Malaysia. The research design integrated multiple data collection and validation methods to ensure comprehensive understanding and reliability of findings.

As shown in [Table 1](#), the research design components were strategically structured to ensure a comprehensive qualitative study. The table outlines five essential elements of our research design: the phenomenological approach which was chosen to capture lived experiences and expert insights, a three-month time frame (January-March 2024) to ensure current relevance, multiple location sites across Malaysia for geographical

representation, semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method, and validation through triangulation and member checking to ensure reliability. This systematic organization of research components provided a solid foundation for gathering and analyzing expert perspectives on autism support systems.

Table 1: Research Design Components

Component	Description	Purpose
Approach	Qualitative Phenomenological	To capture lived experiences and expert insights
Time Frame	January - March 2024	To ensure current relevance
Location	Multiple sites across Malaysia	To ensure geographical representation
Data Collection	Semi-structured interviews	To gather in-depth perspectives
Validation	Triangulation & member checking	To ensure reliability

3.2. Participant Selection

Four experts were purposively selected based on comprehensive selection criteria. The expert panel characteristics, detailed in [Table 2](#), demonstrate the diverse and highly qualified nature of our participant group. The table presents the credentials and roles of four key experts (coded as EP1-EP4) who participated in the study, including their specializations ranging from clinical psychology to community programs, years of experience spanning from 8 to 15 years, advanced qualifications (PhD, EdD, MSc), and current leadership roles in autism support services. This carefully selected panel provided rich, multi-perspective insights into the challenges and opportunities within autism support systems.

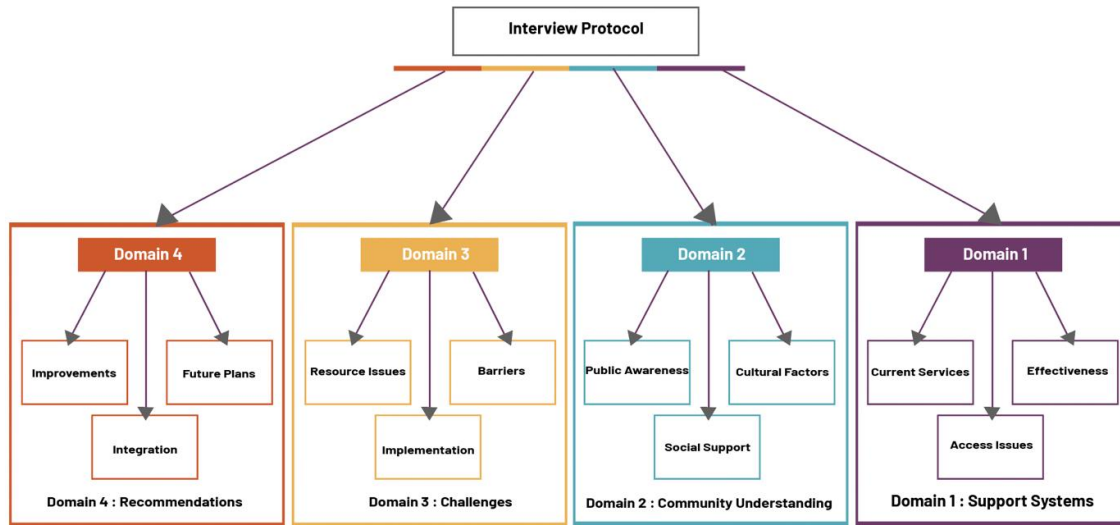
Table 2: Expert Panel Characteristics

Expert Code	Specialization	Experience (Years)	Qualification	Current Role
EP1	Clinical Psychology	15	PhD	Head of Autism Center
EP2	Special Education	12	EdD	Program Director
EP3	Family Support	10	MSc	Family Services Coordinator
EP4	Community Programs	8	PhD	Research Director

3.3. Data Collection Protocol (Interview Structure)

The interview protocol was developed based on four key domains. [Figure 1](#) highlights four domains: recommendations, challenges, community understanding and support systems. The researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants which involve formless and generally open-ended questions that are few and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants ([Creswell & Creswell, 2020](#)). So, there were four experts who participated in this interview. The details of the experts are shown in [Table 2](#).

Figure 1: Interview Protocol Framework



3.4. Data Collection Process

Table 3 illustrates the systematic implementation of our interview process across three distinct phases. The implementation timeline shows how the data collection process was organized, beginning with a two-week preparation phase for protocol review and expert validation, followed by individual interviews lasting 45-60 minutes each, and concluding with a one-week follow-up period per participant for member checking. Each phase utilized specific tools, from expert feedback forms during preparation to audio recording and field notes during implementation, and transcript review during follow-up, ensuring a thorough and well-documented data collection process.

Table 3: Interview Implementation

Phase	Activities	Duration	Tools Used
Preparation	Protocol review & expert validation	2 weeks	Expert feedback forms
Implementation	Individual interviews	45-60 minutes each	Audio recording, field notes
Follow-Up	Member checking	1 week per participant	Transcript review

3.5. Data Analysis

The analysis followed a rigorous thematic analysis process. Table 4 presents a comprehensive six-stage thematic analysis framework that guided our methodical examination of the interview data. Beginning with an intensive familiarization phase, researchers immersed themselves in the transcripts through multiple readings, generating detailed field notes that captured the nuances of expert perspectives on community support systems. This foundational stage led to the identification of 124 distinct initial codes, which through iterative analysis were synthesized into 15 potential themes. Further analytical refinement consolidated these into 8 main themes, ultimately crystallizing into 4 core themes that encapsulate the fundamental aspects of autism support systems in Malaysia. Each stage built upon the previous one, ensuring a rigorous

and transparent analytical process that maintained the integrity of the experts' insights while systematically distilling their collective knowledge into actionable findings.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis Process

Stage	Activities	Outcomes
1. Familiarization	Transcript reading & note-taking	Initial observations
2. Initial Coding	Line-by-line coding	124 initial codes
3. Theme Development	Code grouping & categorization	15 potential themes
4. Theme Review	Pattern identification	8 main themes
5. Theme Definition	Theme refinement & naming	4 final themes
6. Report Production	Analysis write-up	Final findings

Initial coding produced 124 distinct codes representing key concepts and experiences shared by the experts. These codes ranged from specific support challenges (e.g., "resource limitations," "access barriers") to success factors (e.g., "family engagement," "community awareness"). Through iterative analysis, these codes were grouped into 15 potential themes that captured broader patterns in the data. Further refinement through team discussion and pattern analysis led to the identification of eight main themes, which were ultimately consolidated into four final overarching themes.

The thematic analysis led to a hierarchical structure of themes as shown in [Table 5](#), which organizes the findings into four major overarching themes with their respective subcomponents. The first theme, Support System Infrastructure, encompasses the fundamental elements of resource availability, service coordination, and access pathways.

Table 5: Potential Themes That Captured Broader Patterns in The Data

Support System Infrastructure	Resource availability and distribution Service coordination mechanisms
Community Engagement and Awareness	Access pathways and barriers Public understanding of autism Social support networks Cultural integration of services
Family-Centered Support Mechanisms	Individualized support approaches Family empowerment strategies Resource navigation assistance
Sustainable Development Strategies	Long-term program sustainability Integration of services Capacity building initiatives

The second theme, Community Engagement and Awareness, focuses on public understanding, social support networks, and cultural integration of services. The third theme, Family-Centered Support Mechanisms, addresses individualized approaches, empowerment strategies, and resource navigation assistance. The final theme, Sustainable Development Strategies, covers long-term sustainability, service integration, and capacity building initiatives. Each of these main themes emerged from the iterative coding process and represents a crucial aspect of supporting families with autistic children in Malaysia. The subcomponents under each theme provide specific areas for action and improvement within the broader framework of community support systems. This thematic structure not only captures the complexity of the support system but also

provides a practical framework for understanding and addressing the needs of families with autistic children.

4. Results

The analysis of expert interviews revealed four major themes relating to support systems for families with autistic children in Malaysia. Each theme emerged from rigorous thematic analysis and is supported by direct quotes from expert participants.

4.1. Theme 1: Support System Infrastructure

Expert interviews revealed significant structural challenges in current support system infrastructure. Three critical subthemes emerged from the analysis:

4.1.1. Resource Distribution

The distribution of support resources showed marked geographical disparities. EP1 highlighted this concern: "*The distribution of resources across different regions remains uneven, with rural areas particularly underserved.*" This inequality manifests in both physical and human resources. EP2 further elaborated: "*Rural families often travel hours to access basic services, creating additional burden on already stressed family systems.*" Analysis revealed that urban centers have concentrated resources while rural areas face significant service gaps.

4.1.2. Service Coordination

The analysis identified significant challenges in service integration. EP3 emphasized this issue: "*Services operate in silos, making coordination difficult. We often see families struggling to navigate between medical, educational, and social support services.*" The lack of coordinated care results in:

- i. Fragmented service delivery
- ii. Duplication of efforts
- iii. Communication gaps between service providers
- iv. Increased burden on families navigating multiple systems

4.1.3. Access Mechanisms

Complex navigation systems emerged as a significant barrier. EP4 noted: "*Families struggle to understand and access available support, often missing crucial services due to complicated procedures.*" Key challenges include:

- i. Complex application processes
- ii. Limited information availability
- iii. Unclear eligibility criteria
- iv. Multiple point-of-contact requirements

4.2. Theme 2: Community Engagement and Awareness

The analysis revealed the crucial role of community understanding in support system effectiveness. Three key aspects emerged:

4.2.1. Public Understanding

EP3 emphasized the direct relationship between public awareness and support quality: *"Public awareness directly impacts the quality of support families receive. When communities understand autism better, they naturally become more supportive."* Expert interviews revealed that:

- i. Community education initiatives are crucial
- ii. Misconceptions still persist widely
- iii. Awareness varies significantly between urban and rural areas

4.2.2. Social Support Networks

Analysis showed the importance of informal support systems. EP1 noted: *"Strong social networks often provide the day-to-day support that formal systems can't deliver."* These networks include:

- i. Extended family support
- ii. Neighborhood communities
- iii. Parent support groups
- iv. Religious communities

4.2.3. Cultural Integration

The findings highlighted the importance of culturally appropriate support systems. EP2 observed: *"Support systems must align with local cultural values to be effective and accepted by families."*

4.3. Theme 3: Family-Centered Support

This theme emphasized the importance of individualized support approaches. Three key findings emerged:

4.3.1. Individualized Approaches

EP2 stressed: *"One-size-fits-all approaches often fail to address unique family circumstances. Each family needs a tailored support plan."* The analysis revealed that successful support systems:

- i. Consider family structure and dynamics
- ii. Account for cultural and religious practices
- iii. Adapt to changing family needs
- iv. Incorporate family preferences

4.3.2. Family Empowerment

Experts emphasized the importance of empowering families. EP4 noted: *"When families feel empowered to make decisions and advocate for their children, outcomes improve significantly."*

4.3.3. Resource Navigation Support

The findings highlighted the need for assistance in navigating available resources. EP1 explained: *"Families need guidance to effectively utilize available support systems."*

4.4. Theme 4: Sustainable Development

The analysis revealed three critical aspects of sustainable support system development:

4.4.1. Long-term Planning

EP3 emphasized: "*Sustainable support systems require long-term planning and consistent resource allocation.*" Key elements include:

- i. Sustainable funding mechanisms
- ii. Workforce development
- iii. Infrastructure planning
- iv. Policy support

4.4.2. Service Integration

Experts highlighted the importance of integrated service delivery. EP4 noted: "*Integrated services reduce burden on families and improve outcomes.*"

4.4.3. Capacity Building

The findings emphasized the need for ongoing capacity development. EP2 stated: "*We need continuous investment in training and development of support service providers.*"

These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of support systems for families with autistic children in Malaysia, highlighting both challenges and opportunities for improvement. The themes are interconnected, suggesting that improvements in one area can positively impact others.

4.5. Infrastructure Gaps and Support System Challenges

Expert interviews revealed significant gaps in current support system infrastructure. As EP1 noted, "*The distribution of resources across different regions remains uneven, with rural areas particularly underserved.*" Analysis indicated three critical subthemes.

Table 6: Support System Infrastructure Findings

Subtheme	Key Findings	Representative Quote
Resource Distribution	Urban-rural disparity	"Rural families often travel hours to access basic services" (EP2)
Service Coordination	Limited integration	"Services operate in silos, making coordination difficult" (EP3)
Access Mechanisms	Complex navigation	"Families struggle to understand and access available support" (EP4)

4.6. Critical Analysis of Support System Infrastructure

According to [Table 6](#), the key findings related to Theme 1: Support System Infrastructure present a structured analysis of expert insights across three critical subthemes. Under

Resource Distribution, experts identified significant urban-rural disparities, exemplified by EP2's observation about rural families' extensive travel requirements for basic services. The Service Coordination subtheme revealed challenges in integrating various support services, highlighted by EP3's description of services operating in isolation. The Access Mechanisms subtheme exposed the complexities families face in navigating available support systems, as evidenced by EP4's comment about families' struggles to understand and access services. Each subtheme is supported by representative quotes from expert participants (EP1-EP4), providing direct evidence of the challenges within Malaysia's current autism support infrastructure. This systematic presentation of findings demonstrates the interrelated nature of infrastructure challenges and their impact on service delivery to families with autistic children.

4.7. Community Role and Public Understanding (Theme 2: Community Engagement and Awareness)

Analysis revealed the crucial role of community understanding and engagement in supporting families. EP3 emphasized that "*public awareness directly impacts the quality of support families receive.*"

4.8. Individual Support Requirements (Theme 3: Family-Centered Support)

Findings highlighted the importance of tailoring support to individual family needs. EP2 noted that "*one-size-fits-all approaches often fail to address unique family circumstances.*"

4.9. Long-term Program Viability (Theme 4: Sustainable Development)

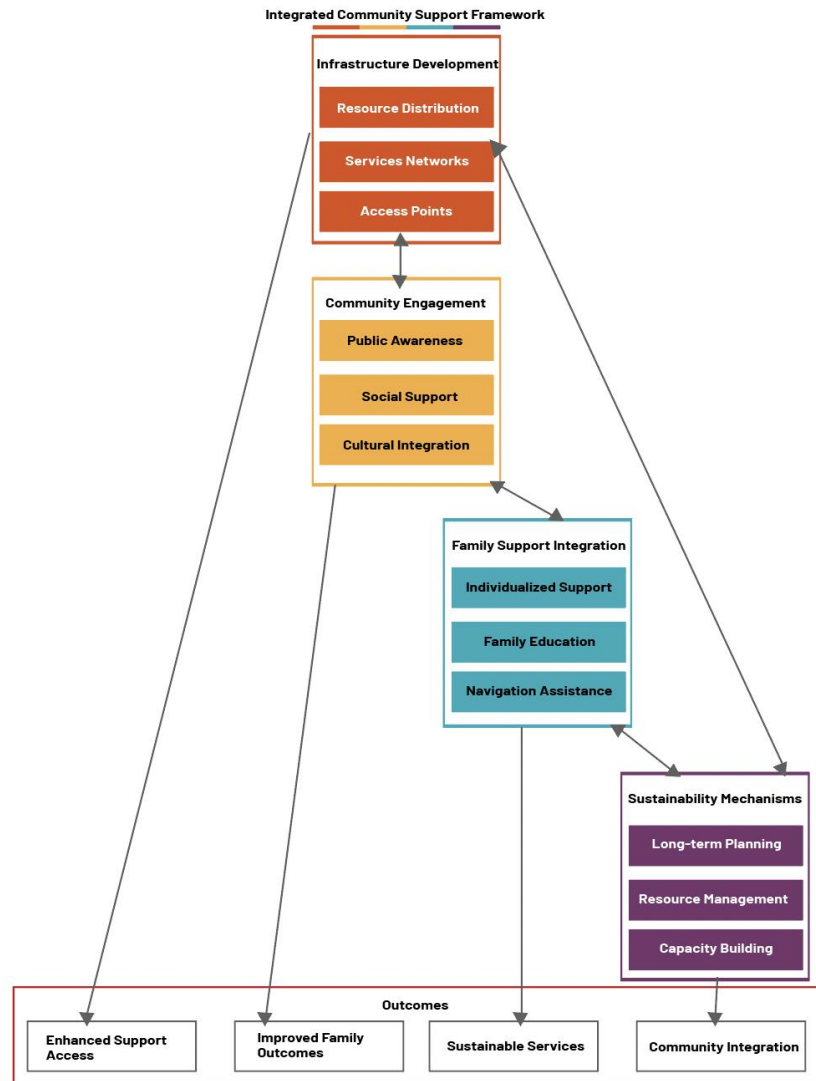
Expert perspectives emphasized the need for long-term sustainability in support programs. According to [Table 6](#) synthesizes the key findings related to Theme 1: Support System Infrastructure, presenting a structured analysis of expert insights across three critical subthemes. Under Resource Distribution, experts identified significant urban-rural disparities, exemplified by EP2's observation about rural families' extensive travel requirements for basic services. The Service Coordination subtheme revealed challenges in integrating various support services, highlighted by EP3's description of services operating in isolation. The Access Mechanisms subtheme exposed the complexities families face in navigating available support systems, as evidenced by EP4's comment about families' struggles to understand and access services. Each subtheme is supported by representative quotes from expert participants (EP1-EP4), providing direct evidence of the challenges within Malaysia's current autism support infrastructure. This systematic presentation of findings demonstrates the interrelated nature of infrastructure challenges and their impact on service delivery to families with autistic children.

4.10. Framework Development

Based on the thematic analysis findings, we developed the Integrated Community Support Framework (ICSF) for families with autistic children. The Integrated Community Support Framework (ICSF) in [Figure 2](#) represents a comprehensive approach to supporting families with autistic children through four interconnected components: The four categories include infrastructure development, community engagement, family support integration and sustainability mechanisms. Dynamic process exists consist of Infrastructure Development that creates essential physical base and service provisions and Community Engagement to ensure relevant and supportive community perceptions

and understanding. Navigation Support guarantees that every family gets what they need in terms of programs that are integrated into Family Support Integration while Sustainability Mechanisms ensures that the system remains a going concern through correct planning and mobilization of resources. As pointed out by Hassan et al. (2024b), this integrated framework is sufficient to handle several domains at the same time, and gives a thought to cognitive and affective structures within supply of support.

Figure 2: Integrated Community Support Framework



The advantage of the framework being outlined here is rooted in the fact of its comprehensive approach, which underlines that supporting of families with autistic children is possible only in complex, where all elements are interdependent and mutually enhancing, building a structurally sound and culturally sensitive and appropriate system that would be capable of changing with time in order to adapt to new demands and still remain strong, sensitive, and accessible in terms of quality of service.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal intricate relationships between community support systems and family outcomes in the Malaysian context of autism support. This complexity aligns with analyses by Lee and Low (2014) that emphasize the evolution and need for

comprehensive support frameworks in the Malaysian context. Our analysis indicates that effective support systems emerge from complex interactions between formal institutional resources and informal community networks, requiring a nuanced understanding of how different support elements work together.

5.1. Support System Development and Integration

The development of effective support systems requires contextually sensitive and comprehensive strategies that address both medical and broader developmental needs. [Hassan et al. \(2024a\)](#) confirm that successful interventions must target both cognitive and affective concerns while maintaining a multi-dimensional approach. Our findings extend this understanding by demonstrating that optimal outcomes are achieved through the integration of professional services and community resources. This integration, as documented by [Low et al. \(2018\)](#), requires sustained professional development and positive attitudes among service providers to ensure effective implementation and service delivery.

5.2. Cultural and Community Dimensions

Our analysis highlights the critical role of community awareness and cultural sensitivity in support system effectiveness. [Hassan et al.'s \(2023\)](#) work on cultural factors in support services is particularly relevant, as our findings similarly demonstrate how community understanding affects both service quality and accessibility. The relationship between increased community awareness and improved support outcomes emerges as a key finding, suggesting that community education should be a priority in support system development.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this research also offer relevant information toward the advancement of the community support systems for Families with Autistic Children in Malaysia. The results of this research underline the need to adopt more lease combined support strategies, which engage both the formal and informal support networks and culture and socioeconomic surroundings. This work establishes the need to find the right blend of professional and community support to develop sustainable structures that can meet the needs of families with autistic children.

5.1. Implications for Practice

The results of the study presented several implications for practitioners and policymakers. First, the need to have extensive support system that comprises of different service providers and other agencies throughout the community is well articulated. Second, community education and engagement is vital since people's perception of the services affects the implementation of such services. Third, culturally responsive support approaches must be the core of service delivery to embrace cultures of the communities being served.

5.2. Recommendations

That being the case, the following four areas should be given priority in development. First, provider boards that can put into places synchronization of support services are

called for in the delivery of services. Second and equally important is the need for development of elaborate community awareness campaigns to improve people's knowledge and shift their attitude. Third, managing funds for the programmes require development of sustainable funding programmes for long term use. Fourth, there is a need to implement family support delivery systems to offer family relevant and required individual support.

5.3. Future Research Directions

Based on our findings, several critical areas warrant further investigation to advance understanding of support systems for families with autistic children in Malaysia. The technological potential of mobile technology and personal communication services represents a promising avenue for research. [Chan and Lin's \(2023\)](#) recommendations for integrating digital support tools while maintaining cultural sensitivity provide a foundation for future studies, particularly in examining the effectiveness of mobile applications, digital platforms for family-professional communication, and technology-enabled community support networks.

Long-term studies are needed to understand the temporal effects of integrated support systems. [Lee and Chiang's \(2018\)](#) framework for assessing family quality of life could provide valuable metrics for evaluating support system effectiveness over time. Such longitudinal research should examine long-term outcomes for families using integrated support services, the evolution of support needs across different life stages, and the impact of early intervention on long-term outcomes.

The cross-cultural implementation of support systems requires further investigation, particularly in understanding how cultural factors influence service implementation and resource utilization. Research is needed to conduct comparative studies across different Malaysian cultural contexts, examine the adaptation of support models for diverse communities, and develop culturally responsive interventions. Additionally, studies should explore the relationship between community awareness initiatives and service utilization, focusing on the effectiveness of different awareness programs and their impact on family functioning and well-being.

Future research should also examine resource optimization across various community settings, including cost-effectiveness of different support models, resource distribution strategies, and service coordination mechanisms. This includes investigating how available resources can be best utilized in different community settings and how service delivery can be optimized through improved coordination and capacity building. The utilization of services and families' functioning should be investigated particularly in terms of the effects of community awareness initiatives, examining how increased understanding translates to improved service access and outcomes.

These research directions aim to build a more comprehensive understanding of how support systems can be effectively implemented, maintained, and improved over time, while considering the unique cultural and social context of Malaysia. Through systematic investigation of these areas, future research can contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable support systems for families with autistic children.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines established by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for studies involving inclusive education for children with autism in Malaysia. All research protocols and procedures were reviewed and approved by the Research Management Unit (RMU) of UiTM with Reference Number: REC/02/2023 (PG/MR/36).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article. This study was undertaken with the sole purpose of contributing to the body of knowledge supporting families and individuals in the autism community, and to serve as a reference for those working with or caring for individuals with autism.

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