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History of the Audiology & Speech Programmes in Malaysia

Speech and hearing services in this country started way in the 50's and 60's. The services were few and sporadic and they were provided by non-governmental bodies with help from international voluntary organizations such as the American Peace Corps and the Voluntary Services Organization (VSO) of the UK. Later governmental bodies such as the Social and Welfare Departments also took in a few of the foreign volunteers to work in specific areas of speech and hearing in specialized institutions. These meager services were later reduced when Malaysia became more developed economically. By the middle to late 1980's the vacuum left in these organizations for speech and hearing services were greatly felt as societies became more affluent and there were an increased demand for these services.

The education of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists in this country however began only recently. In 1992, the Medical Faculty of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, mooted the idea of starting a degree program for professional training of these two professions. These programs were designed to meet the international practicing standards and at the same time address the local conditions particularly the multilingual and multicultural needs of the people. The first batch of 15 students for each program started in 1995 and since then 7 cohorts of students have graduated from UKM. The programs are now being placed in the Faculty of Allied Health among other programs in health sciences. The UKM programs draw upon expertise from the medical, linguistics, psychology, social sciences and the speech and hearing sciences. At the initial stages of development much of the teaching expertise in specialized areas of speech and audiology were brought in through collaborative programs with international universities in the UK, US and Australia. Such collaboration also included training and education of local faculties to gradually develop expertise in these specialty areas.

Research in the area of speech and audiology are beginning to emerge in this country and there are positive developments in terms of collaborative research in related areas with other disciplines within and outside UKM. The UKM program has now been bench marked for the development of other new programs.