THE UNEMPLOYMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS WITH LEARNING DISABILITY PEOPLE IN MALAYSIA: REALITY OR FANTASY

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Abstract

This concept paper describes the issues concerning people with special needs, the category determining the people with special needs, educational challenges for people with special needs, the issue of unemployment faced by people with special needs with learning disabilities, and the effects of unemployment on these people on their living, their families, communities and societies as a whole. The people with special needs or also known as people with disability (PWD) are individuals who have a lack of physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments in the long run where they are unable to commit fully and effectively to the society. In circumstances where they are faced with obstacles or problems. The findings from the literature review show that there is an issue of unemployment among people with special needs in learning disabilities. Thus, robust research studies to improve the employability skills for people with special needs with learning disabilities have to be conducted vigorously to address this socio-economic issue by taking into account factors that affect unemployed people with special needs with learning disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Human capital is a valuable asset in bolstering the development of the country towards a developed nation. A thorough source of labour should be used efficiently as the waste of manpower certainly affects the country’s economic growth as well as increases the number of unemployed in the country. The unemployed are defined as those who are not working or participating in economic activity, whereas it is categorized into two groups: the active unemployed and inactive unemployed. The actively unemployed are unemployed people that are willing to work and actively looking for work. The inactive unemployed are people that are not looking for work because they believe that no work is available, or they think that they are not qualified, or they are only looking for work if there are no obstacles, such as illness or weather
conditions, or they are seeking for work opportunities and are waiting for responses to their job applications (Department of Statistics, 2016).

The phenomenon of unemployment in Malaysia recently has become quite alarming when there was a sharp increase in the number of unemployed, i.e. the total of 500,000 people in 2018 in which 140,000 of them were graduates (Lim, 2019). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019), the number of unemployed in the second quarter of 2019 is 520,600 people which is equivalent to 3.3 percent of the unemployment rate. This shows an increase of 1.9 percent compared to the second quarter of 2018. The youths aged 15 to 24 accounted for the highest number of unemployed in the total of 293,700 people in 2018 which makes a 10.9 percent unemployment rate. This shows an increase in the total of 9,800 people compared to 2017 (Ministry of Human Resources, 2019). The uncontrolled unemployment of youth is a waste of manpower and to some extent, will affect the current economic developments. The unemployment rate of young people in Malaysia is higher than Singapore (4.6 per cent), Thailand (5.9 percent), Vietnam (7.9 percent) and India (10.5 percent) (Special Room, 2019). The problem of unemployment in Malaysia has involved all segments of society including the people from the special needs group.

PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The people with special needs or also known as people with disability (PWD) are individuals who have a lack of physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments in the long run where they are unable to commit fully and effectively to the society if they are faced with obstacles or problems (Department of Social Welfare, 2008). Until 2018, a total of 472,228 people with disabilities in Malaysia have registered with the Social Welfare Department (Department of Social Welfare, 2018). This group consists of seven categories, namely physical disabilities, learning disabilities, visual impairment, mental problem, hearing impairment, various troubled disabilities, and distressed speech. According to statistics from Department of Social Welfare (2018), the number of disabled people with a physical problem is the highest with 167,077, followed by the disabled with learning disabilities with 163,904 people, disabled with visual impairment makes a total of 42,184 people, the disabled with the mental problem comprises of 39,229 people, the disabled with hearing impairment include 35,273 people, the various troubled disabilities make a total of 22,100 people and disabled with problematic speech constitute a total of 2,461 people. Table I shows the number of registered PWDs in the Department of Social Welfare for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018, according to the category of people with special needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Category of people with special needs</th>
<th>Number of people with disabilities registered by year (people)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learning disability</td>
<td>143,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Physical problems</td>
<td>142,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the disability’s statistics registered with the Social Welfare Department, the number of special needs people with learning disabilities accounted for the second-largest group after the number of the disabled with physical problems for 2017 and 2018. In school, people with special needs are called Students with Special Needs (SSN). Students with Special Needs (SSN) refers to students who have the characteristics of mental, physical or emotional contrast to the norm, so they need special education program, namely Special Education in which they are divided into three types of programs including (i) Program Sekolah Pendidikan Khas (Special Education School Program) (ii) Special Education Integration Program (iii) Inclusive Education Program (IEP full inclusion in the mainstream). Table II shows the number of students with Special Needs (SSN) for the year of 2016, 2017 and 2018 according to the program.

Table II: Number of Students with Special Needs (SSN) for 2016, 2017 and 2018 according to the program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Number of Special Needs Students by year (people)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Special Education School</td>
<td>2,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Special Education Integration Program</td>
<td>59,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Inclusive Education Program (Full IEP in the mainstream)</td>
<td>14,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>76,166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special Education School Program (SESP) is a school for students with special needs (SSN) whereas the school provide special education and involve all levels of schooling. This shows that all students placed in these schools are Students with Special Needs (SSN). There are six secondary schools and 28 primary schools and preschools under the School of Special Education until 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2018). The six secondary schools are (i) Special Education Secondary School Vocational Indah Pura (ii) Special Education Secondary School Vocational Kuantan (iii) Special Education Secondary School Vocational Merbok (iv) Special Education Secondary School Shah Alam (v) Special Education Secondary School Penang (vi) Special Education Secondary School Setapak.

Special Education Integration Program (SEIP) varies from the Special Education Schools program because this program is conducted in the normal schools. There were 822 secondary schools and 1,521 primary schools and pre-schools involved with the Special Education Integration Program. For Inclusive Education Program (IEP), students with special needs (SSN) that are eligible will be allowed to learn in
mainstream full-time programs in which they are placed in a class that is equivalent to their achievement. SSN’s Inclusive Education Program have to follow the national curriculum and public examinations. A total of 2,027 secondary schools and 4,175 primary schools and pre-schools involved in this Inclusive Education Program (Ministry of Education, 2018). Table III shows the number of Students with Special Needs (SSN) by program and category of disability for 2018.

Table III: Number of Students with Special Needs (SSN) by program and category of disability for 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Mainstream SESP</th>
<th>SEIP</th>
<th>IEP</th>
<th>Overall total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Sec</td>
<td>Hig</td>
<td>Pre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4,493</td>
<td>3,259</td>
<td>853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Physical Disability</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2,345</td>
<td>2,316</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Disabilities</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hearing Disability</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vision Disability</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Speech Disabilities</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>8,383</td>
<td>7,351</td>
<td>975</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table III, it is clear that the Special Needs Students with Learning Disabilities category records the highest number than other disabilities. Special needs people with learning disabilities are among those who have intelligence that is not consistent with biological age. Individuals classified in this category are those who are suffering from late global development, down syndrome, intellectual disabilities, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia) (Department of Social Welfare, 2012). These special needs with learning disabilities people or formerly known as ‘retarded’ have an IQ of 80-90. Students with learning disabilities are students that experiencing a malfunction in the central nervous system which make them unable to understand, write, speak, and solve mathematical problems (Sleeter, 2010).

At school, most SSN with learning disabilities are placed in Special Education Integration Program. An SSN with learning disabilities who are eligible to follow the national curriculum is placed in Inclusive Education Program and will be sitting for their UPSR, PT3 and SPM. Meanwhile, for SSN with learning disabilities in Special Education Integration Program, they follow the Standard Curriculum for Primary and Secondary School of Special Education where they will not be sitting for their UPSR, PT3 and SPM. Special Education School Program for elementary school is more focused on the placement of students with hearing and sight impairment. Special Education School Program for a secondary school is focused on providing
opportunities for SSN to master vocational skills in preparation to equip themselves with employability skills before stepping into the job market. However, although the Special Needs students are equipped with vocational education, some studies show they still unable to secure a job.

UNEMPLOYMENT OF THE SPECIAL NEEDS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

The workforce that has mastering academic skills and employability skills is a good human capital (Ismail, 2000). Employers are individuals who are responsible to employ according to the needs, requirements, and criteria they desire. People with special needs could never be isolated from a situation in which they must compete with normal people in order to get a job. The inability of people with special needs to win the hearts of employers to hire them will keep them from entering the job market and be termed unemployed. According to Datuk Azizah Mohd Dun, Deputy Minister of Women, until December 2014, only 4,147 persons with disabilities managed to get a job in which 3,741 people were in the public sector and 406 people were in the private sector (BERNAMA, 2015). This number is very small compared to the overall number of disabled persons in Malaysia.

To provide a right of rights-based concept to the disabled, 685 Disabled Act 2008 came into force on July 7, 2008 (Department of Social Welfare, 2008) in which the government’s policy through circular no. 10/1988 establishes that at least one percent of jobs in the public sector is allocated to persons with disabilities (PWDs). This policy in effect was revised in a circular No.3 / 2008 which stated that each agency and the Appointing Authority (AA) need to employ the disabled as many as one percent of the total number of employees in the agency subject to the application by the disabled, job fit and facilities (the Department of Public Service, 2008). However, this policy has not achieved its target. According to Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, based on the report of the Public Service Commission (PSC), a total of 3,800 people with disabilities or representing 0.31 per cent of the disabled has been appointed as an employee in the public service in various positions until the end of 2018 (Halid, 2019). It turns out that the number of disabled who successfully assumed the position in the public sector is very small compared to the total number of registered PWDs in the Social Welfare Department until 2018 with a total of 472,228 people. The situation is rather alarming and raises questions about the marketability of people with disabilities because although the number of the people with disabilities reaches hundreds of thousands, it still could not meet the quota of one percent of jobs allocated to them.

According to the Ministry of Human Resources (2019), there were 3,059 applications from the various categories of disabled persons for the job in the public sector from different categories of people with disabilities position in the public sector but only as many as 27 people received the job. Of the 27 people who have successfully selected,
none of them were from the categories of learning disabilities, although the number of the disabled with learning disabilities applying was 231 people. It shows that there has been a mismatch of skills from MBK learning disabilities with the skills required from the public sector job market resulting in no suitable job for this special group being offered. A study conducted by Tune & Khoo (2013) on more than 478 people with disabilities, shows that people with learning disabilities records the largest percentage of disabled respondents who do not work which is 53.5 percent. This is followed by hearing disabilities of 28.2 percent and with visual disabilities by 13.1 percent. Disabled people with learning disabilities said that they are not working because they have low educational qualifications and not very independent. Without academic qualifications and employability skills that match with labour market needs, people with learning disabilities will certainly face difficulty in getting jobs and these will contribute to the rising unemployment of the disabilities in Malaysia.

In order to encourage the government to work with special needs, the government has provided an allowance of RM 300 per month for disabled or disabled workers. According to the Department of Social Welfare (2018), the number of employees who work and receive disability allowance for disabled workers in 2017 was 78,536 people. This amount is quite smaller compared to the overall number of disabled persons registered with the Social Welfare Department in 2017 of a total of 453,258 people. It showed that only 17.3 percent disabled people managed to penetrate the job market for the year 2017. Table IV shows the number of employees with disabilities or disabled persons receiving disability allowance in 2016, 2017 and 2018 compared to the overall number of people with special needs or disabilities registered with the Social Welfare Department.

Table IV: Number of handicapped or disabled workers who receive an allowance of disabled workers compared to the total number of people with special needs or disabilities registered with the Social Welfare Department for the years of 2016 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Number of people with disabilities registered with the Social Welfare Department (people)</td>
<td>409,269</td>
<td>453,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Number of people with disabilities receiving disability workers allowances (people)</td>
<td>73,056</td>
<td>78,536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from the Ministry of Education (2017) shows that the number of disabled with learning disabilities who graduated in 2017 is 67. This is a small proportion compared to the total number of people with learning disabilities identified with the Social Welfare Department by 2016, which is 143,334 (Department of Social Welfare, 2016). This shows that most of the disabled people with learning disabilities have not finished school and graduated at the age of 19 years (2 additional years compared to students in the mainstream), that is in the youth category. According to YPKDT (2012) in Samian, Md Ali and Buntat (2013), the State of Johor in particular, up to September 2013, there were 201 applicants with disabilities presents in the Family Development
Foundation Darul Takzim (YPKDT). Of these, 80 per cent or 161 potential PWDs are able to work. Of the number stated, the disabled that could potentially work by category, classified as deaf (83), physical problems (52), learning disabilities (14), sight impairment (40), speech difficulty (4), mental illness (4) and others (1). However, statistics from YPKDT shows that as of September 2013, only 11 PWDs have been successfully placed on the job market based on the data provided by employers that offering employment opportunities to the disabled people (YPKDT, 2012)

A study by Mohamed Yusof, Mohd Ali and Mohd Salleh (2014) on the marketability of vocational school graduates with special needs found that 69 of the 99 respondents were employed, while 30 students are still out of work. Out of 69 students who had worked only 24 people working in fields related to the skills they learned in vocational schools. Meanwhile, the other 45 students or 65 per cent of respondents were able to penetrate the job market but not within the scope of the skills they learned in vocational schools. Of the total, 30 students are learning disabled students, 13 more students with hearing problems and 2 students with vision problems. Of the 30 students currently unemployed, 20 are students with learning disabilities and 10 are students with hearing problems.

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that people with special needs for learning disabilities are still facing unemployment. The total number of people with special needs reaches 172,293 people by 2018 which is a very large number and if this unemployment issue is not addressed, it will affect the society, the community and in particular the sustainability of this group.

**UNEMPLOYMENT EFFECT ON THE SPECIAL NEEDS PEOPLE**

The issue of unemployment concerning people with special needs will affect the individual self, family, society, and country. Without work, they will have no livelihood and the income for their basic needs as well as funding for their health care. According to Heron and Murray (2003), people with disabilities are willing to work and need to (i) Obtain livelihoods (ii) Enjoying social relationships (iii) Self-esteem. Unemployment means that they are unable to earn a living on their own and have to rely on other family members. Without livelihoods, people with disabilities will certainly not be able to improve their living standards. This causes them to be afflicted with poverty. The analysis of 14 household surveys in 13 developing countries, found that people with disabilities are a group of adults who are poorer than average households (Filmer, 2008). The relationship between disability and poverty is irrefutable. This may be closely related to the cost of living is high among those with special needs where the money is channelled to health care, transport, aid equipment, special assistance, and home (Tibble, 2005). This situation will cause the inner family members to feel overburdened and further contribute to misapprehensions among family members.
In addition, unemployment also affects the social psychology of the disabled, especially to their self-concept where they will find themselves unable to do any work. According to Ramli (2010), self-concept can be defined as self-assessment of a person’s ability to self-assess whether positive or negative. Through working, they are given the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and contributions, thus contributing to a positive attitude and increasing their self-esteem (Heron & Murray, 2003). Failure to secure a job will make them feel undervalued, excluded, and marginalized. In turn, people with disabilities will be depressed and feel lonely because unemployment makes them less social (Heron & Murray, 2003).

Unemployment also affects the attitude of people with disabilities to some degree. Disappointment can create a situation of discontent in themselves and can lead to emotional disorders that cause these people to get caught up with the symptoms of immorality such as stealing, fighting, suicide, drug abuse, rape and so on. According to Fogden, Thomas, Daffern, and Ogloff (2016), the rate of violent crimes and sexual abuse among individuals with intellectual problems is higher than that of individuals without intellectual problems. The rate of violent crimes by individuals with intellectual problems is three times higher than individual without intellectual problems while the rate of sex crimes by individuals with intellectual problems is approaching 8 times higher than in individuals without intellectual problems. According to Fazel, Xenitidis and Powell (2008), through a systematic review of 10 studies involving 11,969 inmates, 0.5 per cent to 1.5 per cent of the prisoners are diagnosed with intellectual disability. Some studies show that people with special needs of learning disabilities tend to experience behavioural problems. This study was supported by Awang Noh (2002) who found that 80 per cent of special needs students with learning disabilities experience issues such as aggressive behaviour, passive, emotional problems, socially negative, speech problems, lack self-management, gross motor and fine motor problems. This situation is worrying for society as the negative behaviour of people with special needs affects the community, social harmony, and a peaceful environment.

Unemployment among people with special needs also has a negative impact on the country’s growth. Vocational education applied in the educational system for people with special needs should be entrusted with the provision of employment to this special group. According to the World Health Survey 2010, an estimated 10 per cent of Malaysia’s population is the people with special needs. It indicates that of Malaysia’s population of 28 million people, 2.8 million of whom are people with special needs and if this great value is not supervised, the waste of manpower could harm the country’s economic growth.

Unemployment among those with special needs for learning disabilities has a negative impact on the lives of these particular groups, society, and the country in
general. This problem will escalate year after year if it is not resolved as people with learning disabilities increases every year.

CONCLUSION

From the above data, the issue of unemployment among people with special needs, especially those with learning disabilities is a reality and not a fantasy. This issue needs to be taken seriously and resolved. In fact, employability skills are seen as an aspect that needs to be emphasized in order to ensure that these groups succeed in penetrating the job market and thus addressing the issue of unemployment. The views of the various parties including employers, people with disabilities and educators with disabilities on the employability skills required by these groups, need to be addressed and tailored to produce individuals with special needs who are able to work well, compete with normal individuals and successfully enter the job market.

References:


