Chapter 89
The State of Education and Employment of People With Visual Impairment in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is an in-depth qualitative study using a phenomenological approach in understanding the state of education and employment of people with visual impairment in the Klang Valley, Malaysia to identify the challenges they encounter and to discover the strategies they use in the employment sector. The results showed that people with visual impairment had a positive self-concept towards themselves, family, and friends; perceived that there was still a lot for the society to improve in terms of their awareness; acceptance and daily predicament faced by people with visual impairment. They faced challenges such as insufficiency of facilities provided in schools and employers, personal skills, limited mode of transportation in rural areas, job choice, and too many expectations are required from them. Therefore, proactive recommendations are also made to the respective parties in order to be fully knowledgeable concerning what further supportive and accommodative actions need to be taken to aid those who are visually impaired for better employability and education.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Malaysia addressed issues of inclusion in schools, yet, there is a resounding difference in the classroom experiences for those students with disabilities and those without. Classrooms serving students with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments, are somewhat well equipped with digital facilities. However, the efforts remain inadequate when compared with the number of students with visual impairment and other disabilities living in the country. Access to education and school fa-

cilities properly equipped to serve all students are just two of the challenges still facing the Malaysian people. It is advisable for the government to 'go down to the grassroots' to investigate the lack of proper facilities in schools and to investigate why some visually impaired students do not attend school. This chapter will explore the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of visually impaired individuals towards visual impairment and the self-concept?
2. What are the educational provisions/resources provided by the government to facilitate visually impaired learning?
3. What are the trainings provided for teachers for inclusive education and practice?
4. What are the supports given by visually impaired parents and their relationship with the society?
5. What are the challenges faced by visually impaired individuals and the role of education in getting employed in Malaysia?

This chapter will provide a background for the reader on the presence of special education in Malaysia, the concern for students with visual impairment, as well as challenges faced both culturally and in education. Finally, the chapter will address the questions above through a research study specific to exploring the needs of students with visual impairments. The chapter will conclude with recommendations and considerations.

BACKGROUND

The year 1926 witnessed the history and development of special education in Malaysia, when the non-governmental organizations, the NGOs, took the effort to establish special schools for people who had visual and hearing disabilities. St. Nicholas Primary School for people who were visually impaired was the first special education school built in Malacca, before subsequently moving to Penang Island, Malaysia (Special Education Division, 2010; Malaysian Association for the Blind, 2010). This was then followed by the establishment of other special schools for the visually impaired, such as the Princess Elizabeth Primary School. There were only visually impaired primary schools available in Malaysia at that point of time. As evidence, the first secondary school for the visually impaired was made available for the students with visual impairment in 1962 through merging with the mainstream school under the integrated education system (Special Education Division, 2010).

In general, the occurrence and prevalence of blindness and low vision in Malaysia is expected to be 0.29% and 2.44%, respectively in all ages according to the Malaysian National Eye Survey (NES I) report 1996 (Zainal et al., 2002). A study by Chew et al. (2018) on the estimation of visual impairment and its causes from (NES II) was consistent with the report of RAAB studies that found prevalence of blindness ranging from 1.2% to 4.4% (Mathenge et al., 2007 and Li *et* at., 2013). It is also reported in the study by Chew et al. (2018) that due to the poorest access to ophthalmological services, Sabah and Sarawak had the highest prevalence of visual impairment in Malaysia. In addition, a study conducted on the causes of childhood blindness in Malaysia, using the results from a national study on 6 blind school students aged 7 to 17 years in Malaysia, reported that 92.7% (332 out of 358) students were severally blind or visually impaired (Reddy and Thevi, 2017). A study from Min et al. (2018) titled "visual impairment and amblyopia in Malaysian pre-school children," which involved 1,287 pre-school children reported,

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