Inclusion Setting for Disabilities in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Issues and Challenges in Disabilities Research

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ABSTRACT
Department of Higher Education Malaysia has launched the guideline that emphasis on disabilities to promote inclusivity setting at higher education institutions. The idea is basically to highlighted the effort by leaving no one behind. Nowadays, students with disabilities facing many challenges and hardships to adapt and adopt with the current institutions setting including physical and non-physical aspects. This paper intended to do a systematic review of the disabilities research for the past 20 years. The information and knowledge of this review are believed to help in assisting the higher education institutions providing a more comprehensive environment for the disable students which later helps them persist and remain in the institution.

Keywords: Disabilities, Higher Education, Inclusion

1. INTRODUCTION
Providing all-encompassing access to classes and physical spaces which include programs, admission, and events within the university’s setting can be referred to as inclusion [1]. The social movement to participate in people with disabilities has kept increasing which now becoming a cornerstone for social policy and the voice for them to has better equality [2]. However, this movement is quite recent in Malaysia, the movement started in the 1960s where an introduction to community-based rehabilitation programs has been proposed Malaysian Ministry of Health to shifted from custodial care to deinstitutionalisation. This attempt categorise as a failure because the people with disabilities were seen from the perspective of the provider instead of users in terms of participating in decision-making, policy formulation, resource allocation, and service provision [3]. During the Incheon Strategies to Make the Rights Real for Person with Disabilities in 2008, the Malaysian government took a step forward by introduced and rectifying the Person with Disabilities Act. This commitment showed Malaysia's seriousness in progressing to fulfilling the rights of people with disabilities while improving their life quality.

2. OVERVIEW ON THE ISSUE AND CHALLENGES OF DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)
There are many issues and challenges experienced by students with disabilities in HE despite the efforts made by the Governments. Some of the limitations that are faced by students with disabilities are due to the conventional requirements by their institutions such as ‘fitness’ to perform duties. This is one of the challenges by the HE itself in accepting students with severe mobility, visual, speech, or hearing impairments related to health courses [4]. Despite that, students with disabilities also faced challenges when they finished their studies and started working where their employers might have negative thoughts on their abilities to work [5] as well as their participation rates and wages [6,7]. This issue had also been discussed by Johnson et al. [8] where they...
reported that normally employers have no issues with those with a physical disability or mild disabilities but were not keen with emotional disabilities or more complex. Apart from that, many scholars have also highlighted that when students with disabilities finished their secondary school, the internal barrier for them to pursue further education in higher institutions and employment is due to lack of personal motivation, side-effects of medication and physical health problems [9-11]. With the increasing concerns and numbers of enrolment of students with disabilities in Higher Education institutions, the concept of inclusivity is needed. This is to ensure that those segments were not left behind and the ambition to achieve inclusive education is a success.

2.1 ‘Leaving No One Behind’: The efforts done by the Higher Education (HE) in Malaysia to Support Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In realizing inclusivity in HE for students with disabilities, inclusive education must be seen as a tool for educational equality, capability, and well-being of these students [12]. The pledge to ‘leaving no one behind’ is one of the initiatives that has been highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in which to advance inclusive development for all. It also highlighted that the societies will never achieve the SDGs without the full participation of everyone including people with disabilities. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres added that the contributions of 1.5 billion people could not be ignored or marginalized. He also added that many countries are yet still lacking in the provision of essential services for people with disabilities, especially those with poverty background. Apart from that, it is also important in making sure that persons with disabilities are visible in policymaking especially when it comes to education.

The need to recognise persons with disabilities and their potential as contributors to society is vital to enhance the current efforts and rights in achieving inclusivity at all levels. However, as to date, the number of people with disabilities in Malaysia is not complete as registering them is not legally compulsory. This is also agreed by Page and Islam [13] where he mentioned that due to the non-updated data several challenges had occurred especially among the service providers and users itself. Nevertheless, statistics by the Ministry of Education (MoE) as indicated in Table 1 shows a steady increase in the number of students with disabilities in Malaysian public universities, although there is a slight decline between the year 2017 to 2018 enrolment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Enrolment (Bachelor)</th>
<th>Students with Disabilities Enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>340,538</td>
<td>1742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>324,894</td>
<td>1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>322,507</td>
<td>2444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>332,023</td>
<td>2139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>338,563</td>
<td>1874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is unarguably that education plays a significant role in developing both individual and country. This is because education not only crucial in developing intellectual and personal quality, it is also an influential factor in job employment opportunity. Singal et al. [14] clarify that people with disabilities also need education to enable them not only to read and write but also involved in a more complex environment such as in decision making and finding a job. Additionally, he also mentioned that with education, people with disabilities can acquire a better life, respect by others, and also gain interpersonal skills. Due to these circumstances, academic world philosophy has changed from just a “disciplinary research” to “pedagogic research” [15]. In realising the importance of education that promotes inclusivity, Terzi [12] stated that inclusive education must act as a tool for educational equality, capability equality, justice, and well-being of students with disabilities.

Not only that, any related services and programs should be also introduced and established to ensure children with disabilities can be included in society such as community-based rehabilitation programs, teacher development initiatives, inclusive schools, and programs to facilitate education [16]. A developing country like Malaysia still encounters some difficulties in implementing comprehensive and inclusive education for children with disabilities despite having international and regional instruments such as UN’s conventions and ASEAN’s declarations. The reasons behind these difficulties are due to mistranslation of educational philosophy for children with disabilities,
conflicting definitions of disability by different agencies, and discriminatory policy [17]. Hence, the existence of every instrument and strategies whether it is global or regional needs to be treated and adopted properly in the local context to ensure those tools do not function as a nice book on the bookshelf.

3. METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, the author conducted a systematic review by gathering and analysing papers that were published online for the past 20 years related to disabilities research in higher education from various sources. From the year 2000 until 2019, the author analysed 19 papers from 12 different reputable journals that mainly focused on issues and challenges related to disabilities research or study. The articles used for the study were gathered through SAGE, ProQuest, Science Direct, and Emerald Sight platform through the systematic review process (SLR) as proposed by [18]. The trends in the publication that is related to disabilities research in higher education from the year 2000 until 2019 were shown in Figure 1 below. In continuity of the process, the critical literature content has been done to understand the gap arises on the disability research from the 19 papers. The gap can be seen through the key findings and variables that been found by the all the authors in the last 20 years.

![Figure 1: Summary of trends in publication related with disabilities research in higher education from the year 2000 until 2019](image)

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the importance of disability studies and its relationship with higher education perspective is vital, especially within the Malaysian context. This is to ensure that better protection and awareness of students with disabilities can be implemented either through the enhancement of physical aspect, academician or through their curricular activities. Additionally, disability studies have also become a crucial and important discipline due to its complexities regarding issues and challenges involving disabled people [19]. In Malaysia, the increasing number of students with disabilities shows that there is a need for the government and respective agencies to highlight their needs once they step into the institution of higher education. With that in mind, studies on disability should be done progressively in order to get ideas and sufficient information on their needs in higher education level. Table 2 shows the articles on the disabilities research for the past 20 years published in peer-reviewed journals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Key Research Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Rajohane Matschedisho [22]</td>
<td>Access to higher education for disabled students in South Africa: a contradictory conjunction of benevolence, rights and the social model of disability.</td>
<td>Disability &amp; Society</td>
<td>Disability rights, political commitment and legacy of benevolence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Getzel [23]</td>
<td>Addressing the persistence and retention of students with disabilities in higher education: Incorporating key strategies and supports on campus.</td>
<td>Exceptionality</td>
<td>Self-determination skills, assistive technologies, career development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Sharma et al. [24]</td>
<td>Impact of training on pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns about inclusive education and sentiments about persons with disabilities.</td>
<td>Disability &amp; Society</td>
<td>Attitudes, sentiments and concerns, teacher self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Vickerman &amp; Blundell [26]</td>
<td>Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education.</td>
<td>Disability &amp; Society</td>
<td>Facilitate barrier free curricula and embedding of personal development planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Mullins &amp; Preyde [27]</td>
<td>The lived experience of students with an invisible disability at a Canadian university.</td>
<td>Disability &amp; Society</td>
<td>Invisible disability, organisation barriers and nature of disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Milic Babic &amp; Dowling [29]</td>
<td>Social support, the presence of barriers and ideas for the future from students with disabilities in the higher education system in Croatia.</td>
<td>Disability &amp; Society</td>
<td>Equality of opportunity in HE, disability awareness for academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Heiman et al. [30]</td>
<td>Access and perceived ICT usability among students with disabilities attending higher education institutions.</td>
<td>Education and Information Technologies</td>
<td>Difficulties in coping with academic skills using ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Morina [31]</td>
<td>Inclusive education in higher education: challenges and opportunities.</td>
<td>European Journal of Special Needs Education</td>
<td>Opportunities in inclusive education, designing policies for inclusive settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Hove et al.[32]</td>
<td>Students with disabilities in higher education.</td>
<td>Social Inclusion</td>
<td>Inclusive education in HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Pacheco et al. [33]</td>
<td>Transition 2.0: Digital technologies, higher education, and vision impairment.</td>
<td>The Internet and Higher Education</td>
<td>Technology implementation in disabilities transition to HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Los Santos et al. [34]</td>
<td>Determining Academic Success in Students with Disabilities in Higher Education.</td>
<td>International Journal of Higher Education</td>
<td>Relationship between university’s facilities and services in determining the student with disabilities academics success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the discussion above has the potential to make incremental improvements in disability studies, considering a universal research design also has the potential in remaking all the facets in the research process [37]. Incorporating the perspectives of students with disabilities in the design process will eventually help researchers in developing more variant instruments, generate and increase interest in participation and also represent findings that could better enhance the experiences of students with disabilities. Hackman and Rauscher [38] in their study also highlighted that universal design has become a common part of classroom instruction where researchers can take into account its principles to ensure that data collection instruments are fully accessible. Through this process, students with disabilities were not only acting as passive conveyors but actively involved in multiple phases of the academics process. It is suggested that students with disabilities should benefit from their participation in the study be it in the classroom or doing their curricular activities.

The findings also identified the gaps that lie between the lived experiences of students with disabilities and what they value in higher education. In general, issues such as mutual respect should be taken into accounts such as in terms of mobility inter and intra university and the usability of physical spaces. These aspects should be well addressed by disability services in HE as to guarantee equal capabilities and well-being were fairly given to all students, especially for those with disabilities. Apart from that, while academic staff trying to make adjustments for examinations, the teaching experiences are also vital through the support in tutoring services. Training all the lecturers in disability awareness and the adaptation of teaching styles is essential in implementing the universal learning design.

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Although the discussion regarding disability is not a new one in higher education, and urgency rises to undergo rigorous research in order to portray a better perspective towards policy and practices in HE where the emergence of the student with disabilities is growing as their number in university intakes keep in increasing. The author hopes that this paper attempted in providing the HE community the outline of research and basic information related to disabilities in HE, with a specific focus on the key findings of the previous research is achieved. This paper intended to initiate and suggest possible ways in expanding the existing theories and models of higher education students, environments, and processes that can be further used in developing a guideline that can be implemented especially in HE. The effort is plausible by focusing on research regarding access pathways, learning outcomes, transition, and Universal Design that will have an immediate practical benefit to both the research community and students with disabilities.

This situation will spark a new and greater knowledge about the disabilities, the institutions that aim to serve them, and the research approaches needed to represent their experiences authentically as the first step toward greater equity and inclusion in higher education. To conclude, it is without a doubt that Malaysia has shown a positive development in providing a better education for children and adolescents with disabilities. However, there are still issues and challenges that need to be faced by the respective agencies and stakeholders as well as the Ministry of Higher Education, academic staff, and university management. These include unstructured programs, poor infrastructure, and technological accessibility, financial constraint, low level of readiness among special and general educators, and individual self-conflict. Acknowledging these challenges will further help those responsible to effectively plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate the steps taken in a way to achieve inclusivity for students.
with disabilities especially at HE level.

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