Accessibility to Higher Education through Inclusivity – A case study of the University of Malaya

Yong ZUBAIRI\textsuperscript{1,2}, Evelyn KHOR\textsuperscript{1}, Kamila GHAZALI\textsuperscript{3,4}

\textsuperscript{1}International Corporate Relations Office, \textsuperscript{2}Centre for Foundation Studies in Science, \textsuperscript{3}Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, \textsuperscript{4}Deputy Vice-Chancellor Office (Academic and International), University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email: yzulina@um.edu.my, evelyn@um.edu.my, kamila@um.edu.my

Abstract

While government policies in Malaysia have been in place to enable Malaysians to have access to higher education, the absence of institutional policies which take into consideration the needs of the disabled means that this group has yet to benefit from opportunities to access higher education. Recognizing that there was therefore a problem that needed to be addressed, in 2014 the University of Malaya led the way by being the first public institution of higher learning in Malaysia to adopt and implement an Inclusive Policy in its campus. The Inclusive Policy that was adopted by the management took on a holistic approach – both in its principles and practice. This was to ensure that facilities made available would not only meet the needs of those who are physically disabled, the hearing impaired and those who are visually challenged, but also those who have special needs. This presentation will first of all look at the Inclusive Policy adopted by the University of Malaya and then examine how this policy has been implemented across the campus both in terms of facilities as well as support in the areas of teaching and learning.

Key words: Inclusiveness, higher education, physically disabled, policy, accessibility

Introduction

The United Nations and WHO (2011) have estimated that about 15\% of the world’s population, or approximately 1 billion people, are disabled and they also comprise the world’s largest minority group. In Malaysia, the number of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) registered by the Department of Social Welfare is approximately 445,006 in 2012 of which 85,803 are new registrations. Statistical data compiled by the Ministry of Health showed a figure of 22,089 children with special needs as recorded from the year 2004 to 2012. The
Ministry of Education also recorded that the number of children enrolled in special needs education from preschool, primary and secondary schools in the year 2012 totaled 5.2 million. The number of PWD graduates from the Graduate Tracer Study provided by the Ministry of Higher Education for 2013 is 583 where 53.2 percent were from public universities and 32.1 percent from community colleges and polytechnics.

It has been established that in many school districts, trained special education teachers, dedicated counselors and care-givers provide support and services to ensure conducive learning environments for children with disabilities. In Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) however, provisions for disabled students are not mandatory (Cheong et.al., 2013). It has been well recognized the potential contribution of PWD in the economy are lacking in practical and holistic approaches in providing quality education and training in IHL and therefore this may shortchange PWD of opportunities in the workforce. At the institutional level, social ignorance and the high costs of making providing facilities to cater for the small number of students with disabilities have been identified as some of the contributory factors of social exclusion of PWD even though such institutions are at risk of violating the rights of persons with disabilities (Islam, 2015).

Malaysia has a total of approximately 600 IHL, comprising of 20 public universities and 476 private IHL. The University of Malaya (UM) is the oldest public university and located in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. As mentioned earlier, data from the Graduate Tracer Study provided by the Ministry of Higher Education showed that more than 50 percent of PWD are registered at public IHL. As one of the stakeholders in higher education, UM has been providing the necessary facilities in order to ensure the well-being of the disabled graduates on campus. In an effort to elevate the potential contribution of PWD and mainstreaming disabled student with the rest of the campus community, in 2014, the University of Malaya took the lead by being the first public institution of higher learning in Malaysia to adopt and implement an Inclusive Policy in its campus to provide accessibility and equity to PWD in the teaching and learning experience. Some examples on how this Policy has impacted the campus community and the challenges ahead are discussed in the paper.

**Definition of persons with disability**

According to Act 2008, PWD ‘include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which may hinder their full and effective participation during interaction in society’. It is worthwhile to note that the word ‘include’ suggests