

Research Article

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# Hearing-impaired specialized career education: Does it benefit the hospitality industry?

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## Abstract

For many years, disabled graduates particularly with impaired hearing have been accepted as key equity group on the basis that their overall participation levels are limited to specialised education to equip them for certain type of employment. This scenario is also occurring in Malaysia with a number of tertiary institutions offering specialised career education including the hospitality program. The numbers of these graduates are increasing, but there are still a large number of them who are excluded from employment. What may cause for such situation is yet to be investigated. Therefore, this paper attempts to review the development of special education in Malaysia, the employability of disabled persons at global scenario, and highlighting the issues of hearing impairment graduates and their employability in Malaysia hence subsequently proposed for further investigation.

## Keywords:

Hearing-impaired, specialized career, education, employability, hospitality industry

## **1 Introduction**

The human capital is the most important investment in the development of any country. It has a core value in term of innovation that is able to generate higher income and the economic impact. Human capital is also enhancing the organizations and contributes significantly to organizational competencies, which in turn creates a great boost for further innovativeness (Bonaventure, 2005). Schultz (1993) noted that the human capital is a key element to improve organizational assets and employee productivity; and subsequently sustain the competitive advantage. Moreover, the human capital involves processes that relate to training, education, and other interventions to increase the level of knowledge, skills, abilities, values, and social assets that contribute to career advancement (Yasmeen, 2010).

Aligned with above notion, the advancement in technology of the world have also changed the economy that shifted employers' attention from conventional style workers to those who are highly focused, technically-trained, transitory, adaptable, possesses interpersonal, and critical thinking skills (Grzeda, 1999). The change in employers' expectation means that workers of today must be more educated than the workers in the past. They must also focus on work as a career path or process, which demands constant attention to the development of the new skills, adapting to new roles, and the pursuit of lifelong learning (Orpen, 1994; Grzeda, 1999; Romaniuk & Snart, 2000; Zheng & Kleiner, 2001). To cope with the increasing demand of employment in every sector of the diverse industries, many countries have strongly focusing on acquiring people skills especially among the youth through the educational training (Harvey, 2001). This can be seen clearly with the increasing rates of students' participation in higher career education including disabled youth through the special education.

In relation to special education, students with disability have been identified as a key equity group for several years on the basis of their overall participating level, progression rates, and the employments outcomes after completion of their study (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). Although, disabilities covering broad characteristics such as physical disability, medical disability, vision disability, learning disability, hearing disability, and intellectual disability, some of them are suited for the employment. As reported, in the USA there are thousands of disabled graduates with hearing impairment whom are doing wide range of works including high pressure jobs that require high skill level; and they are equally productive, remain loyal with the employer for longer period, and tend to have a better average of safety record (Campbell, 1996). Similarly, countries within the European Nations (Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, and United Kingdom) are showing rising in the employment of graduates with minimal hearing and deaf impairment (Riley, 1996). In fact, the introduction of the Disability Act in many countries for instance American Disability Act, 1990 (ADA), Equality Act, 2010 in the UK and other types of mechanism used to protect the discrimination against disabled persons in the employment. Despite the

growing number of disabilities legislations being enacted, many researchers have reported that there are still a large number of graduates with disabilities are excluded from employment (Thompson 1994; Grzeda, 1999; Romaniuk & Snart 2000; Zheng & Kleiner, 2001).

Similarly, in the hospitality area, there are reports indicated that most restaurateurs and hotel operators are reluctant to hiring handicapped or disabled persons considering the higher invisible costs such as time, training, and incentives (Kreismann & Palmer, 1994). Operators need to consider their financial well-being in hiring instructors to train disabled employees. In contrast, Baum (1995) noted that as the shrinkage in the traditional pool of cheap and flexible labour that previously ignored or under-utilized groups such as the individuals with a physical disability are regarded as more likely to be deemed suitable for employment. Such groups should be afforded a number of basic rights such as clear provision and public criteria of a motion, and access to career development, which are not discriminating on the basis or factors such as physical disability. Some argued that the provision of such right as falling within sustainable perspective of industry employment; and any hospitality organization that does not contain the ability to recognize the potential growth in every individual including those with disability will not function effectively hence less likely to sustain within the industry (Baum, 1995; Faridah, 2003).

For the aforementioned reasons, the subsequent sections review the development of special education in Malaysia and the employment of disabled persons.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Development of special education in Malaysia**

In Malaysia, the need of educational provision for disabled people began in the 50s when the government through the Ministry of Education started to establish the special education for children with special needs (Ismail, 2003). The education of the deaf was established in 1954, where the first and pioneer fully residential school known as the Federation School in Penang. A decade later in 1963, special integrated classes or units for the deaf were established to accommodate deaf children nationwide (Malaysian Federation of the Deaf, 2008). In 1977, apart from the mainstream schools, the Ministry of Education progressively established the integration programs for the needs of the special children at both primary and secondary schools. A greater emphasis was given to vocationalise the special education for the deaf so that they are able to acquire self-employable skills in consonance with the manpower needs of the country. The development of the technical and vocational education is going through an intensive evolutionary process to cope with the rapid technological advancement and challenges.

On the same note and to be exact in the 80s the government through the Ministry of Human Resources has also started to introduce the code of practice of employing

disabled persons in both public and private sectors. Since then, public awareness on issues concerning people with disabilities have increased significantly with various programs have been carried out by the government and the private agencies such as seminars, workshops, campaigns etc. These had been carried out until the introduction of the Special Education Act 1996 (hereinafter Act 1996) that introduced the provisions of special education for people with the special needs (Aril & Intan, 2001). Under Section 41 of the Special Education Act 1996, the government has empowered the Ministry of Education to make regulations on the categories of people who are requiring special education, curriculum, and other matters related to it. According to Jayasooria, Krishnan and Ooi (1997), the Act 1996 defined people with special needs as people with visual impairment, hearing impairment, or with learning disabilities whom to be included in the special school.

In addition, the Act 1996 and the Regulations of Education (Special Education) Act 1997 ensured that children with disabilities have the right to access formal education. There are three types of the Special Education Programs available including the Special Education Schools, the integrated, and the inclusion programs. The Ministry of Education policies of "Democratization of Education" and the international policy of "Education for All" acknowledged the rights of children with disabilities to have a quality education as equal as the mainstream students. The Ministry has made primary education compulsory for all children in Malaysia including those with disabilities. As from 2004, there are about 25 primary and secondary schools for disabled students; and about 768 special education integration programs in the primary and secondary schools in Malaysia (Aminah, 2006). Additionally, a number of tertiary institutions have started to offer specialised career education programs specifically for disabled youth in various disciplines. Currently, Selayang Community College and Johor Bahru Polytechnic are focusing on the Hospitality, Graphic Design, and Fashion Design; meanwhile Shah Alam Polytechnic on Civil Engineering and Ungku Omar Polytechnic, Ipoh on Mechanical Engineering with more have incorporated the courses (Ministry of Education, 2016).

## **2.2 Employment of disabled persons**

Based on the literature, there are two areas of concern among the researchers related to the employment of disabled adults. The first area is related to the barriers and constraints to the employment (Orpen, 1994; Thompson, 1994; Grzeda, 1999; Romaniuk & Snart, 2000; Zheng & Kleiner, 2001; Wehman, Revell, & Brooke, 2002; Kiernan, 2002). Thompson (1994) for instance reported that a thousand disabled students completed their secondary schools in the United States, but only few were directly employed, while a large number of them worked as a part-timer with low wages because the employers still underestimated and did not fully recognize their abilities. On the same note, Prescott-Clarke (1990) revealed that disabled people in the UK are 3 times more likely to be out of work than non-disabled people. However, things have improved here in UK with the enforcement of UK Equality Act 2010, also

the fact that UK was part of European Union, they had to comply with EU Regulations; and UK is the member of European Convention of Human Rights with the enforcement of Human Rights Act 1998. At every age, disabled workers are unemployed for considerably longer than non-disabled workers. Unemployment is especially high among the disabled school leavers and disabled workers over 50 years old. In fact, the UK Office of Population through National Census and Survey (OPCS, 1990) found that 85 percent of disabled men and 65 percent of the disabled who described themselves as “unable to work” had tried to find a job but had given up as they were described as discouraged workers (Martin, et. al, 2000).

The second area of concern is associated with discrimination. There are substantial quantitative evidences showing that employers both in the public sectors discriminated openly against the disabled peoples looking for work (Harvey, 2001). For example, a survey of employment policies of 26 UK Health Authorities found that one third of the employers had discriminated against disabled job seekers (Rothwell, Herbert, and Rothwell, 2008). Employers claimed that disabled people could not meet the necessary criteria for working in the health service. These criteria include lifting of patients and general heavy work, the need for a professional qualification or a range of physical and intellectual skills (Dyer, 1995). Dyer argued that such claims ignored the fact that many disabled people are generally capable of lifting and doing heavy work; in fact, some of them have a qualification in nursing, accounting, general administration, and others are in full possession of all faculties.

The situation also existed in the private sector. Using scientific approved techniques similar to those used in measuring the racial discrimination by Fry (1986), Graham, Jordan and Lamb (1990a) conclusively found that employers had discriminated against disabled at the initial point of applying for a job. In the later study Graham et al. (1990b) noted that the level of discrimination of the disabled people remains virtually unchanged as almost identical results obtained. They argued that non-disabled applicants were round 1.5 times more likely to receive positive responses to an application than disabled candidates who are 6 times more likely to receive negative responses.

The issues of discrimination on disabled people were also popular among the researchers in the tourism and hospitality area. Researchers like Lucas (1993) and Argyle, Collet, and Furham (1995) had averred to the discrimination often faced by people with disabilities. Peterson and Gonzalez (2000) argued that career development could often be restricted or blocked altogether for those employees with physical disability. It was also the case that the previous workplace limitations experienced by these individuals can result in fewer social and vocational opportunities. Springer (2001) suggested that such group of people is not small in number and they should be given chances to work as normal people especially among the minor disabilities. Loo (2001) examined the attitudes of undergraduate management students towards people with disability. He commented that such

population will likely be the next generation of professionals and managers who would hire and work with employees with disabilities. Whilst respondents did generally express a complex array of attitudes toward the disabled persons, a number of attitudes were found to be negative and potentially discriminatory, thus the understanding on the issues regarding the abilities and employment potential of people with the disabilities need to be done among the undergraduate students.

In summary, people with disabilities are among the least privileged and most vulnerable in most countries. Their rights to receive training, getting employed, and having career development are often disregarded (Nor'aini et al., 2001). One of the main problems faced by the higher learning institutions toward people with disabilities is the choice of undergraduate course may offer and its relevancy to the employment market (Rae, 2007). Zahari et al. (2014) contended that the institutions may produce a great number of graduates, but if the industries are reluctant to employ the disabled graduates, the issue of poor transfer of graduates, shortage of manpower, and job attrition may not be reduced particularly in the hotel industry. Therefore, it is important to assign the disabled graduates with the right job to ensure that they would not feel incompatible and giving up easily; moreover, this group proved to be committed, loyal to their employer, have high productivity, and have low absenteeism (Groschl, 2007).

### **2.3 Issues in the Malaysian context**

There is an increasing concern by the Malaysian central government on the importance of giving career guidance and training, and employment to the young disabled groups. The Ministry of Higher Education has introduced continuing skill-based or specialised education programs especially for young disabled group with the intention to equip them for an industry career including the hospitality industry. The Polytechnic of Johor Bahru and the Community College of Selayang for instance have been given the mandate to run this pilot program in 2001 (Aril & Intan, 2001). From the applications and enrolments, students have shown a high degree of interest in the program as none of them quit. Up to now, these institutions have produced more than 400 graduates and the number of students has increased every year (Polytechnic Johor Bahru, 2016). Apart from the effort made by the central government, the state governments are also taking the initiative to help the disabled persons by organising a number of courses and programs.

As disabilities covering broad characteristics such as physical disability, medical disability, vision disability, and learning disability, only hearing disability and intellectual disability are suited for the program and employment. Sewing, embroidery, doobby services, automobile, retailing, agriculture, and many others are the examples of the skills given by the central and state governments. In addition, the introduction of the ICARE Program in 2009 by the state government is one of the valuable efforts to cultivate and strengthen not only for the welfare of disabled

persons, but as a good platform to initiate an employment opportunity in various industries for disabled persons. *Bengkel Daya* that has been introduced in 2003 is tremendously showing positive feedbacks from the disability groups and public as well [Mohsin, Mohamad, & Zarina, 2015]. In the hospitality, culinary arts, pastry and bakeries, restaurant, hotel, and tourism are the areas that emphasized by the central and state governments.

Apart from the above notion, in the context of hospitality, some of the disabled graduates have been found not working directly with this industry. As reported earlier, although some are suffering from hearing impairment only, there are still substantial of them who are not getting employed in the hospitality industry either in the hotel, foodservice, restaurant, or tourism sector (Yusoff et al., 2016). Most small service industry providers only accept a minimal hearing impairment disability. This scenario potentially created a serious economic effect; and this situation has also raised several critical questions: 1) are the disabled graduates have lost interest in undertaking employment in the hospitality industry, 2) are the industry practitioners not interested in employing disabled people, or 3) are there any other underlying factors for this current situation. Since these issues are continuously dealt by the central and state governments to ensure smooth economic development and countering discriminatory practices, it is important to understand well the underlying matters hence a proper research is crucial here. Therefore, this paper proposes to examine in depth the factors that may cause the lower rate of employing disabled persons in Malaysia).

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research approach**

The mix research methods of quantitative through survey questionnaire and qualitative through interview are the most suitable approach as this study is looking at the hearing impairment graduates, employers of the hospitality establishment and policy makers concerning the impaired hearing employment. These combination methods have been selected to ensure that the research will be based on the actual experience of industry practitioners, impaired hearing graduates, and policy makers. In this context, the qualitative approach aims to identify and fortify the issue concerning the employability of impaired hearing graduates in the hospitality industry and policy makers toward impaired hearing employment. Meanwhile, the quantitative method aims to assess the factors of career education attributes on the impaired hearing graduates toward employment opportunities in the hospitality industry.

#### **3.2 Research sampling and design**

For quantitative method, the required information for this study will be obtained through self-administered questionnaire with impaired hearing graduates. Therefore, the Selayang Community College, Polytechnic Johor Baharu, and other training centres

will be selected as samples for this study. Based on the initial information gathered, to date, there are about 400 hearing impairment students have completed their study in various hospitality programs in the country. As for qualitative method, the hotel managers, fast food restaurant managers, and catering operators will be chosen to be interviewed. In addition, the officers in charge or dealing with disabled welfare will also be selected for the interview; and 20 to 30 of organization managers and 5 officers will be selected.

### **3.3 Research instruments**

Based on the research approach, two instruments design will be used. A self-completed questionnaire for impaired hearing graduates will be designed. Items for each dimension (independent against dependent variables) and the types of scale that will be used are still in the exploratory stage. However, some of the items in each dimension will be definitely adapted from similar studies in the past. All items will be formulated as clearly as possible by using simple words to reduce any possible ambiguity. It is also pivotal to provide short and straightforward items that will not be misinterpreted by the respondents.

For the qualitative approach, semi-structured interview questions will be developed for industry managers and officers. This type of interview comes with a pre-determined set of questions in a consistent order to ensure the uniformity of information collected. Kumar (1996) argued that the semi-structured interview provides flexibility for the researcher to probe beyond the provided answers to solicit further detail. The semi structured questions that will be developed for the interview is relied on series of open-ended questions that are able to obtain in-depth information for the research. Like quantitative, the questions will be designed in an interactive way to clearly elicit and develop a relaxing and friendly atmosphere to obtain high quality information during the interview (Taylor & Barling, 2004).

### **3.4 Plan for data collection process**

As this study is dealing with quantitative and qualitative information, considerable cooperation from all parties is required for the survey and the interview. Thus, before carrying out the data collection process, the College community Selayang, Polytechnic Johor Baharu, and other training centres will be contacted in order to obtain the list of impaired hearing graduates, seeking permission to undertake the survey, and request for administrative support. At the same time, the permission will be obtained from the respective hotel managers, fast food restaurant managers, catering operators, and officers for the interview sessions. It is worth mentioning that details about the researchers, the aims, and purposes of the study in the cover letter. The information sheet will also include a statement that the participation is voluntary, the information gathered will be confidential, and remain anonymous.



## 4 Contribution and Conclusion

Researching the relationship between the specialised career education and employability of the hearing impairment graduates in the hospitality industry without doubt will contribute in two aspects. This research will contribute to the understanding of impaired hearing students' attitudes, perceptions, and career intentions toward the hospitality industry whereas on the other hand the research will also benefit the hospitality industry practitioners so that they offer job opportunities to the hearing-impaired graduates. Since this study is still rare in Malaysia especially concerning the employment of impaired hearing graduates with specialised career education, it is hoped that the findings will give unique explanation as well as enhance and adding to the body of literature. In developed nations, the issues of discrimination toward employment among disabled workers are well protected by various enacted legislations. In Malaysia, the employment legislation for disabled people is still at infant stage and improving (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2008). Therefore, the findings of this study will surely determine whether the enacted law is being followed accordingly or otherwise among the hospitality industry employers in Malaysia.

In practical aspect, this study may shed light on the hospitality career intention among the impaired hearing graduates of special education in Malaysia and how industry practitioners may perceive this potential group for being part of the labour market. The information from this study will give an overall benefit to all parties namely the impaired hearing persons, educational institutions, the government, and industrial practitioners. On the part of graduates, they will receive broader opportunities to expand their career development in the industry, thus they may feel that their parents' investment toward their career education along with the efforts and the time spent on personal development are worth.

From the educational institutions perspective, this study will give benefit in terms of reviewing their curriculum i.e. whether it meets the industry's expectation and requirement. Thus, the government expenditure through tax payers on the specialised education may be used efficiently. Finally, if the industries are serious in reducing the labour turnovers and poor transfer among the young graduates into the hotel industry in particular, the best alternative is to employ the impaired hearing graduates with the specialised career education.

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