Disabled People are Left Behind the Information Age: Are the Gap Getting Bigger?

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Abstract

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Rapid progress of Information Communication Technology (ICT) will accelerate the distribution of information from government to the people; however the monopoly of technology ICT services will lead to inequality of information distribution in between of normal people and disabled people. Embrace with the inequality of ICT distribution directly make the group of disabled people left behind at the information age, or the situation also known as digital divide. Hence, this article attempts to identify and examine the issues facing by disabled people in order to catch up the fast diffusion of ICT.

Key words: digital divide, government initiative, information communication technology, disabled people

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Introduction

In Malaysia, the government pays fully attention and commitment to wider the diffusion of Information Communication Technology (ICT) to the people. This effort can be seen in various policy establishments such as Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) policy, which encourage Malaysian to use computers more extensively, on the hand of this policy is encompassed the government objective to reducing the digital divide gap in between of have information and have not information especially among the population in urban and rural area. Malaysian government believes by using computers are priority to enhancing the economic and public sector services (Mohd Nizam Osman, 2007).

Generally, ICT changes the method of people live. Nowadays, ICT is fundamental and necessary for the economic growth and society development (Aparna & Chunfang (2014), in Armenta, Serrano, Cabrera & Conte, 2012). However, in terms of accessibility of ICT there are one disadvantages sections which are the population of disabled people. The first reason that comes is the fact that such a consequence is caused by the physical impairments of the persons with disabilities. The problems of ICT are known as digital divide, it is about the gap between the literary of internet, the geographic different and between the people which is disabled and normal people (Frank & Kwaku, 2014).

The Gap Exits

The term Digital Divide was firstly used by former United States President Bill Clinton in 1994, it is to determine the situation of differences exist in between of people who have access to the internet

services and those who did not have accessibility to the internet (Hazura Mohamed,2012). Meanwhile Kruger (2003), stated the digital divide is represent the gap of people which have the accessibility facilities to connected with the internet such as via telephones and computer. Thus, the gap is regarding the situation of economic level which differentiate people who can afford to buy a computer and with those who not afford. According to Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD), the differences in between of individuals, business and geographic areas are the phenomenon of digital divide.

The terms "have it or have not", is the definition for digital divide and it is about accessibility into Information Communication Technology (ICT). Additionally, a situation of inadequate of ICT may also create the absence of ICT or normally knows as the digital divide. Inadequate of ICT is happening when a different segment of people in a country is not receiving the same amount of ICT such as accessibility towards information, for example, people in developing countries normally encounter with the problems of less information even though most of the ICT resources are available worldwide. These phenomena created the situation of the digital divide (Rashid Hussain et al., 2011).

Moreover, the evolution of society to used ICT are moving nowadays to the quality and strength of ICT, and these different situations evolving the definition of the digital divide which are focused into the quality of information received by the society and indirectly it is depending on the level of society development. Meanwhile, in 1990 the term digital divide became very popular and started entering the public discourse among countries (Van Dijk, 2000). In 1990, digital divide is defined concerning on the gap which separating people who have access and those who not access.

The ability to access and use (ICT), including the internet are a crucial part nowadays and because of this movement, it is important to ensure the exclusion of disabled people can be bridged. According to Biwako Millennium Framework Survey (2007), stated in Malaysia most of disabled people are poor and this situation directly makes them unable to get the ICT. Moreover, disabled people are the poorest people in the world, it doesn't matter wherever they are either in developed or underdeveloped country, but it is shown that many poor disabled people live in underdeveloped countries or a third world country, additionally according to UNESCAP (2003), indicated almost 20% disabled who are poor live in the Asian region meanwhile, this similar situation has also claimed by the British Trades Union, stated because of poor life and live below the breadline will bring disabled people to exclusion from the, employment and education, because of many disabled people are poor it is create a gap for them compare than non-disabled people (Bagshaw, 2006). Similarly, disabled people live in poor and they are unemployed (M.Rezaul Islam, 2015). Thus, of this poverty most of the disabled people are not getting the opportunity to get access an education thus, poverty and disability are positive relationship and have had high correlation (Magdalene., T., and Teong, 2013 and Aina Razlin Mohammad Roose, 2006).

On the other hand, throughout the world disabled people are among the least privileged and most vulnerable. Their right to training, employment and job development is often overlooked (Norani Mohd Salleh et, all. 2001). Meanwhile, Datuk Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, stated all disabled people have limited opportunities to obtain training because of their different needs or different disabilities, make them excluded from information and accessibility into Information Communication Technology (Zulkiple Ibrahim, 2011). Consequently in Malaysia there are no surveys on ICT usage by disabled people in order to gain their opinion and knowledge of ICT such as the internet provider, the mobile phone and computer (Biwako Millennium Framework Survey, 2007). The disadvantages of disabilities are prevented them accessing ICT and this makes disabled people facing a phenomena of digital divide (Lin Jin, 2010).

A gap in between of disabled and non-disabled also caused from the unawareness among disabled people regarding their right, which stated in Person with Disability Act 2008, thus directly make them unable to enjoy their live as a normal person such as facilities and privileges that have provided correctly by our government for disabled people. This situation happened because of the attitude of lack of knowledge about the Law. Furthermore, because of this kind of attitude among disabled people have caused them left behind and their right have been rejected. In particular, according to Francis Siva

a president of the Independent Learning and Training Centre (ILTC) one of the nonprofit organization of disabled people indicated that lack enforcement of the disabled law have tarnish the image of disabled pepole and preventing them to live independently and unable to involved with society (Annine Ling , 2013). Meanwhile, the facilities provided for the disabled people are not fully equipped with the need of disabilities such as a school in Terengganu States of Malaysia, mostly not provide accessibility for students who used a wheelchair, at the same time laboratory and library not user friendly for disabled people and located on the upper floors which is hard for disabled people to reach the area. Additionally, a result from Biwako Milennium Framework Survey found in Malaysia, the environments such as the building are not friendly and ICT tools are not equipped for disabled to get access of computer. As stated, the facilities provided are focused on the urban area and it is less equip at less developed states such as Kedah and Perlis (Khoo Suet Leng et.al 2012 and M. Rezaul Islam, 2015).

Generally, disabled people like deaf, blind, learning problem have their own special schools, its sound good for them to be among their group, however, at the same time this separation like isolation them in integrating with the real world and society (Hirwan Jasbir, et.al 2013). Meanwhile, disabled people also complaint about their isolation from the society is because of the limitation to perform in any activities with the society because there are unable to access into Information Communication Technology, on the other hand, the acceptance attitudes of society towards the disabled people need to be increased, because when the society acknowledge the disabled people it will indirectly create opportunities for the disabled people to feel confident to mingle with society (M. Rezaul Islam, 2015 and Abdullah, n.d).

On the hands, difficulty of access could be a barrier factor of ICT. Access problems in terms of ICT itself are not regarding the accessibility of information and benefits. It reflects to the technology tools to enable disabled people get connected with the internet such as assistive technology to adapt to the disabilities needs. Assistive technology equipment may not be readily available to all because it involved big cost. Meanwhile, technology staff needs to be scrutinized and care with knowledge and is also involved cost. High cost of maintenance of computers, special hardware and software are costly. This situation is very difficult for disabled people because they are less educated and knowledge and poor and only dependent on welfare and funding from Local and State Government.

Disabled people are less educated compared than normal people; it is because less professional expert to train disabled people is a major contribution to many uneducated disabled people. Normally, the teachers at intervention center are not fully educated with the knowledge or skills to teach disabled people and most of them are temporary period of training (Wong, 2000). Thus, according to Ibrahim (2000) identified in Specialist Teacher Training College in Kuala Lumpur, only a few people are undergoing proper training before teaching disabled people. In order to solve this shortage of skillful teacher, responsible bodies like the Ministry of Education employ temporary teachers which lack of training and skill and place them at intervention center. On the other hand, at the rehabilitation care center also lack of skillful teachers to teach and train disabled people; most of the teachers are social welfare workers which lack of knowledge. This kind of situation is worse seemed activists are very few interested to look into the different need of disabilities which need special training. The problems of the disabled are crucial nowadays, it has been many years disabled are excluded to contribute to society and they are isolated from the community. Thus, at the same time this phenomenon will tarnish the Malaysian image in order to be a developed country by the year 2020. According to the United Nation disabled people in Malaysia is about 2.8 million, which means equal to 10% of the Malaysian population which is 28 million.

Meanwhile, the number of disabled people in Malaysia is increasing from year, as stated by Social Welfare Department, the number of disabled people in Malaysia by 2012 is, 85,803 and until June 2013 the number of registered disabled people is 464,967. It is shown the number of disabled people is increasing. Thus, several valuable studies have been conducted about the disabled people in Malaysia are focusing on employment rate, facilities such as transportations, and education. For example, several studies done by (Kamarulzaman Kamaruddin, 2007; Tiun Ling Tai, Lee Lay Wah, Khoo Suet Leng, 2012; Mohamed Faziharudean, 2005; Hirwan Jasbir Bin Jaafar, Harlida Abdul Wahab & Hamiza Omar, 2008; Magdalene C..H. Ang, T. Ramayah and Teong Khan Vun, 2013; Mohd Nizam Osman

2007; Faridah Serajul Haq, 2003; Norani Mohd Salleh, Khalid Abdullah and Nor Aishah Buang, 2001; Abdelnaser Omran1, Odile Schwarz-Herion and Susanne Viehbacher, 2011; Aina Razlin Mohammad Roose, 2010), all of this study present evidence about the employment, the transportation services towards the disabled people. Details of past research regarding the disabled people are explained in chapter three in this study. However, none of the studies are focused about the digital divide among disabled people in the field of accessibility towards Information Communication Technology and Malaysian Government initiative.

ICT is a platform and good strategy which enabled the disabled person's inclusion into community nowadays. ICT also plays roles as a signal for them to contribute in social and economic activities. ICT is a significant tool for bridging the divide in between of disabled and non-disabled people; it is because with ICT it will break the barriers of communication that might cause by disabilities or life long illness. Moreover, ICT will increase the confidence level of disabled people to survive in their daily life and directly led them to be independent.

Conclusion

ICT era has developed several new rules such as social stratification and technology stratification between those gets access to the ICT and those are not. This kind of situation leads to digital divide. This phenomenon's caused disabled people a burden to show their capabilities to contribute in the ICT field and into informative society by the year 2020. In particular, the Malaysian country is now moving to achieve Vision 2020, which is in year 2020 Malaysian are living in strong citizen values, share prosperity of the nation economically and live tolerant and caring for each other in other words by year 2020 Malaysia will be known as developed country. Thus, in order to reach developed country, undoubtedly the ICT affects the way of Malaysian lifestyle, the way people working and it is important to provide the best medium of accessibility for all including the disabled people. Disabled people also need information in order to give them the opportunity to participate in society and able to compete in a working environment (D.P. Doessel, Ruth F.G William, 2011).

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