



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development**

**The Perspective of Employees With Disabilities Towards Their  
Workplace**

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**THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES TOWARDS  
THEIR WORKPLACE**

NURAIN BINTI NORMAN

This project is submitted in  
partial fulfilment of the requirements for a  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES TOWARDS THEIR WORKPLACE**

**NURAIN BINTI NORMAN**

There are lack of understanding about the culture of employees with disabilities and the obstacles they faced. Most of the studies were done from employer's perspective in hiring these group. A study that investigated the experiences from the participant's perspectives is still insufficient. Thus, this qualitative study aims to explore the perspectives of employees with disabilities (EWDs) towards their workplace. The issues that were being discussed in this study are the challenges, the motivations and also the strategies in coping with the challenges. The study was conducted in Kuching, Sarawak and the data were gathered from 6 participants which were physically disabled and employed in either private or government sector. The data were collected using a semi-structured interview and audio recording. Pilot study was also conducted which involved 2 participants. For the data analysis procedure, content analysis was used in this study. The findings show that the challenges faced by EWDs are mostly in term of facilities accommodated and their limitation of movement. Findings of the study also indicate that the strategies to overcome the challenges that is used by most participants are positive reframing. This study helps to contribute in understanding the experiences of EWDs at the workplace and provide guidelines for the employers in hiring these group.

**Keywords** employees with disabilities, employment, challenges, strategies, motivation factors

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter will describe the background of study, statement of the problem to the context of the study and objectives of the study. In addition, this chapter also explained the significance of the study, limitation and scope of the study, and definition of terms. Finally, the chapter ended with a summary.

### 1.1 Background of study

Person with disabilities (PWDs) exists in all societies. Many of them are 'hidden' at home or in specific institution due to social stigma, racism and environmental barriers (Ta & Leng, 2013). There are quite a number of Malaysian with disabilities who are still not employed. The exact factors on why these people remain unemployed is still uncertain. The failure to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce has severe economic consequences too (Ta & Leng, 2013). According to Ministry of Human Resources, there are 539,131 registered as disabled citizen in Malaysia (2019). There are 51 PWDs employed in government sector while 507 are employed in private sectors so far in Jan until September 2019 (Ministry of Human Resources, 2019). In 2008, the Malaysian Government had allocated 1% for the disabilities to be involved in the workforce and it is estimated that relatively 14,000 job opportunities in government sector are available for people with disabilities in Malaysia (Abdullah & Arnidawai, 2013). In September 2015, United Nations Member States developed The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve a sustainable development for everyone which also includes people with

disabilities. One of its goal which falls under proper work and the growth of economic is to offers productive and full employment, inclusive growth to allow persons with disabilities in getting fully access the job market by 2030 and Malaysia's score so far in 2019 is 80.4% (Sustainable Development Report Dashboards 2019). According to Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister, companies that hired people with disabilities will get double tax deductions. In addition, an allowance of RM300 is being provided by the departments to the PWDs that earn less than RM1200 and to those PWDs who wants to work in enterprise and small business field are also provided with RM 2,700.00 launching grants (Department of Social Welfare, 2008). Above all of the benefits, policies and implemented laws enacted in Malaysia, still, the participation of PWDs in the employment remain ambiguous and disappointing (Lee, Abdullah, & Mey, 2011; Ta & Leng, 2013). Despite of having distinct measures for PWDs, the rate of unemployment for this group is continually high. Getting employed in Malaysia has been the biggest challenge for them until now ( Lee, Abdullah, & Mey, 2011). The World Report on Disability reported that regardless developed or developing countries, PWDs experienced a high number of unemployment rates compared to the non-disabled (2011). It is essentially compelling for every humans to be employed regardless the person has disability or not . An involvement in the workforce can improve an individual's economic status as well as gaining skills and knowledge (Noor, Isa, & Manaf, 2017).

Several studies have shown that bias or discrimination in hiring people with disabilities is still growing throughout the world (Ta & Leng , 2013). A research acknowledge that people with disabilities experience many obstacles

that hinder their work performance and impact the quality of their working life such as discrimination in terms of payment, autonomy, promotion opportunities, decision making and job security (Blanck, 2001; Baldwin & Johnson, 2006; Schur et al, 2009; Khoo et al, 2013; Ta & Leng, 2013). Although many policies such as American with Disabilities Act (ADA 1990) and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 1995) that acts to protect and help the population of disabled clearly affect less on addressing the problem of unemployment among people with disabilities. These people still face discrimination in a workplace (Magdalene, 2014). Meanwhile in Malaysia, Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 was implemented where it covers an equal access for the disabilities. However, the Act “lacks of enforcement and a discrimination laws such as Hong Kong’s Disability Discrimination Ordinance, Britain and Australia’s Disability Discrimination Act and a Disability Inclusion Commission” are essential according to Prof Ruzita, heads of International Islamic University Malaysia disability services unit (The Star, 2018). However, in Sustainable Development Goals, it includes to promote peace, justice and substantial institutions in one of its goal where non-discriminatory laws and policies are enforced for sustainable development that includes everyone regardless of normal people or the disabilities.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

For the past few years, studies regarding people with disabilities in Malaysia are increasing but it is still not sufficient (e.g Ang, 2014; Hashim & Wok, 2014; Wahab & Ayub, 2017; Luu, 2019). There is also an increasing understanding and passion in exploring the expectations and essential needs and rights of people with disabilities in

Malaysia (Lavasani et al., 2015). This study is to scrutinize and give more information about people with disabilities especially those in the workforce. In addition, lack of understanding about the culture of people with disabilities, 'stereotyping' & various obstacles they experience, often make them to be marginalized in the employment market (Ta & Leng, 2013). The knowledge on progress of integrating PWD into workforce are still lacking therefore hinder companies from thoroughly accumulate the benefits from the diversity of the disability (Colella & Bruyere, 2011). Hence, this present research seek to understand more about the culture of disabilities in labor pool.

Previous years, studies about the challenges of employers and barriers in hiring people with disabilities in the world of employment have been done (e.g. Kho, Tiun, & Lee, 2013; Mohd Nor, Mohd Isa, & Abd Manaf, 2017; Yusof, Ali, & Salleh, 2014). However, limited studies have investigated these experiences from the participants' perspectives (Cho et al., 2019). Although there are now increasing numbers of studies concerning the issue of disability from the employer's perspective, industry and organization (e.g. Kreisman & Palmer, 2001; Lee, 1996; Cleveland et al., 1997; Jen GwoChen & He Zesheng, 1997), to some extent few studies have discussed this matter from the perspective of employee with disabilities. According to Colella and Bruyere (2011), a research about disability are divided into three categories which are accommodation, integration and selection. However, while there are ample studies regarding accommodation and selection, there is still insufficient studies focusing on the integration of PWD or the system after they enter the workplace. This research seeks to investigate the challenges in employment from the perspective of employees with disabilities itself. Moreover, other studies highlighted on disabilities concerns at large, in conjunction with the accessibility of law governing for people with disabilities (e.g. Ainul, 2012) and the critical circumstances affecting employment of



people with disabilities in Malaysia (e.g. Khor, 2002; Ramakrishnan, 2007). Besides, less information on the retention of employees with disabilities and the securing of appropriate workplace accommodations. This present study hopes to contribute in more specific issues regarding the disabilities such as factors that motivates them to stay employed in their current job.

Moreover , plentiful research have documented the obstacles encountered by employees with disabilities in acquiring a position that suits them (e.g. Bean & Beard, 1975; Cohen, 1962; Eggers, 1960; Florian, 1978; PerIman & Strudler, 1976; Polner, 1958; Rickard, Triandis & Patterson, 1963). However ,there are still lack of studies regarding on how employees with disabilities cope with their nature in the workforce. This study hopes to seek on strategies in coping with the challenges they faced in a workplace. Lack of comprehensive information about distinct obstacles faced by PWDs in Malaysia gives a great challenge for increasing their employment rate (Lee, Abdullah, & Mey, 2011). Despite the significance of disability issues raised within the jurisdiction framework, research that provides management supervision for employees with disabilities continues to left behind research conducted on other protected groups such as the non-disabled (Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016).

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The general objective for this study is to explore the perspectives of employees with disabilities (EWDs) towards employment in Malaysia.

### **1.3.1 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives for this study are :

1. To identify the factors that motivates employees with disabilities to stay employed in their current job
2. To outline the challenges of employees with disabilities at the workplace
3. To identify the strategies of the employees with disabilities in coping with the challenges at their workplace

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What are the factors that motivate employees with disabilities to stay employed in their current job?
2. What are the challenges of employees with disabilities at the workplace?
3. How do employees with disabilities cope with the challenges at their workplace?

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

#### **1.5.1 Knowledge**

This study contributes to enhance knowledge about the disabilities to organizations in Malaysia. It also extends literature review on EWDs and employment in Malaysia context.. This study contributes to outlining factors that may motivate employees with disabilities(EWDs) therefore, creating awareness of the organizations in Malaysia about the importance of providing a suitable work environment for the disabilities. Lastly, this study extends knowledge and understanding for policy makers to emphasize more on EWDS.

### **1.5.2 Organization**

It may help the organization to improve their working environment so that it become more accessible to the disabilities hence increasing the employability amongst the disabilities.

This study also helps the organizations in identifying the barriers that exists among the disabilities at the workplace in order to increase the employment rate of the group. In addition, the results of this study can provide ideas to the organization to conduct a suitable training for the disabilities so it will become easier to facilitate this group.

### **1.5.3 HRD Practices**

In terms of HR practices, it can provide ideas and guidance to existing potential HR about EWDs. The existing potential HR also can improve the existing enforcement about EWDs in HRD practices according to their needs and benefits. Furthermore, HRD practices such as career planning and development can be adjusted better for the EWDs as the existing HR have gain knowledge on their needs and coping mechanism. The HR planning and recruitment can be improved for the EWDs group as the existing HR are aware of the encouragement made by government to give them more opportunities in employment.

## **1.6 Limitations of Study**

The respondents of this study are limited to the perspectives of EWDs with physical disabilities only so it would not be able to represent the EWDs in general. The respondents are also limited to one particular city only which is in Kuching. Moreover, the method to collect this data is by interview so some might be answering it unwillingly as some of them are not comfortable talking about personal matters.

The respondents might also be dominated by several circumstance in terms of loyalty and bias in answering the questions. As some of the interview are conducted in their workplace, some of the respondents might be affected by their surrounding in answering the questions honestly. This research is a qualitative research so it is a bit of time consuming in collecting the data.

### 1.7 Definitions of Terms

Terms that has been used in the study are people with disabilities and workplace. The terms given are in conceptual and operational as described in Table 1.7 below.

Table 1.7 Conceptual and Operational definitions of terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Conceptual Definition</b>	<b>Operational Definition</b>
Employee with Disabilities	Employees with disabilities are define as employee with mental or physical impairments that might be hindered in work performance but underlining the long duration nature of disability that includes people with incurable, long term or continuous conditions (EU-SHA,2013)	A person with disabilities that are employed or works under contract of service
Workplace	A place where learning and development can occur and knowledge can be created (Avis, 2010)	A place where someone employed works for their employer
Employment	Employment is a contract for services or on the other hand a professional engagement,	A relationship between two individuals, the employee and a employer based on a contract that

relationship where an individual personally performed a task or services for another individual personally performed a task and get paid by the employer (United Kingdom Employment Agencies Act, 1973)

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Physical Disability	A congenital disease or trauma that cause a person to have a physical limitation that last at least 1 year (Liao & Laferrere, 2005)	A condition that affects the mobility, capacity, dexterity, stamina and physical of a person.
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## 1.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the major components of this study which includes the background of study that related to the disabilities and employment and also the statement of problems followed by the objectives of the study, significant, limitations and definitions of terms.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the related literature review which includes two sections. Firstly, it is the discussion of the definitions of EWDs and the pertinent issues that are related to this study. It is then followed by a discussion of a theory used in this research. This chapter ended with summary of the chapter.

#### **2.1 Pertinent issues related to the study**

##### **2.1.1 Employee with Disabilities (EWDs)**

The definitions of disability that are more than 20 from different domains are documented from past studies (Marshaw & Reno, 1996). Most researchers in management and organizational psychology literature adapt to ADA's definition of disabilities which refers to an individual that has impairment in terms of physical or mental that essentially inhibits most of his or her major life activities (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). According to Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Disabled Persons (LPDP) in China, disability defines as an individual that 'experiences from a damage or abnormality of a certain organ or function, psychologically or physiologically, or in structure of anatomical and someone that has lost fully or in part the ability to do an activity in a regular way' (LPDP, 2008).

Disability is the general term for impairment, limitation of activity and participation, indicating to the negative aspects of the reciprocal action between the individual (with a health condition) and the contextual facto

rs of the individual (environmental and personal factors) (World Report on Disability, 2011). According to European Agency for Safety and Health at Work(EU-SHA), employees with disabilities are define as employee with mental or physical impairments that might be hindered in work performance but underlining the long duration nature of disability that includes people with incurable, long term or continuous conditions (EU-SHA,2013).

In another context, Wood identifies three disablement constitutive levels; a lesion or impairment initiates disabilities which derives in a handicap or social disadvantage. This disadvantage seems to effect daily life especially in seeking a job (1980). In Malaysia, majority of people with disabilities have impairments which are congenital, birth related obtained in early childhood. However, disabilities resulted from industrial injury or automobile accidents during working life among Malaysian is also increasing (Jayasooria, Krishnan, & Ooi, 1997). Employees with disabilities coming to work with the needs of psychological safety, socialization and needs of self- esteem (Medina & Gamero, 2017).

### **2.1.2 EWDs and Employment**

According to the World Report of Disability, the rate of employment among people with disabilities (PWDs) are lower than the whole population (WHO, 2011). In order to improve the employment rates of PWD, the governments motivates a workforce participation and diminish a discriminatory tendencies (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). In China, there was a news reporting that some organizations are reluctant to hire PWD and would rather be sued (Qiao, 2015). Employees with disabilities that works together with the non-disabled people are mostly PWD with minor physical disabilities

or undisguised disabilities (Lengnick-Hall, Gaunt, & Kulkarni, 2008). In order to have a diverse workforce in an organizations, there is a prolonged demands in integrating PWD into the workforce regardless of the common reprimands and discrimination against PWD (Colella & Bruyere, 2011; Dwertmann & Boehm, 2016). The economic, social boundary and material that preclude EWD from the workplace started to be recognized by the governments, nongovernmental organizations such as Handicap International and intergovernmental organizations such as the International Labor Organization therefore they started to work on changing the situations (Oliver, 1990; Swain, French, Barnes, & Thomas, 2014). To reassure the organizations motivate and associate the disability into the workforce so that it can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the firm, there is a demand for researchers to study on internal psychology of PWD in the workplace (Colella & Bruyere, 2011; Dwertmann & Boehm, 2016).

As consequences of these social exclusion, the opportunities of PWD to view outstanding the workplace's role models become low (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). According to Robinson (1995), the person with disabilities usually complaint of others offering too much help. Jones et al. (1984) also outline on how regular the non disabled people act as "child among adults" scripts when interacting with people with disabilities.