

# Adult Learning for People with Disabilities in Malaysia: Provisions and Services

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## ABSTRACT

*In Malaysia, the campaign for lifelong learning has drawn the attention of the public to recognize the need of providing informal and non-formal learning for the adults. In coherence with the normalization principle which has become the guide-line for providing not only services but also education to people with disabilities. Being aware of this scenario, the Malaysian Department of Social Welfare as one of the responsible government agencies for this people has implemented a few strategies for this vulnerable group in the society. Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss the issues and problems with various types of institutions which provide education as part of lifelong learning for the respective group. It was found that lifelong learning is not something new in the special education of the adult with disabilities. However, the lifelong learning program has strengthened the efforts in providing education for this disadvantaged group in the society. This paper also discuss the role of the Malaysian Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Higher Learning and other various voluntary organizations which have established education programs to fulfill the education needs of this disadvantaged group. No doubt, there are a few problems that need to be catered for example the usage of language instruction, financial, cooperation between agencies etc.*

## INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multi-racial country with a population of 26.64 million, comprising of 58.1% Malays and Pribumi, 32.1% Chinese, 8.3% Indians and 1% other ethnic groups (Department of Statistics, 2006). One of the unique features about Malaysia is that the multi-racial population practices various religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity. Under the Federal Constitution, Islam is the official religion of Malaysia but there is freedom of worship. The Malay Language is the national language of the country. However, the people are free to use their mother tongue and other languages (The Charleston Advisor, 1999).

People with disabilities in Malaysia can be considered as one of the most vulnerable of the minority group in the Malaysian population. According to WHO, 7% of the population in any country suffers from disability and around 2% would need some form of rehabilitation services. According to the statistics from the Department of Social Welfare, the registered number of disabled people stood at 197,519 (Department of Social Welfare, 2006) and the breakdown according ethnic groups is shown on table 1.

**Table 1: Number of People with Disabilities According to Ethnic Group 2003 – 2006**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Malays	79,837	91,162	105,163	123,245
Chinese	28,956	32,408	35,104	39,519
Indians	12,396	14,246	15,995	18,346
Pribumi Peninsular	246	283	317	354
Pribumi Sabah	7,515	8,266	9,130	10,240
Pribumi Sarawak	3,226	3,617	4,037	4,682
Others	479	635	709	1,133
<b>Total</b>	<b>132,154</b>	<b>150,617</b>	<b>170,455</b>	<b>197,519</b>

Source: Department of Social Welfare 2006

With the increasing number of disabled people, the Malaysian government is not keeping numb to provide the relevant and quality education for this disadvantaged group. It is the government's policy that *“education for persons with disabilities should form an integral part of national educational planning, curriculum development and school organization”* (Persons with Disabilities Act 2002). Therefore, it is unlawful for any educational authority to discriminate the people with disabilities by refusing or failing to accept the person's application for admission as a student. The educational authority should also not discriminate against a student on the grounds of the student's disability by denying or limiting the relevant authorities' access to any benefits provided by the educational authority; by expelling the student or by subjecting the student to any other detriment.

In order to ensure that quality education is accessible to the disabled people, the Malaysian government also provides support facilities such as hospitals, discounts on travel fares, exemption of road tax, free travel documents, additional income tax relief, discounts on excise duty for purchase of national vehicles and discounts for the purchase of low cost houses. They also receive other benefits such as free medical consultation, medication and hospitalization according to their needs. Therefore, special attention is given all kinds of *“disabilities”*. In Malaysia the breakdown of disabled people are 12,874 visually impaired, 15,876 hearing impaired, 29,469 physically handicapped and 28,129 mentally impaired (Department of Social Welfare, 2006).

**Table 2: Number of Registered People with Disabilities in Malaysia 2002 - 2006**

<b>Types of Disabilities</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Visually Impaired	14,738	14,154	15,364	16,211	18,258
Hearing Impaired	21,981	22,728	24,712	26,470	29,522
Physical Handicapped	41,311	45,356	51,090	58,371	66,250
Mentally Impaired	43,042	49,340	-	-	-
Learning Disabilities	-	-	57,483	66,906	76,619
Cerebral Palsy	-	-	34	623	887
Miscellaneous	1,017	1,077	1,934	4,335	5,983
<b>Total</b>	<b>122,089</b>	<b>132,655</b>	<b>150,617</b>	<b>172,916</b>	<b>197,519</b>

Source: Department of Social Welfare 2006

The awareness of providing education for people with disabilities in Western countries has embraced a diverse and complex range of services for this group of people in Malaysia. They are facing tremendous problems in maintaining their life in the future. Therefore, those sympathizers within the

community such as academicians, parents, social workers, and others felt that all categories of handicapped children need to be taken care off in guiding them towards leading a normal life and functioning as a normal person in the society. As a matter of fact, the concern about the problems faced by this distinct group had initiated the acceptance of normalization services in Malaysia. In Europe, normalization principle has been the guide-line for providing education and services for people with disabilities (Berg, 1991). The development in Western countries has drawn the attention of the country's Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Education and various non-governmental organizations alike (Samsiah, 1988). The concept of normalization which has been accepted as an advocacy and protection for handicapped people since it's introduction in 1980's (Isa, 1998). However, the interpretation has been translated in different ways to suit the Malaysian society. He wrote in length about normalization principle in Malaysia that "..... is aim to allow the handicapped people to provide education, medical benefit, social acceptable in the society and financial support so that it would enable them to adapt themselves in the normal society by utilizing the ability that they had possessed".

The introduction of normalization principles has affected a lot changes in the provision and services for the disabled people (Wong, 2000). This can be seen in the *Memorandum on Legislation for Education of Individuals with Disabilities* on October 14 2000 by Bar Council Malaysia. The effort to help this group of people was followed by a proposal titled "*Persons with Disabilities Act*" which was then submitted to the parliament for endorsement. Then, the campaign for lifelong learning, which was launched on Oct 10, 2004 has revitalizes the spirit and drive towards how the public should recognize the need of providing informal and non-formal learning for the disabled adult (Malaysian Chinese Association, 2006). The concept of lifelong learning can come in many shapes, objectives and communities across the country's agenda but it shares a number of common characteristics such as to provide learning opportunities to the adult in numerous contexts such as at work, at home and through leisure activities, not just through formal channels but also informal. In Malaysia, the concept was inspired from the report prepared by Adult Education Bureau in 1965 (Chapman, 2006). It was stated that "*learning doesn't stop at the age of children and teenager; it should accompany a man for his whole life. Learning should be done in this way to satisfy the perpetual needs of individual and society*". A report from UNESCO (1972) mentioned that once again lifelong learning was emphasized. The report also indicated that "*traditional education system is not complete as it only emphasizes on elite education. In fact, education is neither set up solely for elite, nor just only for specified ages. It should be integrated into the whole society and everyone's life*". Therefore, one of the target groups for assuring access to lifelong learning in Malaysia is the people with special needs (Prime Minister's Department, 2006).

In Malaysia, the government has recognized the lifelong learning and provision of learning opportunities for people with disabilities especially the adult. To justify the government's seriousness, the National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 has been set up (Department of Social Welfare, 2007). Many bodies are now offering learning opportunities to adult learners but there is no one policy unifying their programs. As such, the National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 launched on September 3, 2007 states the urgent need for Malaysia to have a clear, coherent and comprehensive policy on lifelong learning policy. The Government continued to provide care and support for the disabled people through various programs such as campaigns from the voluntary organization, offering postgraduate programs in the universities and providing financial support

Looking at the normalization and lifelong learning concepts, people with disabilities should have gained a lot of benefits especially educational programs. Generally, both concepts strive for the right of adult learning. With this effort, these disabled people will be more determined to lead and experience a

normal life. This approach could also give a positive implication on social integration within the society. Definitely there will be issues and challenges in the implementation of the programs and problems that requires attention to be solved.

### ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The disability rate among adult and elderly people tends to be high due to a high incidence of health related problems. In Malaysia, almost 13,515 adults (male = 8,402 and female = 5,113) live with a physical, sensory, intellectual or mental health disability significant enough to make a difference in their daily lives (Table 3). Therefore, issues and challenges in providing education need to be reviewed so that certain measures can be taken into consideration in assessing the needs of disabled adults in Malaysia.

**Table 3: Number of People with Disabilities According Age, Types of Disabilities and Gender 2006**

Age (years)	Visual		Hearing		Physical		Learning Disabilities		Cerebral Palsy		Misc	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
19 - 25	162	100	246	192	708	315	532	400	53	34	115	113
26 - 35	172	97	246	183	889	475	429	369	37	29	91	82
36 - 45	192	124	180	155	945	401	264	219	23	22	119	50
46 - 59	267	163	249	189	1161	552	279	270	72	40	110	79
Above 60	116	94	128	86	492	208	69	46	12	4	44	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>1049</b>	<b>805</b>	<b>4195</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1573</b>	<b>1304</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>346</b>
	<i>Male (M) = 8402</i>						<i>Female (F) = 5113</i>					

Source: Department of Social Welfare 2006

### Legislation

In general, the “Persons with Disabilities Act 2002” is a specific piece of legislation for disabled people in Malaysia to be protected and advocated. Constitutionally, a disabled person may claim his/her rights under Article 8 of the Federal Constitution that guarantees equality to all persons unless conditions expressly authorized by the constitution. The act also covers any discrimination against a person simply on the grounds of disability in the areas of employment, education, housing, transportation, business undertakings, sports, recreational activities, access to public places, access to public facilities and services. If we analyze Part 2 of the “Education in the Persons with Disabilities Act”, there is no single word mentioning the importance of adult learning to the disabled people. In other words, only the provision of education for children with disabilities is clearly stated in the act. Unlike children with disabilities, the government is really concerned in providing education for the children. This can be seen in 1985 whereby the Malaysian government has revised the “Children and Young People Act 1947” which states clearly the advocacy and protection for the children (Muhamad & Kamarulzaman, 1988). In 1996, the Malaysian Education Act was amended to fulfill the sufficient needs not only for normal children but also for the disabled children to meet the challenges in the new millennium. However, the disabled adult is still lucky because the efforts of providing education for them is based on the memorandum on Legislation for Education of Individuals with Disabilities proposed in 2000 by Bar Council Malaysia. The memorandum stated that if education is important for the well being of normal people, it is even more important for individuals with disabilities for their rehabilitation and to promote some dignity in their lives. “Education” is referred to in a therapeutic context and may not be confined to academic teaching thus requiring trained teachers who are interested in challenges to the profession. The scenario does not only happen in Malaysia but also in Japan, Korea, Thailand and other countries in Asia.

Meanwhile, the Government is also formulating a policy on lifelong learning for the adults, whereby the goals and strategy to fit the country's socio-economic objectives will be considered (Ruslan, 2004). Other areas to be considered include identifying groups such as rural and urban poor, pribumi communities in Sabah and Sarawak, aborigines and people with disabilities to enhance their learning skills as well as to provide them with quality and flexible learning opportunities. The government is very serious in implementing the lifelong learning programs therefore it is listed as one of the five items on the critical agenda under the National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 (Chapman, 2006).

However, in recent years there have been many criticisms from the public and handicapped in Malaysia expressing their dissatisfaction on the services provided by the government. It is unusual in Malaysia to see the disabled people voicing their rights and asking for support and better treatment from the society. Unlike in the UK and other countries in Europe, this vulnerable group can voice up their opinions and criticisms openly where such privileges are rare in Malaysia. Due to this reason the disabled in the UK are being provided with comprehensive facilities such as education, housing, financial support, transport and other essential benefits which are not available in Malaysia.

### **The Establishment of Learning Institution under Department of Social Welfare**

The Department of Social Welfare under Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development is the governmental agency which deals mainly with provisions and services for disabled people. It also administers, under the Persons with Disabilities Act 2002 for their protection and reintegration into the society. According to Hanimah (2007), the Department of Social Welfare has set up various institutions to fulfill the education needs of the disabled people in Malaysia such as Centre of Sheltered Workshop, State Home for Disabled, Industrial Training and Rehabilitation Centres and Community-based Rehabilitation Centres.

**Table 4: Name of Institutions, Institutions and Students/Trainees 2006**

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>No. of Institutions</b>	<b>No. of trainees</b>
State Home for Disabled	7	802
Sheltered Workshop	12	253
Industrial Training and Rehabilitation	1	45
Community-based Rehabilitation	313	8453
<b>Total</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>9533</b>

Source: Department of Social Welfare 2006

As shown on table 4, the number of these institutions is still very small except for the Community-based Rehabilitation. Therefore, the government should consider a few things such as increasing the number of learning and training institutions for the disabled, providing technological changes and the economical needs of the country.

### ***State Home for Disabled People***

The first institution of State Home for Disabled was established in 1947 by the Ministry of Social Welfare and the institutions are now known as the *Taman Sinar Harapan* (Centre of Bright Future or TSH). In 1978, the institution was designated for the care and training of mentally handicapped people. Until 1983, the institution provided care for all categories of mentally handicapped people with low to average functioning abilities. Those who were not educable were only given care and treatment. Since 1984, the institutions have been gazetted as a shelter home for the needy handicapped people. To date, the

institutions have about 802 disabled people of various races (Table 5), various types of disabilities such as cerebral palsy, Down's Syndrome, hydrocephalus, mental retardation, speech defects and deafness.

**Table 5: Numberf Trainees in State Home Institution (TSH) 2002 - 2006**

<i>Taman Sinar Harapan (TSH)</i>	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
TSH Jubli	159	162	165	177	177
TSH Tampoi	95	111	113	93	93
TSH Kuala Kubu Bharu	195	197	191	185	185
TSH Kuala Terengganu	57	63	66	74	74
TSH Seremban	111	116	115	127	127
TSH Cheras			3	54	54
TSH Jitra			20	92	92
<b>Jumlah</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>802</b>

Source: Department of Social Welfare 2006

Obviously, these homes were equipped with facilities that provide physiotherapy, occupational therapy, music therapy, medical rehabilitation as well as counseling to help residents lead a meaningful live. According Hanimah (2007) there are 7 TSH and all are running under the administration of Department of Social Welfare. In fact, it is part of the institution's principle to prepare them with vocational and training careers.

The institutions accepted the disabled from both sexes between the ages of 14 to 25 as resident trainees while those between the ages of 26 to 30 as day–trainees. Counseling and career guidance, education, recreational activities, medical care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy are available at the centers.

#### ***Bangi Industrial Training and Rehabilitation Centre***

Department of Social Welfare has set up an Industrial Training and Rehabilitation Centre at Bangi, Selangor. The main purpose is to provide services for physically disabled people with vocational training and medical rehabilitation. This institution is appropriate for the disabled adult whereby the admission requirement is only for those between 18 – 40 years old. They must also be self-independent and able to benefit from the training. Those who are qualified for admission at the Vocational Courses will be offered with vocational training IT – Computer (MLVK), Fashion Design & Tailoring (MLVK), Electrical (MLVK), Electronics Prosthetic and Orthotics Multimedia Wheelchair Manufacturing, Pre-Vocational Training, Electronic Computer Painting, Sewing Medical Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Ward Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy. This is the one and only industrial training and Rehabilitation Centre in Malaysia (Hanimah, 2007).

#### ***Sheltered Workshop (Bengkel Daya)***

According to Department of Social Welfare (2006), Sheltered Workshop of Disabled is a Social Welfare Department's institution and the first institution was set up in 1979. The institutions are designed to give people with disabilities opportunities leading to dignity, self worth and socialization amongst their peers. These workshops provide encouragement, supervision and jobs that PWD will find exciting and challenging, the pride of accomplishing meaningful work, compatible peers and the all-important salary. In short, the rewards of a successful career. A survey done by the researcher found that there are 12 Sheltered Workshop of Disabled established in Malaysia and the number of trainees at any Sheltered

Workshop in Malaysia are very small (as shown on table 6). The objective of the institution is to create employment opportunities for the disabled and at least to help the group to be economically independent.

**Table 6: The Enrolment of Trainees at Sheltered Workshop of Disabled (2002 – 2006)**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Workshop of Daya Klang	30	32	38	40	32
Workshop of Daya Sungai Petani *			32	34	35
Workshop of Lembah Kinta Gunung Rapat			20	20	23
Workshop of Mini Desa Rembau			15	16	20
Workshop of Pemulihan Kebajikan Marang			20	20	25
Workshop of Perusahaan Kecil Ayer Keroh			25	16	20
Workshop of Seri Perkasa Johol			16	18	21
Workshop of Seri Sarawak			25	28	30
Workshop of Seri Sembilan Mambau			15	15	18
Workshop of Sinar Suria			10	15	18
Workshop of Terlindung Semangat Maju Ipoh			12	13	15
Workshop of Semangat Maju Taiping			10	15	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>253</b>

Source: Department of Social Welfare 2006

However, to give a clear picture of the Sheltered Workshop of Disabled in Malaysia, a short study was done at Workshop of Daya Klang and Daya Sungai Petani. The institutions are residential institutions and only the registered disabled from both sexes between the ages of 18 and 45 are accepted as resident trainees. The majority of the trainees are people with learning disabilities. These institutions provide skills in various courses such as tailoring and bakery, sauce making, batik printing, sewing, welding and plant nursery so that they do not have to rely on welfare aid. However, the administrative board is committed in seeking helps and donation from local community and agencies. At present, with the support from local community and agencies, the institutions have received donations such as sewing machines, equipment such as a television, DVD player, book racks and game equipment for their Resource Centre. The trainees in these institutions come from various disabilities. Those who are working part-time at the workshop will be paid RM200 working allowance apart from the RM75 as their pocket money. Besides acquiring skills during the training, other facilities provided at these institutions are counseling and career guidance, education, recreational activities, medical care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy are available at the centers.

### ***Community-based Rehabilitation Center***

The community-based rehabilitation (CBR) in Malaysia is under the umbrella of the Department of Social Welfare. Efforts to integrate the disabled into the mainstream activities of society were intensified through the CBR program, which involved their families and communities and supported by relevant agencies such as health, education and social welfare. To date, there are 313 CBR centers established throughout the country benefiting 8,453 people with disabilities. CBR programs have proven to be cost effective and an effective alternative to institutional rehabilitation of people with disabilities. In this regard, additional CBR centers will be established during the Ninth Malaysia Plan period. These CBR centers will be developed as a one-stop service centre to provide a more comprehensive service for people with disabilities. Among the services to be provided are be disability screening and detection, referral services, dissemination of information on disabilities, vocational training and job placement, registration

of people with disabilities and advocacy. CBR is implemented through the combined efforts of disabled people themselves, their families and communities, and the appropriate health, education, vocational and social services.”

For an overview of the CBR in Malaysia, a survey was done in the state of Kelantan. Table 7 shows the latest statistics of CBR centers in Kelantan. To date, there are 26 CBR centers established and every district has not less than 2 centers. The number of disabled people enrolled in this program is 459. The study shows that every district has their own CBR centers supervised by the social workers from Department of Social Welfare. The centers accepted any kind of disabilities regardless of their sexes and age. The educational programs provided at these institutions are reading, writing, social skills, language development, career guidance, vocational training, religious and recreational activities.

**Table 7: Number of Community-based Rehabilitation Centers and Trainees 2006**

District	CBR Centers	Trainees/Students
Kota Bharu	3	48
Pasir Puteh	4	47
Jeli	2	35
Gua Musang	2	63
Machang	2	15
Bachok	2	44
Tanah Merah	3	36
Kuala Krai	1	5
Pasir Mas	1	24
Tumpat	6	142
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>459</b>

Source: Kelantan Department of Social Welfare 2007

Other than these institutions, the Department of Social Welfare has also set up institutions for disabled senior citizens such as *'Rumah Orang Tua Melarat'* (Old Folks Home) *'Rumah Bina Diri'* (Self-awareness Home). The objective is to protect the disabled senior citizens so that they can live in a protected and safe environment. Like other CBR, these institutions also provide facilities such as counseling, education, vocation, religious educational and recreational activities.

### **The Growth of Voluntary Organization**

The adult education of disabled people has drawn the attention of various non-governmental organizations in Malaysia. Recognizing the important role of NGOs in contributing to the social development of the country and enhancing the creation of caring societies, the Government continued to provide grants to assist them in implementing various community programs and activities especially for the socially vulnerable groups of society. During the Plan period, grant allocation increased from RM14.9 million in 2001 to RM34 million in 2005 for 210 NGOs to implement their activities as well as to undertake character building programs for their volunteers and caregivers. A total of 855 care givers were trained to enable them to carry out their roles and responsibilities in a more effective manner.

Many NGOs emerged to strive for the benefits of the disabled. Nevertheless, not all of the NGOs have the capacity to set up learning institutions for the disabled people. The interest on adult education to this group of people also came from NGOs whereby they have the experience in the setting up of private institutions nationwide. The established institutions are found nationwide under the various names such as Malaysian CARE, Selangor Association of Retarded Children (SARC), BAKIS, TASPUPUTRA, KIIC, Dignity and Services. Rotary Clubs, KIWANIS, and others. Nevertheless, Wong (1993) reported that

there a lot of complaints voiced by various quarters on scarcity of provisions and services and most disabled people remained neglected. These grievances initiated the establishment of various voluntary bodies to protect the disabled people in the community. NGOs institutions for the disabled adult come in many shapes and sizes. Communities across the country have devised various ways to prepare the disabled people to lead their life closer to the norms in the society. However, almost all NGOs institutions in Malaysia have similar admission requirement, educational programs, facilities, financial support and teaching staff. Table 10 shows the number of institutions set up NGOs in Malaysia.

**Table 8: Number of Learning Centers under NGO and Private Institutions in the State of Malaysia**

Negeri	NGO's Institution		Private Institution		Total
	Daily	Residential	Daily	Residential	
Perlis	3	1	0	0	4
Kedah	3	3	0	0	6
Pulau Pinang	9	2	1	0	12
Perak	6	4	1	0	11
Selangor	6	1	1	0	8
Kuala Lumpur	10	2	1	0	13
Negeri Sembilan	3	1	1	0	5
Melaka	2	1	0	0	3
Johor	4	2	0	0	6
Pahang	2	1	0	0	3
Terengganu	1	1	0	0	2
Kelantan	1	1	0	0	2
Sarawak	6	3	0	0	9
Sabah	5	1	0	0	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>90</b>

Source: Department of Social Welfare, 2006

To give a clear picture about the institutions set up by the NGOs, a short study was done in Kelantan foundation for the disabled and Perak Bethany Home. Kelantan Foundation for the Disabled (*Yayasan Orang Kurang Upaya Kelantan* or YOKUK), is a charitable foundation established to alleviate the plight of the people with disabilities and to give them a meaningful life. it is a community-based rehabilitation center for severely disabled whereby they are provided with the necessary care, rehabilitation and training programmes suitable to their needs revolving around members of the family as well as the local community coming together to assist. them. The educational programs provided at YOKUK is the “therapy service” which is offered daily to all registered clients, electronic class twice a week, riding therapy and daily computer class. The important staff at YOKUK are vocational teacher, occupational therapist, therapist assistant and voluntary teachers from schools, workshop etc.

The interest also came from Religious Bethany Home, aims to provide a comprehensive service for the disabled children and adults who are living not only in the Lower Perak District but also throughout Malaysia. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malaysia and Singapore established Bethany Home in 1966. It was built to provide training and educational programs for disabled children and adults including intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy and many others. The disabled people enrolled in this institution are disabled children and adults from birth onwards and cater for people of both sexes, different races and from all socio-economic backgrounds. However, the majority of the students are Chinese and Indians. We can hardly find any Malays in this learning center. The educational programs provided at Bethany Home are therapy service, offered daily to all clients, speech therapy, mic therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

## The Enrolment of Disabled People in Public Universities and Private Institutions

Throughout the world, it is increasingly recognised that effort should be made to ensure that people with disabilities receive their education in an integrating setting either in public universities or private institutions. People with disabilities were not accorded with quotas for admission to public universities. The Malaysian Higher School Certificate (MHSC) is one of the two major pre-university systems for admission to Malaysian public universities. The other is a one-year Matriculation Programme conducted by the Ministry of Education. Contrary to popular belief, HSC is not the only qualification accepted other than the matriculation programme. The other qualification is the The Malaysian Higher Religious Certificate; taken by religious schools' students. Candidates technically may apply for admission to a degree-level courses with a variety of pre-university examinations which is considered equivalent to the MHSC, including A-Level. The admission is based on merit and performance in the pre-university examination. The candidates have to follow the guidelines a set up by the Ministry of Higher Learning irregardless of their disabilities. Table 9 shows the number of people with disabilities in public universities or private institutions in 2004. Based on that number, the intake of disabled in public institutions of higher learning is still very small compared to the number of disabled adults registered as shown on table 3. Anyway, according to Ibrahim (2000) the number of disabled individuals who have achieved a high level of academic qualification is increasing. Describing this as a good move, Open University of Malaysia is taking into consideration the needs of adults, too. Dhanarajan (2005) noted that *“The government proposes to widen the opportunities and facilities for the people with disabilities studying at higher learning institutions and they can be recognised to go abroad. As we prepare young people for the workplace, we should also refresh the skills of adults”*.

**Table 9: Number of People with Disabilities in Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions 2004**

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>Certificate</b>	<b>Diploma</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Masters</b>	<b>Ph.D</b>	<b>Total</b>
Northern University of Malaysia	0	0	3	0	0	3
University of Technology Malaysia	0	5	10	0	0	15
University of Science Malaysia	0	0	5	0	0	5
University Putra Malaysia	0	18	28	1	0	47
University Malaya	0	0	10	3	0	13
National University of Malaysia	0	0	9	1	0	10
University of Technology MARA	7	98	15	0	0	120
International Islamic University	0	0	1	0	0	1
Malaysian Polytechnic	33	10	0	0	0	43
KUiTTHO	0	2	0	0	0	2
University Malaysia Sabah	0	0	0	0	0	0
University Malaysia Sarawak	0	0	0	0	0	0
Educational University of Sultan Idris	0	0	2	0	0	0
Malaysia University of Terengganu	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Colleges	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>307</b>

## DISCUSSION

### Ethnicity and Language

Looking Malaysia as a multicultural country, government agencies and non-governmental organizations are very careful in implementing their programs; trying to avoid or hurting the people's sensitivity. The Malay Language is the national language of the country. However, the people are free to use their mother tongue and other languages. English as the second language is widely used in business. The use of Malay language as a medium of instruction might impede the progress of normalization programs in Malaysia. This is true when the usual language used by the children is their own language for example Cantonese, Hokkien, Tamil, Urdu etc. is totally alien from the Malay language. Disabled children and their parents often experience communication breakdown with school personnel especially those Chinese and Indian parents. This even might discourage the parent to send their children to rehabilitation care centers or early intervention institutions. Other than language, there are other factors such as the religion followed by the religious values, principles and beliefs in running the rehabilitation care centers. For example rehabilitation care centers run by the Chinese may operate the care centers based on Chinese values, beliefs, principles, living environment and style. The Chinese communities in Malaysia comprise of Hokkien, Hainanese, Teow Chew and Cantonese. This centre may not be suitable for the Malays as the religious beliefs of the 2 religions are indeed different.

### **Educational Awareness**

In Malaysia, the enrolment of this group in the universities and institutions is not very encouraging. To make things worse, the society's cynical view as well as certain beliefs that a child born with a disability is a curse or God's punishment on the parents (Ruzian, 1997). They also believe that the disabled people are unable to be independent and therefore there is no need to provide them with high education. It is worst still that they feel ashamed or embarrassed, stressed, sensitive and easily offended, afraid and various other negative feelings and reactions. Anyway, the Ministry of Higher Learning is not keeping numb but is taking efforts so that disabled people have opportunities to study in public universities or private institutions. MARA, under the Ministry of Entrepreneurial Development (MOED), established several institutes in collaboration with foreign agencies as listed in Table 6.4b. These institutes offer courses at diploma level. In addition, the MOED manages 11 Institut Kemahiran MARA (IKM) and 120 Pusat Giat MARA which are located throughout the country to provide basic skills training, especially for rural youths.

### **Religious Institution**

The historical roots of special education for children with severe learning difficulties in Malaysia were started by the Christian missionary, voluntary organizations and individuals in the early 1900s. In 1970's, systematic attempts were made by the Malaysian government taking into consideration to develop and improve the education service for the disabled children by allocating education in primary and secondary schools. There are many institutions built/set up by Christian organization that practices Christian values. Although this place is for children from all religions and backgrounds but the mind set or perception of the people from other religions especially the Muslims are still negative. Almost all Malays are Muslims and the majority of the Malaysian population is Malays.

### **Cooperation Between Agencies**

The relationship between various parties involved in the interest on learning disabilities especially those with severely and profoundly disabled are not quite favorable. This matter complicates the process of placing the children with severely and profoundly disabled at regular schools after their period at

rehabilitation boarding centers (after 16 years old). Children who had undergone the early intervention programs normally stop going to school when they have reached the age of 13, after which they may enroll in the mainstream school or go back to their families. The enrolment is compulsory and if the parents insist on continuing their children's study at the primary and secondary schools, this initiative is done on their own. Government agencies and voluntary bodies are not active in this process and we can see that there are a great number of drop outs among children with disabilities. Apart from this, institutions also differ in respect of their management and curriculum design. At the Rehabilitation Care Centers, the curriculum was designed by the Department of Social Welfare whilst in voluntary organizations there is no standard curriculum. It is mainly adopted from a structure designed by a British Psychologist, Robert Deller (Wong, 1994) For classes of Special School, the syllabus was designed by the Curriculum Division of Ministry of Education. As we can understand here, there is no concerted effort by the different parties in catering to the welfare of the children with disabilities in Malaysia. It is necessary for the responsible organizations to coordinate their policies and programs under the Ministry of National Unity and Community Development or National Council for the handicapped. According to Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) annual report 2006, there are nine MCA Lifelong Learning Centers were chosen as the models of Lifelong Learning Centers based on their success in organizing short courses and various kinds of learning programs on regular basis. These centers are: Tanjung Piai (Johor), Selayang (Selangor), Subang (Selangor), Kelana Jaya (Selangor), Gombak (Selangor), Cheras (KL), Kuantan (Pahang), Bandar Tun Razak (KL), and Rasah Jaya Community Library (Negeri Sembilan).

### **Lack of Skilled Personnel**

Wong (1993) undertook a study at six early intervention centers in Malaysia and found that most of the teaching staffs in these institutions are without formal training in special education apart from the short period of on-job-training. One teaching faculty reported that there are only a few participants in the special education course conducted by the Specialist Teacher Training College in Kuala Lumpur (Ibrahim, 2000). To overcome the shortage of special teachers, the Ministry of Education has to employ temporary and contract teachers which is not an effective strategy in the long term. With the spirit of the professionalism and accountability not much could be achieved in helping the children with disabilities. The teaching staffs of Rehabilitation Care Centers mainly consist of social workers and social welfare officers who received limited exposure on special education. Overall we can see that the numbers of skilled teachers of severe learning disabilities are very small. To make matter worse, there are very few professionals and social activists interested in looking at the issues of severe learning disabilities. Academicians also have little interest in conducting studies on normalization programs. Hence, not much improvement has been made and few recommendations have been suggested by the professionals and academicians.

However, the government is trying to remedy the short comings. In 1990, Malaysian CARE invited few specialists from the UK to train teaching staffs in early intervention centers in Malaysia (Malaysian CARE, 1990). Specialist Teacher Training College in Kuala Lumpur had been organizing few programs in producing specialist teachers for disabled children since early 1990 (Ibrahim, 1994), However, the seriousness from the Malaysian Ministry of Education in providing trained teachers working at the institutions set up by Department of Social Welfare and NGOs is not encouraging. To overcome this problem the Department of Social Welfare has set up three training centers i.e (i) Sentul Training Centre (ii) Gurney Training Institute and (iii) Wallace Training Centre. It is a year training programme. However, the trained teachers from these institutions are only accepted as social workers and sometimes as

volunteers. Their salaries and allowances are lower compared to the teachers working in special education class in government schools. Looking at these events, considerable efforts and progress in the implementation of normalization programs had been accomplished by the Malaysian government and voluntary agencies. The training at the teachers training colleges throughout Malaysia should be open to social workers and NGOs teachers as well. The public universities which are offering bachelors degrees in Special Education should give opportunity to these teachers to pursue their study in meeting the needs for professional teachers at the institutions set up by Department of Social Welfare and NGOs.

### **Facilities**

Many previous studies have shown that facilities for disabled and their learning is highly correlated. A study done by Tan (2000) in the state of Terengganu, a majority of mainstream schools for formal education lack accessibility for wheelchair users and students with mobility problems. Laboratories and libraries are often located in upper floors and are out of reach for them. The deaf, visually impaired, intellectually impaired and those with cerebral palsy are placed in special schools. This form of segregation prohibits this group of people from interacting and integrating with the larger society in their formative years. Likewise, easy access into buildings is still lacking. Ramps are not properly constructed. Control panels in most elevators are not fitted at a suitable level for wheelchair users, and the Braille. Digital floor announcer is very rarely installed in elevators to aid the visually impaired. Accessible toilets are not built according to specifications. Many of these toilets are not functioning due to vandalism and poor maintenance. There are not many accessible public transport in the whole of the country. Wheelchair users have to depend on alternative modes of transport such as taxis and assistance from family and friends. Taxis are expensive and most times do not follow the rates set by the authorities. Additionally, many taxis refuse to pick up wheelchair users. However, public toilets and parking lots are provided for the disabled people in bigger cities in Kuala Lumpur and special seats are also made available for this special group of people in the LRT (Light Rail Transport System).

In 2006, The MCA has donated funds which include a multimedia education facility that provides free basic Information Communication Technology (ICT) literacy training, assistive technology that allows people with disabilities to perform daily tasks, alternate communication methods for people with disabilities and the setup of IT infrastructure and learning courses for marginalized youth.

### **Economic Assistance**

To help the disabled people to be self-reliant in the society, the Department of Social Welfare has provided economic assistance by purchasing items which they manufacture, and various types of activities have been devised to respond to their needs in ways that facilitate their participation in the society. Allowances for people with special disabilities are provided to help disabled be economically self-reliant. Another form of help to a family with a disabled child is the deduction of income tax. Additionally, Malaysian government has also reduced the tax for those employers with disabled employee. The fare is for all public transport facilities in the country i.e. bus, train and plane is reduced by 50% (Department of Social Welfare, 2005). In cases where transport is needed i.e. wheelchair or three-wheel motor-cycle or car, the department also provide the facility (a subsidy price) to be purchased. Another form of subsidy by the department is providing support for disabled adult who are in need to purchase a house. Kuala Lumpur City Hall has given a special price for disabled adult to buy a low cost house and private flat in Kuala Lumpur city (Department of Social Welfare, 2005).

## **Health Support**

The implementation of normalization in Malaysia has aroused the feelings of sympathy of the Malaysian Ministry of Health towards those disabled people. As we can see in Malaysia, health and medical services is available in most part of the country and the treatment for this disabled people is generally good. An agreement was reached in the Inter-Ministry Committee meeting 1981 that the Ministry of Health is given the responsibility of providing early intervention services and diagnose the level of disability to be placed in the suitable institutions. Muhamad & Kamarulzaman (1998) noted that the ministry also provides physiotherapy and speech therapy for the disabled people at Kuala Lumpur General Hospital, Hospital of Universiti Sains Malaysia, Hospital of National Universiti of Malaysia and Johore Bahru General Hospital. It is noted that therapist from these hospitals are often invited to Early Intervention Centres, Rehabilitation Care Centres and special classes in regular schools. Needless to say, these therapies are to help the teaching staffs to plan effective learning activities for the children in the particular institutions. In addition, counselling and advice services are also available at any hospitals for those suspected pregnant mother who are carrying handicapped or down's syndrome foetus. Early care treatment is also provided for the vulnerable babies.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implementation of Lifelong Learning programs and normalization principles in Malaysia bears a great influence on the educational policy and provision for people with disabilities. No doubts, the active role played by the voluntary organizations and Non-governmental organizations have eased some burden on the part of this Department. NGOs and NGOs have taken a lot of initiative to help the disabled people. However such realization is still at infancy and a long way to be translated into effective strategies due to the regency of such concept, progressive efforts that has been done in educating the public about the nature of normalization and how they should play their role. One significant problem that requires attention is the cooperation between agencies in order to educate the disabled in the community. Nevertheless the achievement is still a long way to match when compared with the service provision in the UK and most European countries. We must not look at this disadvantaged group being isolated from the society. The same goes to Lifelong Learning and the Normalization programs which should require the cooperation between each other. In response to the appeal made by the Malaysian Department of Social Welfare and various NGOs alike various educational programs have been planned for adult with disabilities.

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