



A Narrative Study: Career Counselling Service among Persons with Disabilities at Vocational Centre in Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

Career development embodies a disposition of career maturity, requiring individuals to comprehend the developmental tasks and responsibilities they must undertake. Central to this journey is career counselling. This study focuses on Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). This narrative study highlights the significance of career counselling as the intervention for PWDs' career development at vocational centres. Out of 637537 registered PWDs under the Social Welfare Department, less than 12,000 registered PWDs are employed, as stated in the Malaysian Employer Federation report on November 2023. Therefore, this study uses narrative research focusing on conducting semi-structured interviews. The participants in this study consist of two PWDs: one with physical disabilities and one with learning disabilities. Through this exploration, the study aims to shed light on the challenges faced by each PWD in accessing career support and inform future interventions to promote PWDs vocational success and social inclusion. This study suggests that career counselling services are crucial for supporting the career development and self-concept of PWDs. This underscores the need for interventions to improve access to such services and promote the vocational success of PWDs.

Keywords: person with disabilities, career development, career counselling, vocational centre

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1 INTRODUCTION

Career development spans a lifetime, covering our initial thoughts about work in childhood through to our initial job, advancements, and potential retirement. World Health Organization (2023) reported that approximately 16% of the world's population, equivalent to an estimated 1.3 billion people, consists of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), and 2 to 4% face significant functioning challenges. This means that the remaining percentage comprises PWDs who can function adequately. In Malaysia, PWDs are not mandated to register under the Department of Social Welfare (JKM). Nevertheless, as of January 2023, there were 637,537 registered PWDs under JKJ. However, only 4,500 PWDs were employed in the public and private sectors, constituting only 1% of the registered PWDs in Malaysia (National Health & Morbidity, 2019). In the Public Services Commission report, statistics reveal that out of 3777 civil job applications by PWDs, only 1008 PWDs were called for an interview, and only 71 PWDs were employed (Code Blue, 2023). This demonstrates a significant degree of exclusion PWDs face during the initial application stage, often preventing them from advancing to the interview phase. Mary Chen, President of the Challenges Foundation, stated that only 0.003 per cent of PWD are employed in the public sector and 0.001 per cent in the private sector as of 2018 (Suhaimi, 2020). This indicates that PWDs are not fully benefiting from the government initiatives, which allocate at least 1% of job opportunities in the public sector for PWDs as stated in the affected circular (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam, 2010)

In a broader global context, the United States Bureau of Labour Statistics reported that in 2022, the unemployment rate among individuals with disabilities decreased to 7.6 per cent, marking a decline of 2.5 percentage points from the previous year as of 23 February 2023. The federal government of the United States also designed a program to ensure PWDs could work. Based on the United States Office of Personnel Management's official website, the Federal Government is proactively engaging in the recruitment and employment of PWDs. They provide enticing job opportunities, competitive pay scales, outstanding benefits, and chances for PWDs' career development. The process of hiring PWDs for Federal positions is swift and straightforward. Through a method known as Schedule A, PWDs can secure Federal jobs without competing against others. This emphasises a shared commitment between Western nations and Malaysia to supporting Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) to secure employment. While Western countries, such as the United States, have demonstrated proactive strategies for improving employment opportunities for PWDs, Malaysia has yet to find a comprehensive solution to this extensively discussed issue. The lack of empirical understanding regarding career counselling services as the intervention for the career development of PWDs represents a significant knowledge gap. This study highlights the need to identify barriers hindering PWDs' access to vocational centres, as there are limited vocational centres for PWDs. It proposes recommendations to improve the accessibility and utilisation of vocational centres for PWDs in Sarawak (Edison, 2021). Moreover, in the realm of counselling, this study aims to evaluate the current state of career counselling services at vocational centres and pinpoint areas for improvement to support the career development of PWDs. By doing so, it seeks to provide valuable insights for crafting more inclusive policies and programs that cater to the needs and preferences of PWDs in vocational centres.