

# ***MALAYSIA***

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The Current Situations and Future Trends  
of Educational Practice for Children with  
Visual Impairments — Practice and its  
Outcome of Educational Support in Malaysia

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of Education For The Blind**

The special education for the blind in Malaysia started as early as 1926. The St. Nicholas Home, the first school for the blind was started by the Malacca Anglican Church. And it was not until 1948 that the next school for the blind, the Princess Elizabeth School in Johor Bahru was established.

Later on, even though many special schools for the deaf were built at regularly intervals, the number of special schools for the blind remained the same for a long, long time. It was slowly increased to six up to today. During this long period, majority of the blind students were introduced to the integrated or inclusive programmes in the regular schools.

### **The Formation Of Special Education Department, Ministry of Education Malaysia**

In October 1995, the Special Education Unit was upgraded into a Special Education Department, one of the six departments under the Ministry of Education Malaysia. The department is responsible for the planning, managing, monitoring and assessing all the special programmes in the schools.

Beginning of 2002, the government has made it mandatory for all children to attend schools or else the parents will be brought to court. This policy has certainly created a great impact on the education of the special children, as this is the group who are always left out in the public schools and being kept at home due to various factors.

## **CURRENT SITUATIONS**

### **Special Education For The Blind**

Currently, we have six residential schools for the blind. Only one is catering for the secondary

education, the rest of the five are serving the primary students. The enrolment of the secondary school is 100, under the care of 27 teachers. The five primary schools housed 237 students with 75 teachers. As for the intergrated and inclusive programmes, we have 56 resources teachers and 220 students for the 13 secondary programmes and 65 resource teachers helping the 91 students for the 11 primary programmes respectively.

Meanwhile the blind children are following the national curriculum and sit for the same public examinations as the regular school children. However, the blind children are given an extended 30 minutes of answering time, and very complicated diagrams or maps are simplified for the examinations.

All these existing educational programmes, be it residential, integrated or inclusive, practise high level of interdepartmental co-ordination and co-operation to ensure the success of all the programmes. The Special Education Department, the central coordinator, plays the vital role in the synchronizing of all the activities and programmes that stick to our national values, philosophy and policies in the system.

### **Admission To The Regular Technical, Vocational, Polytechnic Schools**

Starting from 2000, after years of lobbying, the regular technical, vocational and polytechnic schools to recruit the deaf children and have since agreed to take in the learning disabled in year 2003. Hopefully, the blind children will get into the stream soon.

## **FUTURE TRENDS**

### **New Vocational Schools**

In fact, the journey to the access of education for the blind has never been easy. Anyway, under the 8th Malaysia Plan, four special vocational schools, to be distributed in the 4 different geographical zones in Malaysia, will be built. It is planned that each school will accommodate 250 students for the deaf, blind and the learning disabilities.

Courses suggested for the blind are handicraft, agriculture, physiotherapy, music and audio-technology, computer and information-communication technology and etc. Special certificates will be awarded to the graduates of these schools to make certain that the skills acquired are marketable and the quality of the courses is strictly controlled.

### **Regional Service And Resource Centres**

The Special Education Department had set up 6 regional service and resource centres in the

whole Malaysia in order to have an optimal use of resources and also to ensure the greatest resources meeting the highest level of education needs. The noble calling for all of us, who work with the special children, is to help them to reach their fullest potentials thus subsequently contribute to the society.

### **Introduction of Basic Vocational Subjects In Regular Schools**

Right now, the Ministry is in the first phase of introducing basic vocational subjects for the less academically inclined students in the regular schools. This implementation will certainly benefit our children, as majority of the special children falls within this category. The courses suggested for the blind will be handicraft, basic household maintenance or light industries skills training and etc.

### **Employment For The Disabled**

Employment for the Disabled is a much discussed issue globally, in March 2002, the Labour Department of Human Resources Ministry, Malaysian Council For Rehabilitation and the Japanese Association for Employment of Persons With Disabilities had jointly organized a national Seminar On Employment For Persons With Disabilities. An action plan was specially drawn and distributed. As it was mentioned in the chairman's speech that "it will only work provided there is synergy in the collaboration of efforts from everyone ...". It is hoped that the action plan formulated will be put into effect.

### **Support System - GO and NGOs Partnerships**

In Malaysia, as far as special education is concerned, we can proudly and fondly announce that parents, caretakers, individual volunteers and non-governmental organizations have been giving endless, fullest, and generous support towards the implementation of all the special programmes.

To quote a few, the National Council For the Blind, Malaysia had funded generously for the revision of the old Malay Braille Code and sponsoring provisions of white canes to many of our school children. And starting from this year, the affiliated members have adopted schools for the blind, in aim to provide reading materials in Braille, necessary expertise in technical trainings and assist in co-curriculum activities. Likewise, the Malaysian Association for the Blind in Kuala Lumpur has been extending inexhaustible support in giving consultation in the process of teaching and learning of the blind, training staff in Braille code competencies, helping the blind in job-hunting , accessing to the teacher training colleagues and institutions of higher learning and etc. Similarly, there are many community-based rehabilitation centers in the country providing rehabilitations services. Periodically, caring voluntary bodies organize outreach programmes, such

as seminars and motivation courses, to upgrade and update the educational provisions to our special children. All these projects and activities are geared towards the one and identical objective and that is " to provide the equal education opportunities to our children".

### **Services to the Multiple Handicapped**

The Ministry of Education does not provide any service to this group of children in the normal school settings The Welfare Department does sponsor and supervise most of the centres run by the NGOs. The welfare and education of the group, who do have the normal intelligence, is the next for us to work on, as the services provided to them now is minimal. It is our government and people's wish that all the children in our country will enjoy their education while we are experiencing economic growth and galloping into a developed country.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Finally, it needs to be stressed that, whatever 'education opportunities' are given, they are to be "appropriate interventions pertain to the children's special needs". The curriculum must be tailored, job-oriented, able to lead our children for approaching a successful and gainful employment. This is to ensure that our children, after leaving the sheltered and protected school environments, can still cope with the upheavals of life and survive like the others. It is our expectation, promise and hope that whatever is planned and done will enable our children to grow into loving, happy, independent and contributing INDIVIDUALS..