

Support and Opportunities: The Public Benefits Hearing at The National University of Malaysia, UKM

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We conducted this study to identify the support received and the obstacles faced by students with disabilities at the Institute Pengajian Tinggi Awam (IPTA) in Malaysia. The study sample was comprised of students with hearing loss. We obtained data from students in writing and through interviews conducted because the sample had hearing loss. Issues raised by students included those of a sign interpreter, library information help, disabled-friendly transportation system facilities, bureaucratic red tape and lack of empathy from some campus residents. The sample reported that they relied on close friends to assist them in attending college. Improving the quality of services and facilities for students with disabilities in Malaysian high schools was among the suggestions submitted as were efforts to increase awareness and overall understanding. Campus citizens about their challenges and needs and established a body that can communicate their needs of university administrators and take action that can create a more positive physical and social environment to reach their full potential.

Keywords: *Students with Disabilities, Higher Learning Institutions, Barriers, and Support.*

Introduction

The National Philosophy of Education emphasizes that Education in Malaysia puts a continuous effort towards furthering the potential of the individual to create an intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced people based on trust and obedience to God (Halim Tamuri, 2007; Mustapha, 2020). This effort is to produce Malaysians who are knowledgeable, skilled, morally responsible, responsible for achieving personal well-being, and that contribute to the harmony and prosperity of the community and nation. Therefore, to



build a knowledgeable and united society, education is the starting point for ensuring the future of quality education (Currin-Percival & Gulahmad, 2020; Goode, 2007).

In 2016, Järkestig conducted a study at a tertiary institution on the experiences of students with disabilities in Institusi Pengajian Tinggi (IPTA) and found that there was an imbalance in students with disabilities (Järkestig Berggren, Rowan, Bergbäck, & Blomberg, 2016; Claiborne, Cornforth, Gibson, & Smith, 2011). Examples of issues include physical access as well as a lack of accessibility along with guidance and instruction by the lecturers themselves in Teaching and Learning (PdPc) and examinations (Isa & Yusuf, 2019). Universities need to take action to change their practices to provide equal opportunities for students as students need different types of support according to their specific needs. Students with disabilities have been able to adapt to different situations according to their ability to strive to meet the demands of Institusi Pengajian Tinggi (IPTA) (Carabajal, Marshall, & Atchison, 2017; Lukes et al., 2019).

According to Jones (2019) and O'Guin (2019), they stated in their study that a significant positive correlation would be formed among students with disabilities if a support system was provided to students with disabilities such as sign language interpreters, tactile routes, a pedestrian-friendly lane with disabilities emotional, spiritual and social support which is one of the important aspects for the University in providing such support services. Oku students also said that SPS (Disability Support Services) are more helpful than office workers or support staff (C. Bell, 2020). They also stated that they had to ask the faculty for information repeatedly or to ask questions about their learning (Hoxmeier & Lenk, 2020). The faculty is also ignorant and understands the disabilities of this student (Norris, Hammond, Williams, & Walker, 2020).

Furthermore, in the guidelines for implementing the Disability Inclusion policy in higher education institutions, Education Minister Dr. Mazlee Malik, on September 5, 2019, stated that all 20 public universities across the country should implement the Oku Inclusive Policy, a Continuing Education Support System where the guidelines are intended to eliminate the segregation of students with disabilities from other students (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, & Lan, 2010). Therefore there is a need for a disabled service unit at the HEIs in the 2019/2020 session. To date, 5 universities have taken steps to implement the Oku 2019 Inclusive Policy: UM, UKM, UITM, USM and Uniten (Armstrong & Cairnduff, 2012; D. Bell, Carl, & Swart, 2016).

UKM itself has set up a Service and Disability Support Unit to ensure the governance and rights of students, staff and visitors are across all University administrations for disabled students to gain access to services and support in furthering their lives on the UKM campus (Fuller, Healey, Bradley, & Hall, 2004). The Opening Ceremony of the Disability Support Services unit was also held concurrently with National Day of Independence Day celebrated at the UKM level (Denhart, 2008; Järkestig Berggren, Rowan, Bergbäck, & Blomberg, 2016).



Iva Strnadová, in her study, also discusses the rights of students with disabilities regarding the obstacles they face. Based on its study of 24 students with disabilities, the results show that the experiences of students with disabilities especially hearing impaired students are institutional, attitude and unconscious which include the support provided (Strnadová, Hájková, & Květoňová, 2015).

For students with hearing loss, the obstacles faced are due to the lack of sign language translation resources during the PdPc process (Abdullah & Ali, 2018; Kayani, 2008). They criticized the University for their lack of facilities and support systems available. This experience was also related to the University's facilities issue in a study of 30 international students conducted at the British University by Sorenian (Knettel et al., 2020).

Methods

The respondents of this study were SME students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) who had hearing problems and who used hearing aids. The researcher obtained the cooperation of Sekreteriat Mahasiswa OKU (SMAKU) involved in identifying the respondents. The researcher also obtained the respondents' consent to participate in the study.

Instrument

The study was conducted qualitatively to provide respondents with a broad opportunity to share their experiences and opinions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). A form was provided as a framework for responses by respondents. The purpose was to encourage respondents to react to various topics raised by this questionnaire form. This questionnaire was prepared based on a library study conducted on the needs of support system services and facilities for students with disabilities at the IPTA. This questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part A collected the demographic information of respondents such as gender, race, age, place of residence, level of education, the field of study and type of disability. Part B gathered information on the needs of students with disabilities, the facilities they provided, the support and services they received and the obstacles they faced.

Results

The respondents were interviewed by category. Among the categories identified from this study were support received before enrolling in SMEs, support and barriers received during UKM in academic and social, communication, finance, learning process, support tools, college infrastructure, peer support, and access information.

Support received before enrolling in the UK.

In the first instance, the respondents stated that in the first interview session they did not succeed in securing a place as a student in the UKM. However, he did not give up and continued his determination by making a second appeal to apply for a stay at UKM. She also sought help from school teachers by asking for better tips in dealing with second appeals. Fortunately, the respondents were able to become students of the Faculty of Education at the National University of Malaysia. Respondents also stated that thhe was aided and abetted by lecturers from the Faculty of Education. Therefore, respondents felt that their presence in SMEs was well received despite the many obstacles.

Social (Communication)

One of the respondents, a student with a disability at the Institution of Higher Learning (IPTA), said she had some difficulties during her stay in SME. It was because the respondent was a second take admission student. As a result, many of the important details that the respondents left behind. Therefore, the respondent needed to find their own information related to aspects of learning, faculty and the latest information. It resulted in a limitation in the respondents' communication with the public due to the lack of information. Another respondent also stated that he had difficulty communicating with the college and faculty office counters. I took a long time for respondents to get an answer, and sometimes they came home empty handed because they were treated by staff who ignored them throughout the communication process.

A respondent also admitted that during her stay in SMEs, she did not have many friends except for classmates who were aware of her shortcomings. Respondents reported that she often missed out on the programs and activities organised by her residential college because she had no information available because she was alone in college. A respondent also reported that he dealt with the difficulties of not being active in any programs organised by dropping out of college. There is a resentment of the college students due to the poor management.

The Respondents' Academic Learning Process presents many obstacles in their lectures. Among the main needs of the respondents was the service of sign language interpreters to follow the lessons delivered by the lecturers. Due to the lack of sign language services at this faculty, respondents had to rely on the kindness of their friends to help translate the teaching of lecturers into sign language. Even more difficult for respondents was when lectures were given in full English and notes were given in English. It is difficult for respondents having to translate back into English.

Besides, the situation of a respondent was made more difficult when the respondent took the Citra class without any sign language partner to help translate the lecture for him. New friends and lecturers would also look at the respondents' concerns because of the shortcomings they

faced. Sometimes a respondent had to write questions on paper while wanting to ask other college friends. In this way, he did not always get the answers he needed due to the limitations of communication encountered. However, a respondent stated that during his time in the Gamelan imaging class, he was assisted and attended school despite his shortcomings. Lecturers and friends from the imagery class helped a lot even though the respondent did not listen, responding only to the codes found in the ensemble music. Therefore, to sign language interpreters, hearing impaired students also need language tutoring services to address language skills issues and provide comfort as they are one of the needs of the respondents.

Accessing Information

Access to information is crucial in ensuring the academic success of respondents. In terms of information, respondents sometimes found it difficult to stay in the Tun Sri Lanang Library (PTSL) because of it being unsatisfactory. After all, some librarians are less knowledgeable about the needs of the disabled and less friendly, especially when it comes to finding books, borrowing books and paying fines. Sometimes respondents needed to ask the same questions over and over again to get a clear answer. Therefore, respondents felt that sign language translators are very much required in Institusi Pengajian Tinggi (IPTA) to facilitate the affairs of the deaf.

However, so far, the respondents have received assistance from SMI SMAKU (Oku Student Secretariat), which has been very helpful in providing guidance and advice to the respondents during their stay there. Education and accessibility information is aided by SMAKU partners on how to use e-reps, search for computer readings and pay for self-service fines.

Financial

Respondents received an allowance from the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) of RM 1800 per semester of study. However, it was not enough to cover the expenses of one semester at UKM. Respondents did not take loans from any agency such as the Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional (PTPTN). Their previous debts while studying for a Diploma in UITM were large. Therefore, a respondent stated that during the semester, he would work part-time at a Printing shop to cover a small number of his expenses. The employer is also kind, understanding and was willing to have him work in their workplace. Respondents also planned to seek assistance from Zakat UKM.

Counselling

Counselling services are a must for students with learning disabilities (Hadley, Hsu, Addison, & Talbot, 2020). It aims to motivate them and to give them encouragement and advice related to learning and as an individual (Foster, 2020). Respondents said that there was no guidance or

information regarding the existence of counselling services offered to SME students. For one respondent it was because he was a second take admission student, so it is possible that the information did not reach him. It was a bit of a hassle. Respondents also did not know that there was a counselling center in the Faculty of Education itself.

All of the information provided was referenced through the Special Education Lecturer. A respondent stated that the limitations she may have had were due to a difficulty to meet with the counsellor as no sign language interpreter could help. Respondents had a residual hearing loss but was very minimal, and respondents were concerned about communication difficulties (Bryant & Seay, 2020).

Partner Support

Partners helped the respondents to communicate and deal with the counter. In one case, the respondent sought the assistance of his colleague in case of difficulty in paying tuition, counter service, and computer use. In terms of learning, the respondents did not have any problems joining the group during the learning activities. As their friends helped in the group work and presentations as well as helping out as the respondents sometimes said, the information was overlooked because they did not understand the content of the teaching. Therefore, many friends redefine what is required in the subject or course they are studying.

Support Tools

In terms of support tools, respondents used 'hearing aids' to improve their quality of life. Respondents have used hearing aids since they were as young five years. At first, respondents were asked to wear cochlear implants, but the respondents disagreed and only wanted to use hearing aids because they were comfortable with it.

Discussion

The disabled have the social right to access education and have equality in education. Guaranteed access to equality and education in education is one of the key ways to empower the disabled in our country. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the HEIs to meet the social rights of the disabled by providing a supportive environment for the disabled and free support services. Not only that, but every student and administrator at the HEIs should also be more aware of the needs of the disabled in the higher education institutions because inequality can lead to the quality of life of the disabled (Ramli, Ahmad, Wahid, & Harun, 2011).

However, the findings of this study indicate that the services and facilities provided by the university do not meet the needs of students with disabilities, especially those that are hearing-impaired. Even more alarming, the shortcomings discussed were identified as a threat to pro-

college student bullying while at university. Also, the study found that students with learning disabilities in UKM face significant obstacles in the teaching and learning process and in accessing information.

It is due to the absence of sign language translators to assist students. Other factors, such as communication and finance, are also constraints and burdens on students with disabilities. Therefore, the administration of IPTAs should take proactive steps to improve the quality of facilities and services at the IPTA while addressing the obstacles faced by disabled students. The respondents to this study expressed their views as stated below, “I think that for the quality of the future education of the University, we need to appoint sign language translators to enable our deaf students to understand what is being conveyed in any program, speech, lecture, and information.”

The study also found that the respondents hoped for help and relied on their friends to obtain any relevant information as the IPTA did not provide this facility. Therefore, the HEIs need to work and play a role in helping to provide facilities for students with disabilities. The newly launched UPS-Disability Unit in December 2019 is expected to assist disabled students in improving the quality of services and facilities offered to students. The disabled at the Institute of Public Higher Learning can learn comfortably and safely and achieve optimum performance in their field of study.

As such, it is appropriate that the HEIs take the initiative of organising education and training programs to raise awareness among students and for SMEs to have a positive attitude towards the disabled to make the environment more conducive for students with disabilities. Education on the disabled can be incorporated into every general university course or core course to open the eyes of the public on the importance and obstacles faced by students with disabilities in SMEs.

For example, all students can be educated about the workplace and ways of addressing this issue through accommodation and job redesign (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004). The awareness that is instilled and nurtured from the beginning will produce double results as it will benefit students with disabilities and other peers as the community becomes more aware of their needs.

Proposal

This study has several limitations. Among them, this study involved only students with hearing loss who were studying at an IPTA, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM. Therefore, it is recommended that the same study be conducted at all public and private institutions of higher learning throughout the country. This study should also involve all groups of students with disabilities in various categories. The results of this study are expected to provide information on all obstacles and issues faced by students with disabilities to the relevant authorities so that



efforts to eliminate these barriers and problems can be started immediately.

A study also needs to be conducted to identify ways to improve the quality of services and facilities provided so that disabled students in the Institute of Public Higher Learning can learn safely and achieve optimum performance in their field of study. The awareness of the needs of disabled students in Malaysia needs to be enhanced and strengthened further to raise awareness in the community. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will assist in providing good services to students with disabilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the existence of a minority student/student in Malaysia needs to be recognised and accepted in common with the general public. The existing Higher Education System (IPTA) needs to be developed and fully utilised in the development of technology in their teaching and learning process. It is to provide all aspects of assistance and facilities that may improve their quality of life at the University. The support and encouragement needs to be emphasised to improve the quality of life for students with disabilities in public and private institutions of higher learning. As such, educational institutions, ministries, teachers, students, administrators and related staff need to provide supportive access to the disabled while educating students to become more competent like the typical student.

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