

Development of supported employment in Malaysia

Yeo Swee Lan¹, Hiroshi Ogawa², Grace Gan Wei Cheng²,
Sharifah Hafizah Saad Hassan³, and Pang Jee Ching⁴

¹Enabling Academy, Gamuda Foundation
Lot 53-61, Jalan SS22/23, Damansara Jaya, 47400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Malaysia

²Institute of Inclusive Society and Culture, Otsuma Women's University
2-7-1 Karakida, Tamashi, Tokyo, 243-0031 Japan

³Department of Social Welfare Malaysia
No. 55, Persiaran Perdana, Presinct 4, 62100 Putrajaya, Malaysia

⁴Faculty of Education, SEGi University
No. 9, Jalan Teknologi, Taman Sains Selangor, Kota Damansara, PJU 5,
47810 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

Key words: Job coach, Supported employment, Malaysia

Abstract

The collaboration between Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Malaysia Department of Social Welfare (DSW) from 2005 to 2015 has contributed to the development of supported employment in Malaysia. Supported Employment is strategies and techniques to help persons with disabilities working in integrated work settings. During the project, the training packages and implementing schemes were developed under the collaborative work by DSW, JICA and Malaysian leaders in the field of work support for persons with disabilities. As a result of the collaborative project, a total of 2,398 participants have attended 3 days' course or 4 days' course of job coach training as of 2019. From 2012 to 2018, a total of 956 persons with disabilities have been employed with job coach service program by a total of 543 companies. A total of 329 job coaches were involved in supporting these PWDs. The initiative of supported employment in Malaysia seems to be successful, but further researches are needed to improve the quality of job coach training and job coach service program.

1. Introduction

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Malaysia have a choice in regards to registering with the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) since registration is not mandatory for PWDs in Malaysia. As of December 2018, the number of PWDs that have voluntarily registered with the DSW is 513,519 people (DSW, 2018).

According to the DSW, 56.6% of PWDs registered were aged 19 to 59 (DSW, June 2018). This age range is considered the eligible age for employment. However, to date, there are no absolute statistics to

indicate the employment status of these 56.6% of the disabled population.

The Malaysia Persons with Disabilities Act, enacted in 2008, stated in Section 29, that, *Persons with disabilities shall have the right to access to employment on an equal basis with persons without disabilities.* (Laws of Malaysia, Act 685). Several pertinent questions need to be asked include: How are the rights to employment fulfilled in Malaysia? What has the government done to quantitatively and qualitatively measure its achievements in honoring the rights to employment for PWDs?

After ten years since the enactment of this Act, unemployment for PWDs is still observed to be high, especially amongst people with learning disabilities, which is 34%, or 174,459 people of the total population of PWDs that were registered as shown in Table 1 (DSW, Dec 2018).

2. Supported Employment

Supported employment, first initiated in the United States (U.S.) during the early 80's has enabled thousands of people with learning disabilities, once considered unemployable, to be employed in the labor force. Citing Wehman, West & Kergel, Yeo (2010) noted there were 9,000 individuals working in supported employment in the U.S. by 1986. The number grew to 140,000 by 1995. The number of community rehabilitation providers offering supported employment also increased from fewer than 300 in 1986 to over 3,600 by 1996. The supported employment approach was spread to the UK and other European countries in the late 80's and has impacted the employment of people with learning disabilities (Yeo, 2010).

Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), a non-profit organization founded in the United States (U.S.) in 1988, has established the CESP (Certified Employment Support Professional) credential system in the U.S. in 2011. CESP credential recognizes individuals who have demonstrated a sufficient level of knowledge and skills to provide integrated employment support services to help PWDs toward competitive employment (CESP, 2019).

Japan pioneered supported employment services in the Asia Pacific region in the 80's. Ogawa (2007) reported that there is a comprehensive system in Japan to support PWDs, including those with learning disabilities and multiple disabilities for employment. A job coaching system funded by the labor department of the national government was set up to support PWDs

to achieve sustainable employment. Japan Ministry Health Labor and Welfare (MHLW) reported that a total of 9,521 participants have attended the certified job coach training, and by 2018 there were 3,497 PWDs working in the labor market with job coach support system.

Table 1: Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) Registered with the DSW (Dec 2018)

Type of Disabilities	Number of People	% of total number of PWDs
Physical Disabilities	188,049	36.6%
Learning Disabilities	174,459	34.0%
Visual Disabilities	44,686	8.7%
Mental Disabilities	43,248	8.4%
Hearing Disabilities	36,870	7.2%
Multiple Disabilities	23,420	4.7%
Speech Disabilities	2,787	0.5%
Total	513,519	

3. Development of Supported Employment in Malaysia

The collaboration between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Malaysia Department of Social Welfare from 2005 to 2015 in the three projects listed in Table 2, has significantly impacted the development of supported employment in Malaysia. (Nik Ab. Rahman, 2015). Nik Ab. Rahman noted that between the period of Aug 2010 to Dec 2014, 1,350 people have attended Job Coach Training Courses. The majority of these participants were from Community Rehabilitation Centers (CBRs), 453 participants;

private sector, 300 participants; officers of DSW, 188 participants and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), 174 participants. Other agencies that participated in the training included officers from the Department of Education, Department of Labour, Ministry of Health and Social Security Organization as shown in Table 3.

Table 2: Projects Implemented Through the Collaboration of Malaysia JICA and DSW (Sep 2005 - Aug 2015)

Year	Project
Sept 2005 - Aug 2008	Project for Capacity Building on Social Welfare Services for Persons with Disabilities
Sept 2009 – Aug 2012	Project to Support Participation of Persons with Disabilities Phase 1
Sept 2012 – Aug 2015	Project to Support Participation of Persons with Disabilities Phase 2

During the Project for Capacity Building on Social Welfare Services for Persons with Disabilities (Sept 2005 - Aug 2008), various services to support participation and inclusion of all PWDs were introduced and initiated. These services included Supported Employment and Job Coaching, Independent Living, Inter-Agency Networking and Human Resource Development. The first Job Coach Introductory Workshop co-organized by DSW and JICA Malaysia that was held in Bangi, Malaysia, in 2007, was conducted by Hiroshi Ogawa and Daisuke Sakai, who are Japanese experts in supported employment (JICA Malaysia, 2008). These two experts were engaged by JICA Malaysia as experts for the DSW-JICA joint project from 2005 to 2015 (JICA, 2008, 2012 and 2015).

The Project to Support Participation of Persons with Disabilities Phase 1 (Sept 2009 - Aug 2012) created awareness on the importance of supported employment. A two day Job Coach Introductory Course was

introduced to many government officials in the Ministry of Human Resources, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and also Social Security Organization to prepare these officials for the implementation of supported employment in Malaysia.

The significant achievement of Phase 1 was the initial development of supported employment in Malaysia. The Job Coaching Service Program was launched in 2012 by DSW. Human resources and policy development, including development of training packages and implementing scheme were the crucial components of this project (JICA Malaysia, 2012).

A Malaysian research by Saad Hassan (2015), has indicated that job coaching services play a crucial role among employees with disabilities and has proven to achieve higher emotional intelligence, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as compared to the employees with disabilities who were not given any job coaching support. This research was based on a study amongst 229 respondents, of which, a total of 117 were employees with disabilities that were given job coaching services and 112 were employees with disabilities who were not given job coaching services. This is the maiden research conducted on the impact of supported employment in Malaysia. Saad Hassan recommended for more research to be conducted to further assess and improve on the impact of supported employment in Malaysia.

4. Job Coach Service Program

The Project to Support Participation of Persons with Disabilities Phase 2, Sept 2012 - Aug 2015 (JICA Malaysia, 2015), aimed to increase the social participation of employment for PWDs. Structure for the sustainable development of Job Coach Service Program was established and was implemented nationwide. The key output of this project was the development of Job Coach Service Program which was implemented nationwide.

Job Coach Network Malaysia (JCNM) was established by the DSW in 2015, in collaboration with the Labor Department, SOCSO, Ministry of Health as well as selected Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and companies of the Private Sector. Training manuals for Job Coach Basic Course (JCBC) and Job Coach Introductory Course (JCIC) were developed. By 2015, 33 job coach trainers were trained. A team of six senior job coach trainers was also trained and equipped to facilitate the trainers workshop for job coach trainers in Malaysia (JICA Malaysia, 2015).

The training of job coaches continues even after the completion of JICA-DSW joint project in 2015. The DSW (Mar 2019) reported that, as of March 2019, a total of 2,394 participants have attended JCBC a four day course conducted mainly for the CBRs, and NGOs, as well as the JCIC, a three day course that were conducted mainly in the private sector, as shown in Table 3 (DSW, Mar 2019).

Project to Support Participation of Persons with Disabilities in 2009-2012 (Phase 1) and 2012-2015 (Phase 2) saw the establishment of supported employment in Malaysia and the implementation of Job Coach Service Program that enabled more PWDs who require employment support to achieve sustainable employment.

As shown in Table 4, by December 2018, a total of 956 PWDs have been employed to support from job coaches since the implementation of Job Coach Service Program in 2012. A total of 329 job coaches were involved in supporting these PWDs. The number continues to increase even though the JICA-DSW joint project was completed in Aug 2015. Amongst the total number of PWDs given employment support, people with learning disabilities benefited the most, which is 625 persons, 65.4% of the total number of PWDs (DSW, Dec 2018).

According to DSW (Dec 2018), amongst those who were employed by Job Coach Service Program from

2012 to 2018, 625 PWDs were from CBRs and 331 PWDs from NGOs.

Table 3: Participants of Job Coach Training from Aug 2010 to Mar 2019 (DSW, Mar 2019)

Organization/Agency	No. of Participants by Dec 2014	No. of Participants by Mar 2019
Community based rehabilitation Centers	453	999
Department of Social Welfare	188	378
Private Companies	300	342
Non-Governmental Organizations	174	308
Department of Education	72	134
Department of Human Resources	58	110
Ministry of Health	54	67
Students and Researchers	34	36
Social Security Organization	17	17
Islamic Religious Council	0	3
Department of Youth and Sports	0	1
Government Link Company	0	1
Total	1,350	2,396

The implementation of Job Coach Service Program could continue even after the collaboration with JICA Malaysia because there was commitment to continue the development from the Malaysian Government. The Ministry of Finance has since 2016, allocated an annual funding for this program, to promote sustainable employment of PWDs.

This funding, besides being used to pay job coaches for their job coaching services, is also being used to conduct more JCBC to equip more job coaches to provide employment support to PWDs (DSW, 2018).

As shown in Table 4, there were a total of 543 companies involved in employing PWDs through the

Job Coach Service Program. Amongst these companies, that have hired a significant number of PWDs include Mydin Mohamed Holdings Bhd (56 PWDs), Kentucky Fried Chicken (40 PWDs), Uniqlo Malaysia (32 PWDs), SM Mastana Enterprise (20 PWDs), Gerbang Alaf Restaurant Sdn Bhd (15 PWDs), Dialogue in the Dark Sdn Bhd (13 PWDs), Kwang Li Industry Sdn Bhd (10 PWDs) and Rosuria Enterprise (10 PWDs).

These 543 companies, however, did not capture the number of PWDs employed by companies that have their own in-house job coaches or support system. Gamuda Berhad, for example, has employed 18 adults with autism since 2014. Enabling Academy, an initiative of Gamuda Foundation has through their Employment Transition Program, supported 28 adults with autism for white collar and professional jobs in 14 partner companies of Enabling Academy since 2017 (Enabling Academy, 2019). AEON CO (M) Berhad has currently a record of 114 employees with disabilities in their outlets nationwide (DSW, May 2019). The success of the Job Coach Service Program is gauged by the employment sustainability of PWDs who are employed. A research on the retention rate of PWDs in employment is recommended to be conducted to monitor the success of the Job Coach Service Program.

5. Job Coach Training Program

5.1. Malaysian Job Coach Basic Course

The Malaysian JCBC was first conducted in 2012 (JICA 2012). Between the year 2012 to 2015, 38 JCBC were conducted throughout Malaysia (JICA 2015). The JCBC covers the seven steps of the process of job coaching as shown in Table 5 (Kuno et al., 2012). JCBC are still being conducted by Job Coach Network Malaysia and funded by DSW, even after the DSW-JICA joint project completed in 2015. As of 2016 to April 2019, 15 JCBC and four JCIC were conducted and funded by DSW, throughout Malaysia (DSW, May 2019).

Each of the seven steps of a job coaching process are being taught at JCBC with role plays and practical training for active participation and effective learning. On the first day of each training, a 14 minutes video on how these steps are being carried out by a job coach was shown for participants to visualize how each step is being carried out. The importance of these seven steps is strongly emphasized during the job coach trainings through power point presentation lectures, case studies, role plays and videos.

Table 4: Job Coach Service Program from 2012 to 2018 (DSW, Dec 2018)

Year	Total PWDs	Companies	Job Coaches	Learning Disabilities	Blind	Physical	Multiple	Deaf	Speech	Mental
2012	7	5	4	5	0	0	2	0	0	0
2013	94	41	17	61	29	3	0	1	0	0
2014	260	142	64	156	51	28	10	12	2	1
2015	70	53	24	38	22	2	4	4	0	0
2016	145	97	76	107	4	14	3	13	3	1
2017	222	102	88	154	6	24	16	14	1	7
2018	158	103	56	104	4	15	7	23	0	5
Total	956	543	329	625	116	86	42	67	6	14

Table 5: Process of Job Coaching

Step	Process of Job Coaching	Description
1.	Assessment of Persons with Disabilities	Understand the PWD's background, preferences, abilities and challenges.
2.	Assessment of Workplace	Evaluate the physical and human environments of the workplace.
3.	Job Matching	Match the job and PWD's preference and abilities, modify the job and environment to enable PWD to work effectively.
4.	Negotiation and Consultation	Negotiate and consult with employer to ensure that the PWD is given equal benefits and the appropriate support needed for sustainable employment.
5.	Intensive Support at Workplace using Systematic Instructions	Apply concepts and skills of systematic instructions i.e. job duty analysis, task analysis, appropriate level of instructions, manual and jigs to guide PWDs to work.
6.	Natural Support	Ensure retention of the employee with disabilities by developing Natural Support amongst co-workers.
7.	Fading and Follow-up	Gradually, fade out of support at the workplace when natural support is formed but continues to follow-up periodically.

5.2. Job Coach Introductory Course

The Job Coach Introductory Course (JCIC) is a three day course designed for private sector in-house job coaches. This course was adapted and simplified from the JCBC to make it relevant to the companies of private sectors that are employing PWDs. Some topics such as Negotiation and Consultation, were not included in this course. This course was conducted mainly for private sector.

5.3. Job Coach Follow-Up Workshop

A total of 21 Job Coach Follow-Up Workshops were

carried out nationwide in every state by appointed officers of DSW and job coach trainers of Job Coach Network Malaysia between the year 2013 to 2014 (JICA Malaysia, 2015). Currently, this workshop, known as Job Coach Enhancement Workshops is still being carried out throughout Malaysia from time to time, to enhance the quality of job coaching services. In the year 2017 to 2019, six Job Coach Enhancement Workshops were carried out in six regions through Malaysia (DSW, 2019). Job Coaches from every state were represented.

During the workshop, job coach trainers and assigned officers of DSW will enhance the job coaching knowledge and skills of job coaches through discussion, case studies, sharing of best practices as well as question and answer session. These workshops play an important role not only in enhancing the knowledge and skills of job coaches, but also instilled confidence in job coaches through the best practices and inspiration of the experienced job coaches.

6. The Malaysian PWDs Job Coaching National Occupational Skills Standard (NOSS)

The Department of Skills Development (DSD) in collaboration with DSW has established the Malaysian PWDs Job Coaching NOSS in 2017. Based on the analysis of job duties of a job coach, the NOSS development committee has given the consensus that job coach certification begins at Level 3 of the Malaysian PWDs Job Coaching NOSS. Job coaches with Level 3 certification must be competent in performing the following core competencies (DSD, 2017).

- i. PWDs Placement Assessment
- ii. PWDs Employment Welfare Support
- iii. PWDs Employment Benefit Support
- iv. PWDs Sustainable Employment Support
- v. PWDs Employment Progress Report

Each of the roles, job description and duties of the above core competencies were clearly stated in the PWDs Job Coaching NOSS. To be a certified job coach, the candidate must be able to fulfill the required competencies.

However, though the PWDs Job Coaching NOSS has been established since 2017, to date, no examination has been carried out yet to examine and certify practicing job coaches in Malaysia.

7. Conclusion

The collaboration between JICA Malaysia and Malaysia DSW from 2005 to 2015 has a significant impact in the development of supported employment in Malaysia. Being a developing country, the commitment of the Malaysian government in the development of supported employment to promote sustainable employment for people with disabilities is commendable.

It is observed that Malaysia has the strongest supported employment program in the South East Asian Region. Job coaches are trained in every state of Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak that is located in the East Malaysia where development is relatively slower than the West Malaysia. The number of people with learning disabilities being employed (625 people) within seven years is remarkable for a developing country.

This research has also noted 543 companies offered employment for PWDs through the Job Coach Service Program within 2012 to 2018. This is a significant number of companies in view that employment of PWDs is not mandatory in Malaysia.

The development of supported employment in Malaysia continues to progress though the collaboration with JICA Malaysia had ended in 2015. Through the financial funding of the Ministry of Finance since 2015, more job coaches are being trained and thus support for more people with disabilities are

made possible.

Nevertheless, it was noted that the monitoring of the quality of job coaching is not in place, though the Malaysian Job Coaching NOSS is developed. There is a need to examine the employment sustainability of PWDs that have benefited from supported employment to ensure long term sustainability.

References

- [1] Malaysia Department of Social Welfare (2017, 2018, 2019). Data source on Job Coach Service Program, Career Development Division, Department for the Development of Persons with Disabilities.
- [2] Yeo, S.L. (2010). *Employment Services for People with Learning Disabilities in the UK*. A research report under project: Towards a culturally sensitive disability studies: Interconnections of disability studies in and across Malaysia and the UK. Manchester Metropolitan Research Institute for Health and Social Change.
- [3] Association of People Supporting Employment First (ASPE) (2019). Certified Employment Support Professionals (CESP) Certification Handbook, United States.
- [4] Ogawa, H. (2007). A training workshop on *Introduction Job Coaching*, conducted at Bangi Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, Malaysia, 30 Oct to 2 Nov. Organized by Malaysia Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.
- [5] Japan Ministry Health Labor and Welfare (2018). Implementation system of vocational support for persons with disabilities in 2018.
- [6] Nik Ab. Rahman, Nik Omar (2015). A Paper presented at the *Asia Pacific Supported Employment and Job Coach*, 4-5 May, held at The Royal Chulan, Kuala Lumpur. Organised by Malaysia Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

- [7] Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Malaysia (2008). Project Report of the *Project Capacity Building on Social Welfare Services for Persons with Disabilities*, Sept 2005 - Aug 2008.
- [8] Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Malaysia (2012). Project Report of the *Project to Support Participation of Persons with Disabilities Phase 1*, Sept 2009 - Aug 2012.
- [9] Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Malaysia (2015). Project Report of the *Project to Support Participation of Persons with Disabilities Phase 2* (Sept 2012 - Aug 2015).
- [10] Kuno, K., Yeo, S.L., Ogawa, H. & Sakai, D. (2012). *Job Coach Handbook, A Practical Guide to Job Coaching*. Malaysia: MPH Group Publishing Sdn. Bhd.
- [11] Malaysia Department of Skills Development (2017). *Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) Job Coaching, National Occupational Skills Standard*.
- [12] Malaysia Department of Social Welfare (2019). *Community Based Rehabilitation Programme*. <http://www.jkm.gov.my/> (Retrieved 16.5.2019)
- [13] Saad Hassan, S. H. (2015). *Effectiveness of Job Coaching from The Perspective of Emotional Intelligence and its Effect on Job Satisfaction and Organisational Commitment Among Employees with Disabilities*. A dissertation as part of fulfilment for a master degree in the field of industrial and organisational psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Malaysia.

(Received November 26, 2019; accepted December 10, 2019)

Yeo Swee Lan

Project Consultant, JICA Malaysia (2011-2015)
Manager, Enabling Academy, Gamuda Foundation (2016-current)