

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SECONDARY SPECIAL SCHOOL STUDENTS TO CONTINUE TO HIGHER EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This research aims at answering the questions on why there are still limited numbers of students with disabilities to continue their study in tertiary education, what problems faced by the students and the universities, and how universities set the policy in accepting students with disabilities. It is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Semi structured interviews were applied to students of special schools and inclusive schools, school principals, and university top management. The research proved that the private universities in Jakarta only accepted students with disabilities limitedly. Some universities even rejected students with disabilities with various reasons. This study explores information regarding what actions should be taken to provide opportunity for students with disabilities to continue their study to higher education. For future research, it is recommended to conduct a study on the rights of students with disabilities in higher education with different approach.

KEYWORDS: Students with Disabilities, Tertiary Education, Private Universities

INTRODUCTION

Education is the right of every citizen, including persons with disabilities or disabilities. However, their access to university is still limited. Higher education institutions in Indonesia still exclude persons with disabilities, even though the government has passed Law No. 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities that encourage the inclusion of people with disabilities and also the Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education Regulation in 2017 which requires every university to provide services for students with disability. Academics assess that there are still many universities in Indonesia that have not adopted these rules and ignored their obligations to protect the rights of students with disabilities. The lack of access to higher education results in only about 5% of the 10.8 million people with disabilities of working age who have graduated from college.¹

The latest data from the Indonesian Blind Association (Pertuni) also indicates that in 2017, there were only around 400 blind students in Indonesia. The number of students with conditions that affect cognitive or communication skills - such as Down Syndrome or autism - is predicted to be much lower than that. Law number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities article 42 paragraph 3

¹ <https://www.newsdifabel.com/disabilitas-dan-pendidikan-tinggi/>

mandates providers of higher education to facilitate the formation of Disability Services Units. In fact, it was emphasized that higher education providers who did not form a Disability Service Unit would be subjected to administrative sanctions, ranging from reprimands to revocation of education delivery licenses. However, the current regulations still discriminate against people with disabilities. The most obvious example is the condition "physically and mentally healthy" for people who want to apply to state universities. The regulation can lead to the perception that persons with disabilities are not allowed to participate in the selection.

Many people with disabilities do not pass the selection of State Universities not because they are not competent, but the examination selection system which is still felt to be less accessible and difficult. But that does not mean that they lose the spirit to pursue higher education. Private universities become the next alternative option that is promising for them so they can still compete in academics with other people who are not disabled.²

The latest regulation is in 2017, where the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education stipulates Permenristekdikti Number 46 of 2017 concerning Special Education and Special Service Education in Higher Education. The enactment of Permenristekdikti number 46 in 2017 becomes very important for the treasury of higher education in Indonesia, because at this time more and more citizens with disabilities are studying in tertiary institutions. Based on data published by the Directorate of Learning of the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, there are as many as 401 students with disabilities in 152 universities in Indonesia. As many as 401 students were classified into various types of obstacles (visually impaired, deaf, deaf, etc.). It is true that this figure is very small compared to the total number of people with disabilities of higher education age in Indonesia. Especially when compared to developed countries. However, the regulation can be the first gate to increase access and opportunities for people with disabilities to obtain higher education.

Until now, there are still many universities that reject prospective students with disabilities. The reason is that the chosen study program is not ready to provide special services for persons with disabilities. Actually ready or not, it depends on whether or not there is a will. If there is a will, and the opportunity is given by tertiary institutions for persons with disabilities to try to enter a certain study program, then gradually, all parties will learn to understand disability together and can facilitate with the necessary accessibility.

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² <https://www.newsdifabel.com/disabilitas-dan-pendidikan-tinggi/>

impaired, deaf, etc.). In 2019, there were 1,692 people with disabilities applying to become prospective civil servants.³

Based on the description above, this research is focused on answering the questions why there are still limited numbers of students with disabilities to continue their study in tertiary education, what problems faced by students and the universities, and how universities set the policy in accepting students with disabilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Equity and Equality in Education

Equity in education is the most important facet in social justice, by distribution of education citizens are given opportunities “to develop their capacities and to participate fully in society” (Waghid, 2014, p. 1459). Equality education access for disabilities Social justice exists when people having common humanity are entitled to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources. They are not discriminated against or prejudiced based on gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliations, age, race, belief, disability, location, social class, and socioeconomic circumstances (Robinson, 2016).

Dias (2015) declares, equity involves two concepts: equity of access and equity of outcomes, which implies that everyone should have equal opportunity not only to access, but also to progress in order to complete higher education studies and achieve academic success. To define equity is not easy; it embraces various dimensions and different scholars introduce different explanations to it. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Review of Equity in Education, equity is defined as a concept having two dimensions: fairness and inclusion. Fairness means that personal and social status (i.e. gender, socio-economic position or ethnic origin) should not be deterrents in the way of achieving educational potential and inclusion assuming a basic minimum standard of education for all (Dias, 2015).

According to Leach (2013), access strategy to higher education has been shaped by three principles over time. The first principle is ‘inherited merit’, when access to education was limited and only academically selected students experienced it. These people usually were male, representatives of high class and urban dwellers. Then it was followed by ‘equality of rights’ emphasizing that higher education should be accessible to more people irrespective of social origin and the third principle is ‘equality of opportunity’ which means that some affirmative actions are necessary to increase admission. However, the tension between equality and merit still exists and represents a dilemma for policy-makers.

³ Direktorat Pembelajaran Kemenristekdikti (2019)

Oduaran (2006) introduces three strategies that higher education institutions have used regarding access throughout history:

1. Access by patronage related to the period of the elite universities when entry was decided by social standing or by patronage. Governments actively used this strategy to provide people with abilities with scholarships.
2. Access by 'objective testing' – This strategy refers to using tests and examinations that emphasize academic criteria and promote a wider distribution of potential learners within the system. Through this strategy access was no longer an exclusive right for people with high socioeconomic status and became an opportunity for people with academic ability.
3. Access to target groups – This third strategy is considered to be innovative and vital for widening access as it is focused on target groups and considers the disadvantages of individuals.

Inclusive Higher Education

Students with disabilities are a challenge for the university, not only in terms of eliminating architectural barriers, but also with regards to more ample access to the curriculum, teaching, learning and evaluation. Diversity in higher education brings along a number of benefits as well as poses compelling challenges. For example, heterogeneous work groups have a variety of perspectives, experiences and knowledge and this results in enhanced problem-solving skills (Terenzini et al., 2001), better creativity (Pascarella et al., 2001), active participation and positive academic growth (Kaur, Noman, & Nordin, 2017). However, failing to manage diversity in an effective way may result in poor engagement (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009), restrict participation (Trotman, 2005) and may lead to inequality and subsequently undermine the potential transfer of learning among students (Cohen, 1994).

Rights involving no discrimination and equal opportunities are underlined; these rights are accepted by the United Nations through the World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (Ahmmed, 2012) and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (Ainscow, 1999). Attention to students in higher education with a disability must follow the same guidelines as in all other levels of education; likewise, an institutional dimension is required to involve all members of the university community. Thus, universities should encourage interventions that favor the existence of means, support, and resources that guarantee equality for people with a disability in relation to all other students; assure the universal design of buildings, learning environments, virtual environments, services, procedures, information, and study plans in such a way so as to guarantee that no one's right to enroll, move around, remain, communicate, study, or obtain information is affected.

An inclusive university should avoid standardization systems when it thoroughly analyses the obstacles that limit or condition students' participation, and when resources are effectively used to support students' learning. In short, university inclusivity occurs when conditions are created to

stimulate the inclusive process that allow all students' needs to be satisfied (Fernandez (2014). The ability to embed inclusivity in teaching and learning approaches is one potential way forward to acknowledge and address the complexities of existing classrooms in higher education (Barrington, 2004). Student diversity is a multifaceted phenomenon; however, the goal is singular and specific which suggests that through our practices we should overcome the barriers to participation and facilitate increased participation of every member in the class (Ainscow, 1999). Consequently, it is important that higher education practitioners participate in strategic reflection to review and understand how diversity and inclusion is conceptualized and managed in their own context.

Diversity in higher education brings along a number of benefits as well as poses compelling challenges. For example, heterogeneous work groups have a variety of perspectives, experiences and knowledge and this results in enhanced problem-solving skills (Terenzini et al., 2001), better creativity active participation and positive academic growth (Kaur, Noman, & Nordin, 2017). However, failing to manage diversity in an effective way may result in poor engagement (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009), restrict participation (Trotman, 2005) and may lead to inequality and subsequently undermine the potential transfer of learning among students (Cohen, 1994). Therefore, the practice of inclusivity that embodies the principles of equity, equalization, and integration become fundamental in managing diversity.

Hopkins (2010) described inclusivity as “the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all. It embraces a view of the individual and individual differences as the source of diversity that can enrich the lives and learning of others.” (p. 1). May and Bridger (2010), proposed four dimensions: institutional commitment, curriculum design and content, pedagogy and instructional delivery, and assessment to be considered for developing and implementing inclusive teaching and learning. Students' experiences of inclusion such as when they feel belonged and connected with others in a meaningful way result in enhanced academic, social and emotional adjustment at the university (Kift et al., 2010).

For attention to special needs, the preparation of future teachers is considered relevant; training in which teachers acquire a series of teaching strategies to guarantee successful inclusion is essential (Ahmmed,M et.al.,2012; Chiner,E, 2017; Swain, et.al., 2012).

The barriers of Universities in accepting students with disabilities

Existing research has concluded that university teachers are the key to the support system and play a very significant role in the course of developing inclusive higher education (Zhang et al., 2010; Sánchez et al., 2018). Different studies discuss the barriers and supports universities offer: inaccessible curricular, negative attitudes on behalf of the staff or architectural barriers (e.g., Fuller et al. 2004; Hopkins, 2011; Mullins and Preyde, 2013). As Moswela and Mukhopadhyay (2011) stated,

students with disabilities face additional barriers and more challenges than the rest of the student body.

Academic faculty are often positioned as key players in determining the relative inclusivity of learning and teaching (e.g., Moriña Díez, López Gavira, & Molina, 2015; Thomas & Heath, 2014), and the teaching and learning context is seen as a primary site at which inclusion and exclusion are enacted (e.g., Brookfield, 2007). A more comprehensive list is provided in the appendices but the list below should provide readers with an idea of the specific areas in which many disabled learners experience difficulties in the HE context.

Coventry and Warwickshire Aimhigher (2004) During the last 15 years a considerable amount of research has been undertaken which has explored the experiences of disabled learners within higher education. Many of these studies suffer from difficulties with generalizability because they are undertaken with small sample numbers or are within a particular context (such as within one HEI). However, more recent studies have rectified some of these issues and studied the student experience across a number of institutions and across a range of courses. This part of the discussion is a summary of some of the key barriers which have been identified in the research. The list below should provide readers with an idea of the specific areas in which many disabled learners experience difficulties in the HE context:

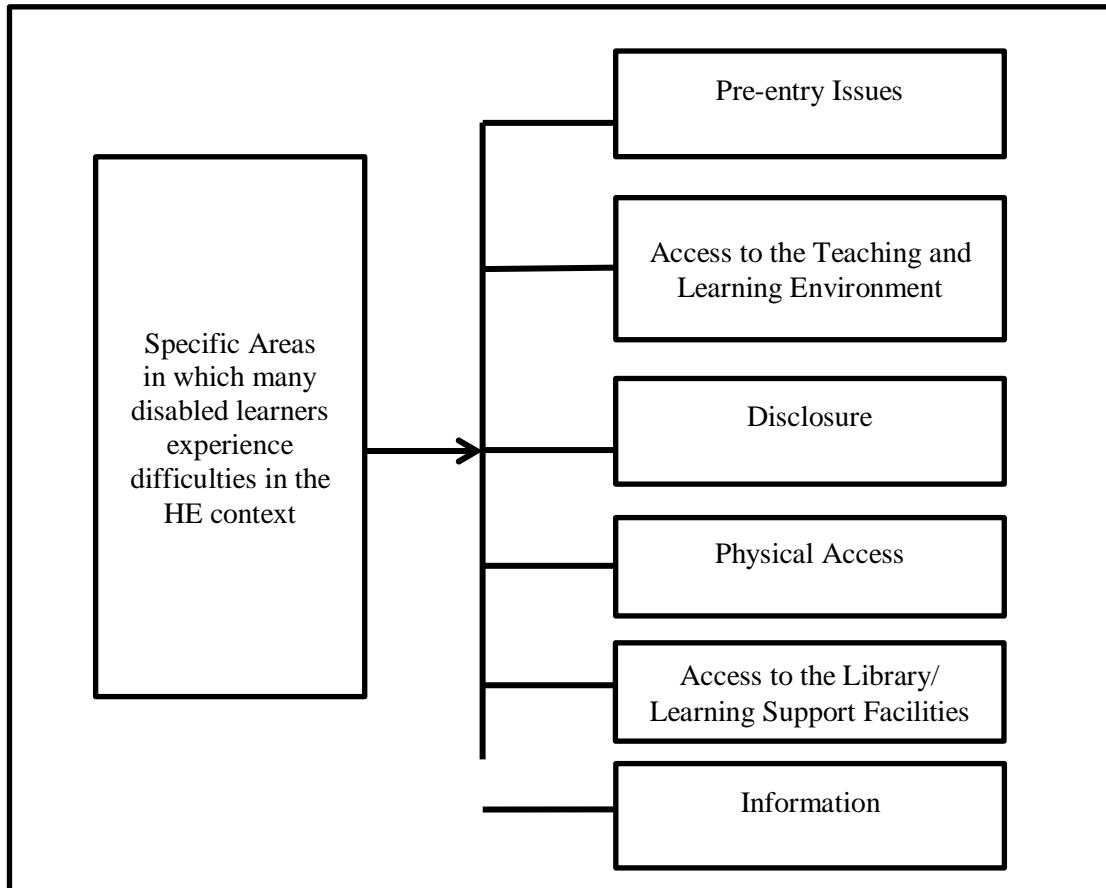
- (1) *Pre-entry issues* – there were a considerable number of issues related to difficulties and issues that disabled learners faced before they got to study in higher education settings. This could be due to a lack of information that had been provided by the HE providers or a lack of awareness on the part of FE staff. Students were unaware of the system of support in HE and information did not use familiar terminology or was not targeted at them. Many students experienced negative attitudes from significant others such as teachers or parents and some had been left feeling that university was not appropriate for them
- (2) *Physical access* – most of the studies report that there are still physical access issues for disabled learners and these impact upon the learners' experience of teaching because they may be unable to get proper access to rooms where teaching is delivered or to other learning facilities such as libraries. In the first instance, these are issues which a disabled learner will take considerable heed of before considering going into higher education or choosing a particular institution. When they get to university, there are numerous instances highlighted in the research of where access to the teaching room or related buildings such as the university library were far from suitable or in which transport or travel to and between campuses was difficult.
- (3) *Access to the teaching and learning environment* including teachers' attitudes – in addition to the campus environment there are significant issues within the learning space. These included poorly designed acoustics in lecture theatres or break time problems when learners could not get to the canteen where the other learners were taking a break. There are also numerous

mentions of difficulties with teaching delivery e.g. not remembering to look at a deaf learner when speaking so they can lip read. Many of the examples would be classed as reasonable adjustments that ought to be made within the terms of the DDA. Additionally there are issues over teachers' attitudes which were reported as less than ideal in many circumstances

- (4) *Access to library/learning support facilities* – the variability of support within the learning context is further exacerbated by poor experiences in accessing library and associated learning provision such as IT. Often rooms and buildings were quoted as being inaccessible or fully accessible computing facilities were not provided. Universities were not providing computers which had assistive technology installed or had poorly designed websites.
- (5) *Disclosure* – learners are reluctant to disclose as a result of bad experiences or worries over what support they might receive. This is a vicious circle as the learner will not receive the support they need if they do not disclose. Disclosure is supposed to be an enabling process but it can become disabling and there were also problems with having to disclose over and over again each time support was required. Students expressed surprise that they had to do this and they had to keep informing teaching staff. There were also instances of a lack of sensitivity around the issue of disclosure of disability for example, disclosure being made to other students about an individual's impairment by a member of teaching staff.
- (6) *Information* – many learners reported that they were not getting the information needed to enable them to have a successful experience. This might be about the accessibility of the environment or about the process of applying for DSAs. Additionally, learners felt unprepared for the shifts in the way support was delivered in the university context and for the significant change in the way the course was delivered.

It can be seen in the figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Disabled learners experience difficulties in the HE context



Source: Coventry and Warwickshire Aimhigher (2004)

RESEARCH METHODS

Phenomenology as a methodological framework has evolved into a process that seeks reality in individuals' narratives of their lived experiences of phenomena (Cilesiz, 2009; Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology includes different philosophies consisting of transcendental, existential, and hermeneutic theories (Cilesiz, 2010). While transcendental philosophy is often connected with being able to go outside of the experience, as if standing outside of ourselves to view the world from above, existential philosophy reflects a need to focus on our lived experience (Ihde, 1986; Langdrige, 2007). On the other hand, hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes interpretation as opposed to just description. This study used the transcendental phenomenological framework developed by Edmund Husserl who provided the basis for phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological research investigates the lived experience of participants with a phenomenon. It is important to clarify the term 'lived experience' to present the scope of this paper. van Manen (1990) explained the nature of the lived experience in a phenomenological study by offering the following analogy. Based on van Manen's analogy, teacher A who has no experience in teaching as this is her first day on the job has different experiences compared to teacher B who has ten years of experience. The expert teacher forgets the presence of the students during the lecture while the novice teacher feels the glance of the students. According to van Manen, the novice teacher is constantly aware of her own experience on the first day of school. However, the expert teacher is unaware of her acts during the lecture because she is used to lecturing and behaves more spontaneously. This analogy presents a lived experience, showing differences between two people experiences in the same event. The lived experience can be a starting point in a phenomenological study, as it identifies teacher's feelings on the first day of class. Therefore, Phenomenological studies start and stop with lived experience and it should be meaningful and significant experience of the phenomenon (Creswell 2007; Moustakas, 1994. van Manen, 1990).

Creswell (1998) posits that the best criteria to determine the use of phenomenology is when the research problem requires a profound understanding of human experiences common to a group of people. The author suggests that the studied group should consist of 3 to 15 members. The members of the group need to be able to articulate their lived experiences. The more diverse the experiences of participants, the harder it will be for the researcher to find the underlying essences and common meanings attributed to the studied phenomenon. The role of the phenomenological investigator or researcher is to "construct" the studied object according to its own manifestations, structures and components (Ponce, 2014).

The participants for in depth interview consists of 10 people, namely 2 students of special schools and 2 inclusive schools to get their perspectives on the opportunity to continue their study to universities, 3 university students with disabilities, to know how their campus life is, 1 school principal, and 2 university top management to get the data on policies regarding the acceptance and treatment of students with disabilities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the interviews with students in special schools and inclusive schools, data is obtained that students are not entirely sure they want to continue their studies at university. They are still questioning whether currently in Indonesia, Jakarta in particular there is an inclusive university where students with disabilities receive the same treatment. They are not discriminated against or prejudiced based on gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliations, age, race, beliefs, disability, location, social class, and socioeconomic situations (Robinson, 2016). Students with disabilities are very hopeful that in the not too distant future, Indonesia, especially Jakarta as the capital of the country, will have inclusive tertiary institutions.

One student even remembers when a student with a disability was bullied by his friends and went viral on social media. This is one of the factors that causes students with disabilities still feel unsure about continuing their studies at tertiary institutions. This is unfortunate because students with disabilities also have the same achievements as other children.

Researchers also interviewed students with disabilities to get data about their experiences when they first entered university at university to experience in campus life to date. The three students said that they get discrimination not only from their fellow students but also from staff at the university.

“I have been treated badly since I first registered, took the test, and started college. I got this treatment not only from students, but also from the staff who provided services. In my opinion, many staff at the university do not quite understand how to treat a person with a disability. Often I have to wait in line for a long time to arrange payments or if I have to ask something from the academic department, even though all the officers see that I only have one leg and have to use crutches. ”

From interviews conducted with outstanding principals obtained data that teachers try to encourage students to continue their studies up to college. Some special schools have even tried to collaborate with universities in order to receive prospective students with disabilities. But in its implementation it is still difficult, because when graduates of special or inclusive schools register and see their physical condition, the university immediately refuses for various reasons. Very few universities are really willing to accept prospective students with disabilities.

“At this time, what has always been heard is only inclusive schools. There have been many government programs that have promoted inclusive schools, but to date, the government has not done any campaign for inclusive campuses. I think at this time the role of government is needed to provide the widest possible opportunity for students graduating from special schools and inclusive schools to continue their study at tertiary institutions. Certainly not only university leaders and management must have the awareness to treat persons with disabilities but the entire academic community including staff and all students.”

The researcher also interviewed two university rectors. From interviews with policy makers, different information was obtained. A leader of a private university in Jakarta said that until now his university had accepted students with disabilities, but it was limited only to those with physical disabilities, namely students with wheelchair and physical disabilities. The university has not yet accepted students with visual impairments because they were not ready, both the teaching staff and the modules which had to be written in Braille, and students with hearing impaired because there had to be co-professors bridging with sign language. When asked if there were sanctions from the government if the university refused persons with disabilities, the leadership of the university said that so far no sanctions had been imposed on these universities.

“Most importantly, universities must have a commitment especially in these 4 main areas, namely: institutional commitment, curriculum design and content, pedagogy and instructional delivery, and assessment to be considered for developing and implementing inclusive teaching and learning.” (May and Bridger, 2010).

Meanwhile, a chancellor from a state university said that his university had accepted students with disabilities over the past 10 years. They also have prepared teaching staff who can help such as for students with hearing impaired. There is a teaching assistant who guides him with sign language. Likewise, infrastructure. In every public facility there are Braille letters. The differences in the university will actually benefit, especially if students get the task to discuss groups (Terenzini et al, 2001). However, if the university cannot manage this difference properly it will certainly have bad consequences (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009).

CONCLUSION

From the data analysis above, we can conclude that until now there are still very few graduates of special schools and inclusive schools who continue their studies to universities. This is because there are still often found students with disabilities who are bullied and discriminated against. Another problem is the lack of socialization from the government about inclusive universities as well as inclusive schools. Therefore the government needs to immediately launch an inclusive university program. For future research, researchers recommend conducting research on inclusive university program design with a different approach.

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