

# **The Level of Awareness And Understanding On Disable Concept Among Diploma In Architecture of POLISAS Students**

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## **Abstract**

Disabilities is very complex, and it related with our daily life. There are several categories of disabilities. Due to the various categories of disabilities types, it lead to the misunderstanding of disabilities concept within public and students. The purpose of this paper was to evaluate the level of understanding among polytechnic students (Architecture Programme), to find out the best way how to educate students about disable people and to understand the cause of low understanding and misconception of disable among the students. By using quantitative method, the questionnaire was distributed to 155 architectural students selected from all semesters of study. Result from analysis show that most of the students still lacking on the understanding and knowledge of disabilities since the percentage of the No answers for the question given is more than 50%. The mean score for definition of disability how at 0.85 which indicate at negative level of knowledge among the students. However, the students show some positive response toward learning new topic of disability. In addition, for the understanding of disability, the result denoted that it gradually decreased as it goes up to higher semester respondents. It has, therefore, become necessary for architects and designers to consider these needs when working within their profession. In order to provide the inclusion of disabled people needs in the built environment and daily life, it is crucial for the students that learning about the built environment (architecture) to understand about disability. The implementation learning about disables people in students' curriculum has been recognized as an important step in facilitating and enhancing the uptake of the barrier-free environment during the design process.

**Keywords:** Disabled People, Architecture Curriculum, Higher Education

## **1. Introduction**

The Ministry of Education in Malaysia has set up a special education division that caters to the needs of students with disabilities (students with special needs). According to the Ministry's website, the special education division has set up special education service centres that work with specialized agencies in providing professional services (such as audiology services, sign language classes, therapeutic activities, counselling to students and reference services as required), services to help and advice on special education, social welfare, education and career prospects for individuals with special needs, provide information materials related to special education to be disseminated to the community. In Malaysia, disabilities are divided into seven categories: hearing, learning, mental, physical, speech, visual and multiple. Each category covers a huge variety of disability types, over half of which cannot be identified at first glance. However, the awareness and understanding of disabled people and needs are still low and lacking among students that deals or learn closely with the built environment, especially students from the diploma of architecture in polytechnic.

## **2. Disabilities**

Disability is complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and contested. Disabilities come in a various way. There are several classifications of disabilities. As mention by (Kristen Betts, 2011) there are 3 categories of disabilities as reported by US Census Bureau which cover Communication Domain, Mental Domain, and Physical Domain. Disability refers to the negative aspects of the interaction between individuals with a health condition (such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, depression) and personal and environmental factors (such as negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social supports). According to (Kristen Betts, 2011) as being defined by Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the disability term refers to a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such individual. This paper will discuss the understanding of disable term among architecture students in POLISAS. Since architectural students deal directly with creating the universal design or barrier-free environment, it is crucial to know the level of understanding of handicapped or disable people (Ambigapathy, 2011). It is important for Diploma in Architecture students to understand and increase their knowledge of disability in order to support and findings ways to provide a better-built environment or barrier-free environment to the disable people (Hasnah Toran, 2011).

## 2.1 Concept of Disabilities

In reference to (Kristen Betts, 2011), disabilities are divided into 3 categories which are Communication Domain, Mental Domain, and Physical Domain.

A person whom identified under Communication Domain normally is someone who has difficulty in vision and hearing sense. In other words, they are blind, deaf or both. Furthermore, they also had difficulty having their speech understood by others. This might also happen due to speech sounds, whereby the person cannot utter the word correctly or clearly and in other cases, the person have problems in speaking fluently without hesitating too much or stuttering whenever they are trying to communicate with others (Barnes, 2011).

Apart from that, Mental Domain is referred to a person whom had an intellectual disability, learning disability, development disability or in other words Alzheimer's disease. Furthermore, the act of senility or dementia also highly related to this domain. Having all these difficulties, the person might feel unstable emotionally or mentally that will negatively affects their everyday activities (James H. Rimmer, 2004).

On the other hand, (Muhamad Nadhir Abdul Nasir, 2016) Physical Domain is defined by a person who has to use a wheelchair, cane, crutches or even walker to assist them moving. In relation to physical disability, they might find it difficult to climb a flight of stairs, lifting heavy things, grasping objects or even getting in or out of bed like normal people do every day. Diseases generally known such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, paralysis, and stroke are also categorized under this domain. More specifically, arthritis or rheumatism, stiffness or deformity of limbs, thyroid problem, back or spine problem, stomach or digestive problems, broken bone or fracture, cerebral palsy, head or spinal cord injury, lung or respiratory problem might contribute to limitation in daily routine.

## 2.2 Problem Statement

From all the efforts on integrating built environment with the design for all types of user including disabled users into curriculum and professional networks, it become obvious that the awareness of the students particularly from the department of architecture, as the final product will being utmost relation with the user, hence it should be increased to provide environment that designed with high quality and considered for all categories of users. However, there has not been any specific organized initiative to develop a curriculum in which the consideration for disabled people is provided as a separate course on its own in schools of design and architecture. Therefore, students from the stated departments graduates and enter into professional environments without any inclusion or consideration of disabled people or user. Even, they do not have an idea about considering to design for disables users.

Hence, in this study the main concern is to highlight the importance of understanding of disabled concept among the architecture students in polytechnic specifically also in the education process of the design profession, and raise the awareness on that concept. Low level of awareness and consideration for disabled and misunderstanding of disability scope could lead to the disabled design or built environment. This study attempts to investigate the knowledge and awareness of disabled/people with special needs among architectural students POLISAS.

#### 2.1.1 Objectives:

- i. To evaluate the level of understanding among Architecture students Programme in POLISAS
- ii. To know the willingness of the students to learn a new topic
- iii. Find out the best way how to educate students about disabled people

### **3. Research Methodology**

A simple questionnaire related to the understanding of disabilities concept was developed. This questionnaire consisted of three types of background characteristics. Section A: demographic (gender, age, education level, and living setting); Section B: knowledge about disability and Section C cover the question related to the willingness of the sample to study or to learn about disability.

#### 3.1 Participation and Survey

The questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of the new semester of December 2017 session. They were chosen by stratified quota sampling on the basis of their class. The focus groups were conducted in POLISAS. The participants are from semester 1 to semester 5 of Architectural Programme and it cover 155 of students. The survey was conducted by using questionnaire survey in which the questionnaire are the same for all respondents (Krauthwohl, 1997). Since the main issue was to analyse the awareness of Architectural students in POLISAS on the disabled concepts, the questions were modified from (WHO, 2011). The participants were facilitated by members of the research team to conduct the survey sessions. At the beginning of each survey session, the researcher explained the purposed of study. The participants were instructed to address the information related to their understanding of disability concept.

## 4. Data Analysis and Findings

The accuracy of the 155 participants' responses to the stated questions was assessed by using SPSS. The statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 22. Table 1 shows results of the survey. The results of the survey will be presented in percentage and mean value score.

### 4.1 Section A

Section A focuses on demographic studies on respondents taking part in the questionnaire. The respondents were asked about demographic which questionnaire covers on gender, age, education level and living setting. For the Section

Table 1 shows the, overall, the majority percentage of the questionnaire was contributed mostly by students aged 18-20 represented by 56.1%. They are the youngest age group students representing semester 1 and 2, while respondents aged 25 and above are the lowest at 0.6%. The range of respondents' age strongly relates to the level of education for polytechnic admission that will be discussed under the Education level category.

In relation to the Age category results, most of the respondents who go to polytechnics are Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) students represented by 60.6% and Community College (KK) 33.5% from all over Malaysia. 5.8% is for Other than these two options. Being govern under the same ministry known as Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) who aims to produce graduates at semi-professional level in engineering, commerce, hospitality, ICT and services, and provide alternative routes to education high, namely to public or private institutions for post-secondary students the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia and Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Vocational) and graduates of polytechnics and colleges community. Hence, both polytechnics and community college institution work collaboratively to ensure education resources can be accessed through the various channel. In that sense, the community college has become among the main feeder of students for polytechnic and specifically for Diploma in Architecture programme, they will be distributed among 5 Polytechnic in Malaysia that offers the said course. There is a difference between SPM students and college community graduates, especially their level of knowledge, computer skill, , and creativity. So based on these differences, the result of this survey is hugely influenced by the group that answers the most and in our case, the majority is from SPM student. They are considered as fresh and still lack of exposure on matters concerning current issues in the architectural field.

By gender, female respondent is leading by 54.8% whereby male respondent is 45.2%. Based on every semester intake recorded by *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Pelajar (HEP)*, the ratio of female students always higher than the male ratio in the most programme offered in polytechnic.

Furthermore, 93.5% is contributed by Malay respondents for Race category followed by Chinese 3.2%, Indian 1.9% and Others 1.3%. This shows that Malay student still prefers Polytechnic as their academic institution to build their foundation before pursuing their study for the higher level. This continuously affects the percentage of Religion category whereby 94.2% of respondents are Muslim, followed by Christian 6%, Hindu 2.6%, and Buddha 2.6%. From these results, it can be summarised that Architecture programme in POLISAS is still dominated by Malay and Muslim students.

Finally, for Living Setting category, the percentage of the respondent is quite balanced between Small City 39.4% and Rural 30.3%. The slightly lower percentage is from Large City, at 23.2% and the least is respondents from Town area, recorded at 7.1%. This statistic shows that most of our respondents come from the small city and rural areas. This might happen due to polytechnic's location that is relatively nearer to our respondent hometown, in those areas. Respondents from large cities and town might have varies options to choose for an educational institution, public or private ones.

#### 4.2 Section B

In section B, the questioned are more focused on students' knowledge about disability and their definition of disability. Students were asked about the several conditions and either the condition can be considered as disability or not. The answers either, Yes, No or Not sure. Each answers are given scale in order to measure the respondents' responds. A score of 0 indicated No, 1 indicated Not Sure and 2 indicated Yes. The results of all questions from survey questions are divided into two parts which are;

- (i) Distribution of the average percentage of students Understanding on Disabilities
- (ii) Mean Score of students' knowledge based on different semesters. A mean score greater than 1 signify a positive level of knowledge, while a mean score that is less than 1 denoted a negatives one.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the feedback on their understanding and knowledge on disabilities. Referring to the distribution, most of the students still lacking on the understanding and knowledge of disabilities. The percentage of the No answers is more than 50%.

Section B is a study of the 3 main domains associated with disability research, namely Communication Domain, Mental Domain and Physical Domain, as described earlier. The questionnaire that used as survey are as follows:

Question a. Do you consider any of the following conditions and diseases to be a disability? Mark one answer for each category.

- Physical Disabled
- Mentally Disabled
- Visually Impaired (blind, low vision)
- Bi-Polar Disorder
- Colour Blindness
- Medically fragile/ dependent- includes those dependent on life sustaining medications such as with HIV/AIDS and diabetes, or are dependent on medications to control conditions and maintain quality of life such as pain medications, allergy medications, seizure control medications etc.
- Depression
- Pregnant Woman
- Frail/elderly, seniors
- Obesity

Question b. Definition of Disability

- Disability is related to the impairments related to the physical, medical fragile, medical compromised, pregnant, Senior Citizen and Obesity
- Not Sure
- Disability is not related to the any impairments and it is a type of diseases.

Question c. Willingness of the respondents to learn about Concept Disability

Starting with the definition of Physical Disabilities, which is translated as impairments that significantly impact physical performance and daily life activities with inborn being classified as hereditary, congenital, or induced by birth trauma quoted in (Mark F.O'Reilly, 2015) there are 6 types disable which has been specified under this domain such as Physical, Medical Fragile, Medical Compromised, Pregnant, Senior Citizen and Obesity.

Among the types mentioned, the pregnant type is often neglected by the community. Still many Malaysians especially teenagers are not aware that pregnant women are classified as disable. Among the issues often associated with these groups are the priority for getting services or facilities for public transportation, employment, parking facilities and others.

Furthermore, the same negligence occurs for obesity category. Being labeled as the highest obesity prevalence in Southeast Asia, Malaysia had

the largest number of productive years lost because of obesity among females, which was between seven and 12 years, and the second highest among males at between six and 11 years (Rashid, 2017). This figures covered intensive survey on Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Based on the findings of the survey, 61.3% stated that they did not know about physical disabilities. 31% know about it while 14.3% is uncertain. For Medical Fragile and Medical Compromised, 74% of the respondent is not aware of this disability, 7% is aware and remaining 18.7% is uncertain. Followed by Senior Citizen and Obesity, 86% of the respondent is not aware of this disability, around 6% is aware and remaining 8% is uncertain. Finally, for the Pregnant category, 91.0% of the respondent is not aware of this disability, 3.2% is aware and remaining 5.8% is uncertain. This figure is a bit troubling as it appears that the majority of respondents are not sensitive to this group. Therefore, it also makes it difficult to help these people in their daily routine as their existence is not getting the right attention.

Turning to the Mental Domain, there are three main categories namely Mental, Bipolar Disorder and Depression. An individual suffering from any recorded is also indirectly categorized as disable. They need to be supervised frequently, attend continuous treatment and safe space to keep their mental stability in control. For the Mental category, 67.1% of respondents do not know about this disability, 23.9% is aware and remaining 9.0% is uncertain. Followed by Bipolar Disorder category, 66.5% of respondents do not know about this disability, 12.9% is aware and remaining 20.0% is uncertain. Lastly, for Depression category, 71.0% of respondents do not know about this disability, 13.5% is aware and remaining 15.5% is uncertain. Overall, the majority of respondents did not have the basic knowledge and exposure on Mental Domain. Among the contributing factors is the lack of interest in reading on disable issues, lack of exposure from the mass media. There is also a possibility where the society misunderstood the concept of disable by assuming mental problems does not belong to disable criteria.

Moving on to the last domain, the Communication Domain consists of 3 main groups such as Deaf, Color Blindness and Blind and other problems. All three types of disables can cause difficulty in communicating well in everyday life. Based on the statistics of the questionnaire received, 64.5% of respondents did not see it as disable matter, 29.0% is aware and remaining 6.5% is unsure for the Deaf category. This is followed by Color Blindness category where 76.1% of respondents do not see it as disable matter, 15.5% is aware and remaining 8.4% is unsure. Among the three categories, the highest percentage of low knowledge on disable among respondents was noted by the category of Color Blindness. Briefly, it refers to red-green color blindness which is usually inherited, and occurs in about eight percent of males and only about 0.4 percent of females. This is because of the way the genes for the different cone cells are carried on the

chromosomes. The genes that lead to red-green color blindness are on the X chromosome (males have only one of these whereas females have two). (Government of Western Australia, Department of Health, 2013). A person with Color Blindness may only be able to tell red and green traffic lights apart by their position (red above green). In normal daylight, this may be easy to do, but on a dark, wet night it may be much more difficult to know which is which. Moreover, some occupational groups will not allow a worker who is color blind to do certain work for example, where wiring or warning lights are color coded. Having all these restrictions, a color blinded person totally depends on great infrastructure and facilities that could help them live a normal life like everyone else.

Referring to Table 3, it is indicated mean value for the question related to the definition of disable. Students were asked about their definition of disability. The mean value of scores for this question are presented in the table above. From the result, it shows that the overall level of awareness and understanding of disable concept among polytechnic students is very low. Response for do not know what is disability is all about and was the most frequently chosen response with 54.8% of overall participants. The respondent who has an idea about disable is represented by 39.4% and the remaining 5.8% belongs to the group of the respondent who feels uncertain about this topic. In addition, the mean score for this questions show is below 1 score which 0.85. This score signify that the students' knowledge and awareness about disability is below par or at negative level.

From our analysis, we found out that most of our respondent is confused with the term to disable whereby their interpretation is totally different from what we aim. Disable for them means unable to do something, which has got nothing to do with the 3 main domain discussed earlier, namely Communication Domain, Mental Domain and Physical Domain. Hence, the main issue of the low level of awareness and understanding among our respondents is due to language barrier and lack of exposure on their own effort. According to a survey on the use of English as language medium in Malaysian education system, it is only among the small group of middle and upper-class families in urban areas that English continued to be used as the preferred home language (Ambigapathy, 2011). As cited in (Phillipson, 1993) as for the rest of the population, especially those from the rural areas, English has become an entirely foreign language.

Back to earlier demographic study on the living setting, 30.3% of the respondent is from rural areas which mean there is a strong evidence of misinterpretation and misconception of the term disable do exist.

Table 4 represent the comparison of distribution of percentage about understanding and knowledge of students between the semesters of study. In addition, the comparison level of disabilities understanding between semesters also being analyzed. Based on the survey result shown above, the level of understanding on disable concept constantly

increased from 14.3% to 41.4%. Instead, for low understanding, it gradually decreased as it goes up to higher semester respondents. It drops quite drastically from 71.4% to 48.3%. In short, higher semester respondents have a better understanding of disability concept compared to the lower ones.

However, the unsure percentage started with 14.3% from semester one respondents and drop drastically to 3.1% and 3.4 for semester 2 and 3. It goes up again for semester 4 and 5 students, closing at 10%.

Table 5 portrays the result for the question related to the willingness to learn about new topic which is disability concepts. Students show positive attitudes towards learning new topic (the concept of disabilities). The willingness of the respondents to learn about the new topic is shown in Table 5. From the table, it shows that positive attitudes among students. Most of the respondents are willing to learn a new topic. This suggests that architecture students viewed the disabilities or the differences of individual as the important topic that they should be exposed and learn for a better experience and their future practice.

### 3.3 Section C

In Section C, students were asked what is the best method or medium that they think the best to use in order to learn the concept of disabilities. The data of the survey from this section are illustrated in Table 6.

Question D: What is the best method, approach or medium to learn Disable topic?

According to Table 6, students or respondents mostly prefer to learn about the concept of disabilities through an informal method which is the movie that covers 36.7% from the response and followed by learning through animation, that caters 18.6%. Furthermore, students choose to learn the concept of disabilities through Formal syllabus accommodate about 13.5 % and followed by others which cover 13%. Hence, Magazines /Comic and Others take about at 12.6% and 10.4%. Lastly, storybook becomes the last choice of the students as the method of learning the concept of disabilities where cover only 5.6% of the overall percentages.

## 5. Conclusion

There are many arguments about the educational, social, and ethical issues due to the inclusion of the disabled people with their special needs in the built environment. Many educationalists believe that such inclusion would help disabled people to integrate better into society.

Apart from the lack of exposure, language barrier or virtual setting that might help the student to visualize on how does it feel to be a disabled people, the fundamental understanding is strongly related to the

knowledge and awareness on universal design, known as UD. Based on a study on their intertwined relationship, According to the (ERKILIC, 2011), the universalization of the status of disability, provide a basis for the development of the conceptual and strategic foundations of UD. The term 'universal' has never been accepted as the universal within UD in a more essentialist dogmatic way. The term 'design for all' indicates 'universality', and the principles of UD always encourage a diversity of solutions that can solve various physical environmental problems alternatively in order to solve the design problems of 'all people' to the greatest extent possible.

In the nutshell, this study is the first step to access the level of awareness and understanding on disable concept among polytechnic students which also leads to the discovery of the term universal design. By defining the cause of low understanding and misconception of disability among the students, it will help to find out the best way how to educate students about disable people to ensure the future architect generation is well educated and sensitive towards all fundamental need that caters people from all walks of life.

The results of the study showed that there was statistically significant lack of understanding and awareness among architecture students in POLISAS regarding the concept of disabilities. There are also respondents that show some misunderstanding about disabilities. This study is the first to assess architecture student knowledge and awareness related to the concept of disabilities, and the enthusiasm of students to be exposed or learn a new topic. Besides, students also being given an opportunity to propose what is the suitable method for them in order to learn new topic with maximum understanding. These findings have contributed to the current body of knowledge relating to the concept of disabilities in higher education especially in polytechnic and have identified important areas for future research in order to enhance the training and education of future built environment workforce.

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## Appendices

**Table 1: Demographic data**

Variable	Categories	Percentage (%)
Age	18-20	56.1
	21-22	31.0
	23-24	12.3
	25 Above	0.6
Gender	Male	45.2
	Female	54.8
Races	Malay	93.5
	Chinese	3.2
	Indian	1.9
	Others	1.3
Religion	Islam	94.2
	Christian	.6
	Hindu	2.6
	Buddha	2.6
Education level	SPM	60.6
	Community College	33.5
	Others	5.8
Living Setting	Large City	23.2
	Small City	39.4
	Town	7.1
	Rural	30.3

**Table 2: Knowledge about Disability**

Types of Disabilities	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not Sure (%)
Physical	30.3	61.3	8.4
Mental	23.9	67.1	9.0
Blind and other problems	38.1	54.8	7.1
Deaf	29.0	64.5	6.5

Bipolar Disorder	12.9	66.5	20.0
Color Blindness	15.5	76.1	8.4
Medical Fragile	7.1	74.2	18.7
Medical Compromised	6.5	74.8	18.7
Depressed	13.5	71.0	15.5
Pregnant	3.2	91.0	5.8
Senior Citizen	7.1	85.2	7.7
Obesity	5.2	86.5	8.4

**Table 3: Definition of Disable**

<b>Definitions</b>	<b>Percentages</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
<b>Related to impairments</b>	39.4	
<b>Not related to any impairments</b>	54.8	0.85
<b>Not Sure</b>	5.8	

**Table 4: Comparison level of disabilities understanding between semesters**

<b>Definition of Disability</b>			
<b>Semester</b>	<b>Related to impairments</b>	<b>Not related to any impairments</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
1	14.3 %	71.4 %	14.3 %
2	40.6 %	56.3 %	3.1 %
3	27.6 %	69.0 %	3.4 %
4	30.0 %	60.0 %	10.0 %
5	41.4 %	48.3 %	10.3 %

**Table 5: Willingness of the respondents to learn about Concept Disability**

<b>Willingness of the respondents to learn about Concept Disability</b>		
<b>Response</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	91	58.4
No	10	6.6
Not Sure	54	35.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 6: Medium or Method to learn Concept of Disabilities**

<b>Method of Learning</b>	<b>Responses</b>	
	n	%
Formal Syllabus	29	13.5
Animation	40	18.6
Magazines / Comic	27	12.6
Movie	79	36.7
Story Book	12	5.6
Others	28	13