

THE INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN PRIVATE SECTOR: ARE WE DESTINED TO REMAIN IN THIS MESS?

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a group of respondents' attitude towards employing persons who are blind or with visual impairment in their companies. We develop a survey and disseminate it to a different network of employers and member organizations of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. We also ask individuals who are blind or with visual impairment to bring the survey to their workplace. At the end of data collection, we receive 35 responses from 23 entities from various sector of business. However, we have to disregard 3 responses from one entity. Our sample consists of 18 respondents in the management category, while the remaining 14 respondents belong to co-worker group. From our data analysis, we find that the majority of our respondents from both management and co-worker groups perceive negatively towards employing persons who are blind or with visual impairment. Though 15 out of 18 respondents from management group claim to have a policy on recruiting employees who are blind or with visual impairment, persons who are blind or visually impaired may still face with unequal pay and no opportunity for career development. Many of the respondents from management group are not ready to hire more or to continue hiring workers who are blind or with visual impairment and take other proactive measures, including collaborating with organizations for and of the blind. Besides that, majority of our respondents from management group are not aware of assistive devices and software for persons who are blind or with visual impairment, related law, return-to-work program and incentives provided by the government. At the end of this paper, we propose some ways for the organizations for and of the blind to revitalize their advocacy work in this area.

Keywords: Employment, attitude, persons with visual impairment, private sector, advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

Under article 8 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, all citizens regardless of their biological and sociocultural background, have equal rights and equal protection before the law. Such protection includes the rights of citizens to employment. As part of ASEAN members, the Malaysian government also affirms the rights of all people to work, free choice of employment, just and decent pay, favorable working condition as well as the rights to assistance schemes upon unemployment through sub-article 1 under article 26 of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration 2012. For disabled persons in Malaysia, the right to employment is further strengthened through section 29 under the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008.

The Malaysian government through various agencies, such as the Department of Workforce, Department of Social Welfare and Malaysia Social Security Organization have organized many initiatives such as job coach services, job carnivals, return-to-work program, and so on. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development also underscores several national-level initiatives specific on employment for disabled Malaysians through the adoption of Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2008-2012 and Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2016-2022.

According to the Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2016-2022, there are several indicators and targets underlined which include the fulfillment of the 1% quota policy on job placement by three ministries per year, 10% of disabled persons participate in the labor market, the establishment of a One-Stop-Center for employment-related information and services, and the enhancement of relevant legislative and support mechanisms (Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat, 2016). However, we have not heard or seen any progress report on these targets.

Ten years have passed since the enforcement of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 and we have now reached the mid-term implementation of the Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2016-2022. Unfortunately, it seems the situation on employment opportunities for disabled persons in Malaysia is still very grim. To date, some companies initiated good programs to open job opportunities for disabled persons such as the Selangor Dredging Berhad (NST Online, 2019) and the Gamuda Foundation (Samudin & Zamrie, 2018) and many businesses benefit from the job coach services (Chuah, 2014). Nevertheless, most disabled persons are still being denied to have gainful employment, particularly persons who are blind or visually impaired, which call for both public and private sector to hire more disabled persons (Landau, 2018; Menon, 2018).

We believe it is time to monitor and evaluate current attitudes and support for disabled Malaysians in the local employment sector. However, this study focuses squarely on the inclusion of persons who are blind or with a visual impairment from employers' and co-workers' perspective. Hence, we strongly prohibit the generalization of findings from this study. Nevertheless, we hope to better understand the current situation, assess it and come out with new approaches to solve any lagging conflicts. The next section briefly discusses past literature. Then, we explain the research methodology of the present study. Following that, we discuss the findings gathered from our respondents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the recent mid-term evaluation of the Incheon Strategy, disabled people in Asian and the Pacific region are two to six times less likely to have jobs on average, which their participation in labor market limited only to welfare-based employment with low salary, corporate social responsibility projects, self-employment or in private companies as expendable resources (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2018, p. V). In Malaysia, despite the government policy which allocates 1% quota of job placement for disabled persons in the public sector, the recent number of disabled public servants so far still below 0.25% (Landau, 2018).

The Malaysian government also provides various programs and incentives for the private sector in the effort to promote job opportunities among disabled Malaysians such as tax exemption (Jabatan Tenaga Kerja Semenanjung Malaysia, 2019). However, Malaysia still has no data on the employment situation of disabled persons (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2016, p. 127). Until today, it seems that we do not have the basic idea on the exact number of employed disabled individuals in this country, thus preventing us to develop and enact comprehensive measures in our effort to sort through this muddle. Though documented data does not exist, we are still hearing troubling anecdotes, either from online postings or direct conversations within the disabled people community.

Over the years, there has been cumulating research on employment situation among persons who are blind or visually impaired. One study in Canada finds that persons who identified as legally-blind have lower labor participation compare to persons without impairment and also have a lower rate of employment even when compared to persons with other types of impairment (Benoit, Jansson, Jansenberger, & Phillips, 2013). Attitude and discrimination, including stigmatization, are the major barriers to disabled persons to get a job (Benoit et al., 2013; Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2016, p. 14). On the other hand, a survey among 500 restaurant employers uncovers that these employers have a more positive attitude towards hiring persons with physical and sensory impairment than persons with intellectual impairment (Chi & Qu, 2005). But, there may be some disparities of perception and trust towards different types and degree of sensory impairment, namely between hearing impairment and visual impairment.

In another survey among 102 employers in small-size retail trade and service businesses in Greek islands find that these employers perceive people living with blindness, learning disabilities, and mental health problems are less likely to be employed in comparison to persons with other types of impairment (Zissi, Rontos, Papageorgiou, Pierrakou, & Chtouris, 2007). The lower preference towards persons who are blind or have visual impairment may cause by society's over-prioritization and overreliance of the sense of sight to do most jobs, including using job-related equipment. Hence, individuals with visual impairment are perceived as unable to perform or achieve certain standards. A study by Shier, Graham, and Jones (2009) supported this where they find a perception on one's impairment and accommodative measures to suit one's needs heavily influence one's ability to sustain their jobs or otherwise.

As a result, blind and visually impaired persons have no choice to work in poorly paid menial jobs and in sheltered workshops in the past (Deshen, 1990). In Malaysia, the situation somewhat remains the same where most blind and visually impaired persons work as telephone operators (nowadays such positions have been rebranded to 'customer service officers'), telemarketers, and masseurs. Besides that, a portion of people who are blind and visually impaired work in the public sector as teachers and as government officers. A number of persons who are blind and have visual impairment also work as professionals and lecturers. Another huge portion of blind and visually impaired persons involve in self-employment and work in non-profit organizations. However, we realize a comprehensive mapping on the employment situation of the blind and visually impaired is greatly needed in this country.

Besides negative societal attitude, disabled persons have to face various forms of barrier within and outside the workplace (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2016, p. 14) such as inaccessible transportation (Bjerkan, Nordtømme, & Kummeneje, 2013). For visually impaired individuals, the availability of accessible technologies is vital (French, 1995, p. 9). In addition, persons who are blind or have visual impairment also face social exclusion in the workplace since they are not included to fully socialize and participate in company's social activities and enjoy meaningful interpersonal relationships (Naraine & Lindsay, 2011).

It is evident that increasing the employment rate among disabled persons can bring increasing economic benefits to a country (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011). Hence, the government must develop and implement effective policies to produce more job opportunities for disabled persons, including the provision of support services and other relevant mechanisms. Many scholars discuss and propose policy actions in this area. However, Lunt and Thornton (1994, p. 227) assert that policy objectives tend to be confusing and not articulated clearly, an improper implementation may occur, and policies may also produce conflicts with other policies and laws. Such problems may not bring the intended changes even within different parts and levels of the government (Piggott, Sapey, & Wilenius, 2005).

It is argued that providing compensation or subsidies to employers who hire disabled persons are the illustration of the individual model of disability, instead we should change the nature of the work and the workplace to become accessible and equitable for all (Lunt & Thornton, 1994, p. 227). Such reforms must involve the active participation of disabled persons in identifying the issues, enhancing the services, and developing best practices (Smits, 2004). One alternative to compensation approach can be through the introduction of natural supports rather than relying on paid supports and the provision of supported education (Murphy, Mullen, & Spagnolo, 2005).

The government must also develop and enforce policies that can nurture positive organizational culture and climate toward employing persons who are blind or have a visual impairment. There is accumulating evidence which suggests positive corporate culture towards diversity can increase the recruitment of disabled persons (Samant, Soffer, Hernandez, Adya, Akinpelu, Levy, Repoli, Kramer, & Blanck, 2009). A review of past studies on diversity and disabled people in the workplace shows previous studies tend to see disability issues in a negative light and strong emphasis for future research to investigate such issues from positive and proactive theoretical frameworks (Shore, Chung-Herrera, Dean, Ehrhart, Jung, Randel, & Singh, 2009).

Legislative action is one of the common ways used by the governments to ensure the rights of persons with impairment and/or chronic illness to employment. In Malaysia, the right to employment among persons with impairment and/or chronic illness are guaranteed under the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, however local employers are found to only fulfill the right to equal salary, but do not provide support for career development and decent work environment (Jaafar, Wahab, & Yaacob, 2017). Jaafar and his colleagues propose the enhancement of the definition of disabled workers and amending the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 by inserting clause on punitive measures to combat discriminatory acts toward persons with impairment and/or chronic illness in the employment sector.

In order to assess the inclusion of persons with some form of impairment and/or chronic illness in the employment sector, we should investigate in five main areas; attitude, actions, knowledge, forms of support, and proactive approaches. The subsequent section will describe the research methodology of this study and then continues on to the discussion on our research findings.

METHODOLOGY

We use quantitative research design for this study. We are aware of the superficiality produced from the chosen research design. We use quantitative research design to have a quick survey on the current attitude towards employing persons who are blind or visually impaired. Due to its small number of respondents, therefore, the findings must not be generalized. We develop a survey using Microsoft Word Document software. The survey uses the English language. There are two parts to the survey. The first part sought to map out our sample's demography such as gender, type of business sector and so on. The second part explores their attitude, form of support needed and reasons they employ persons who are blind or have a visual impairment. Prior to data collection, we carefully design the survey form. The first author drafted the initial survey form. Then, the draft was reviewed by other co-authors for correction and improvement. During the review process, several sentences and response options were changed.

This study targets two main groups from each company:

1. Management team, which includes chief executive officers, directors, managers, heads of department, and human resource officers.
2. Co-workers.

To increase the number of response on our survey, we engage with three groups of gateway granter, which refers to those who can introduce or facilitate sampling process (Nind, 2008), Those three groups are:

1. Networks of employers in Malaysia;
2. Member organizations of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia; and,
3. Individuals who are blind or with visual impairment.

We disseminate an email to the first two groups with the survey in soft copy format as an attachment. For the third group, we provide them with a printed questionnaire. The data collection process begins in July 2018 and ends in October 2018. We receive 35 respondents from 23 entities. However, we have to disregard 3 responses from one entity due to technical problems, leaving us with 32 respondents from 22 entities. Below is the descriptive information on our respondents:

Table 1: Respondents' descriptive information

Variables	Number of respondents (out of 32 respondents)	
	Male (%)	Female (%)
Gender	9 (28.1%)	23 (71.9%)
Position	Management (%)	Co-worker (%)
	18 (56.25%)	14 (43.75%)

The number of female respondents is higher than male respondents, comprising of 71.9% from the total number of respondents. 18 respondents self-report to be in the management category, while the remaining 14 respondents are in co-worker category. This diverse group of respondents can also be seen in terms of their business sector. Out of 22 entities, 4 entities are in the banking sector, 4 in the manufacturing sector, 3 in the service sector, 3 in public sector, 2 state government incorporations, 3 in the hospitality sector, 1 in the trading business, 1 in the gaming sector and 1 in data analytics. We are also curious about the source of information they receive in recruiting persons who are blind or with visual impairment as workers. We extract this information exclusively from 18 respondents from the management group.

Table 2: Sources of information in recruiting employees who are blind or with visual impairment

Source of information	Number of Respondents (% out of 18 respondents)
Direct application	4 (22.2%)

Recommendation	2 (11.1%)
Placement officer	3 (16.7%)
Others	5 (27.8%)
Not stated	4 (22.2%)

Only 4 respondents report to receive a direct application from visually impaired persons, and 3 respondents state to receive information from a job placement officer. Other sources of information seem to be the highest contribution. These other sources may be through job carnivals, online job-matching services and so forth.

We analyze the findings using the Microsoft Excel application. We interpret the data by using descriptive analysis and simple percentage. In the next section, some subsections only use responses from the management sample group, while other subsections use both. This is because in some subsections, for instance with regards to companies' policies and employee recruitment can only be answered by respondents from the management group. We shall explicitly mention this distinction.

DISCUSSION

We begin by analyzing the attitude of our respondents toward persons who are blind or with visual impairment in an employment setting. The data shown in Table 3 below combines data from the management group and co-worker group.

Table 3: Attitudes toward persons who are blind or with visual impairment

Attitude	Number of respondents (out of 32 respondents)		
	Disagree and strongly disagree (%)	Agree and strongly agree (%)	No response (%)
Employing workers who are blind/with visual impairment has its benefits	24 (75%)	5 (15.6%)	3 (9.4%)
Employing workers who are blind/with visual impairment are costly	5 (15.6%)	24 (75%)	3 (9.4%)
Employing workers who are blind/with visual impairment will make other employees uncomfortable	2 (6.3%)	29 (90.6%)	1 (3.1%)
Workers who are blind/with visual impairment able to adapt to the working environment	27 (84.4%)	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.2%)
Opportunities to work closely with the organization for and of the blind	23 (71.9%)	3 (9.4%)	6 (18.7%)

Results in Table 3 above is very alarming. These show our respondents have a very dull attitude toward persons who are blind or with visual impairment as workers or workmates in spite of many awareness programs and job fairs all around the country. Subtracting those who do not put any response, the majority of our respondents perceive that employing workers who are blind or with visual impairment are costly, have no benefits, and make other employees uncomfortable. Majority of our respondents also view employees who are blind or have a visual impairment unable to adapt to the working environment.

Though most of the equipment and software used by persons who are blind or visually impaired are expensive, these costs can be managed with various tax exemption schemes provided by the government. Plus, the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia also offers an assistive equipment loan for two years. This may point to the ignorance among employers and the public at large of such schemes and support system.

Shockingly, 23 respondents (71.9%) state they disagree and strongly disagree for any opportunities to work closely with the organizations for and of the blind, whereas 6 respondents (18.8%) have no response. We can only hypothesize three possible reasons for such a response. First, these respondents may face negative experience in communicating or employing persons who are blind or with visual impairment in the past. The second hypothesis has to do with one's response toward impairment, which loss of sight means loss of capabilities to do work. Lastly, they may have no idea or not confident with the idea to collaborate with the organizations for and of the blind and employ workers who are blind or with visual impairment.

Secondly, we are interested to analyze actions by the management of these entities to include persons who are blind or with visual impairment in their workplace.

Table 4: Company's current actions toward employing persons who are blind or with visual impairment

Actions	Number of respondents (out of 18 respondents)
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	Disagree and strongly disagree (%)	Agree and strongly agree (%)	No response (%)
Paid equal salary	17 (94.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (5.6%)
Opportunities for career development	14 (77.8%)	1 (5.6%)	3 (16.7%)
No policy on recruiting workers who are blind/with visual impaired	15 (83.3%)	1 (5.6%)	2 (11.1%)
Has an inclusive policy towards employing workers who are blind/with visual impairment	6 (33.3%)	9 (50%)	3 (16.7%)
Ready to hire more or continue hiring workers who are blind/with visual impairment	9 (50%)	7 (38.9%)	2 (11.1%)
Committed to create more inclusive working environment	14 (77.8%)	0 (0%)	4 (22.2%)

Though 15 respondents report having a policy on recruiting persons who are blind or with visual impairment, yet only 9 respondents claim to have an inclusive policy towards this group of employees. This may show that these entities' action only limited to recruiting, not making reasonable accommodation in overall working experiences such as support system, psychosocial, and accessibility aspects. Majority of our respondents disagree and strongly disagree with equal pay and opportunity for career development for persons who are blind or with visual impairment.

Unequal pay may cause by their perception about the blind and visually impaired employees' inability to meet all of the job specifications. The idea of job modification is still very new. Therefore, most employers have no idea what and how to modify certain jobs for persons with a certain type of impairment. This may also lead to no opportunities for disabled persons to gain promotion in the workplace.

It is also alarming when 14 respondents (77.8%) state disagree and strongly disagree in committing to create a more inclusive working environment. Such response may cause by superstructural barriers (e.g. decisions by the higher management or stakeholders) and may relate to the result in the previous subsection, concerning with cost and benefit for them. Looking at the trend of response in this section and the previous ones, it is not surprising when 9 respondents (50%) are not ready to hire more or continue hiring employees who are blind or with visual impairment, and 2 respondents (11.1%) do not put any response on the same matter.

There is a huge task to reform corporate and private business culture to make these entities more open to the idea of employing persons who are blind and have a visual impairment. Reflecting on the findings in Table 4 above, we believe there must be a concentrated effort in this area. One possible way is to practically use the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights 2011 as well as the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In our survey, we also ask our respondents about their knowledge of related programs, services, technologies, and law. For this subsection, we draw data from the management team's responses. As shown in Table 5 below, majority of our respondents are not aware of existing assistive devices and software for persons who are blind or with visual impairment, related legislation, return-to-work program and even incentives provided by the government.

Table 5: Level of knowledge

Knowledge	Number of respondents (out of 18 respondents)		
	Disagree and strongly disagree (%)	Agree and strongly agree (%)	No response (%)
Aware of assistive devices and software	16 (88.9%)	0 (0%)	2 (11.1%)
Aware of related law	13 (72.2%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)
Aware of job coach service	8 (44.4%)	8 (44.4%)	2 (11.1%)
Aware of Return-to-Work program	13 (72.2%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)

Aware of the incentives provided by the government	12 (66.7%)	5 (27.8%)	1 (5.6%)
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It seems we are still facing the same persisting gap in our effort to increase the employment rate among people who are blind or with visual impairment, that is information. This may be one of the crucial obstacles which may lead to the results presented in previous tables. Indeed, we have to re-examine our current and past strategy in order to enhance our engagement and awareness-raising programs. At least, almost half of the respondents aware of the job coach services. This may in part due to aggressive and continuous programs relating to job coach services organized by the government. The presence of a job coach is institutionalized through specific officers and units under the Department of Social Welfare, the establishment of a job coach network and so forth. We believe the same amount of aggressiveness can also be applied to cultivate consciousness among employers about related incentives, laws, and other initiatives.

The second objective of this study is to analyze forms of support needed by employers in order to accommodate employees who are blind or with visual impairment in their workplace. Drawing responses from the management group, we can see assistive equipment loan, tax exemption, grants for infrastructural renovation and software purchase are the top four forms of support needed to employ these workers.

Table 6: Form of support needed by companies

Forms of support	Number of Respondents (% out of 18 respondents)
Assistive equipment loan	12 (66.7%)
Training for human resource officers	8 (44.4%)
Tax exemption	12 (66.7%)
Grant for software purchase	13 (72.2%)
Grant for infrastructural renovation	13 (72.2%)

We also ask our respondents of other support they may require. Few respondents suggest for an engagement program with employers, guidelines on proper communication technique with people who are blind or with visual impairment, as well as guidelines on suitable job matching and job modification for this group of workers. One respondent also suggests for a free medical check-up for employees who are blind or with visual impairment.

We believe that organizations for and of the blind have the capacity to produce such guidelines and organize more engagement sessions with the companies. We must ensure the employers have the capacity and control over the matter, especially when confronted with technical aspects in providing support to persons who are blind or have a visual impairment in the workplace (Ang, Ramayah, & Teong, 2013). Familiarity and exposure are also imperative. Notwithstanding these points, the organizations of and for the blind must utilize new and creative ways to engage with the private sector. From our observation, simply organizing seminars may not work anymore.

Following the section above, we ask respondents of their readiness to hire persons who are blind or with visual impairment as permanent workers, organize an internship program for students and graduates who are blind or with visual impairment, and to collaborate with organizations for and of the blind to adopt relevant TVET courses if the above support is provided to them. For this subsection, we only take responses from management team into account. The results are as follows:

Table 7: Readiness for proactive initiatives

Initiative	Number of respondents (out of 18 respondents)		
	Disagree and strongly disagree (%)	Agree and strongly agree (%)	No response (%)
Hiring as permanent workers	10 (55.6%)	2 (11.1%)	6 (33.3%)
Organizing an internship program	10 (55.6%)	4 (22.2%)	4 (22.2%)
Collaborating to develop relevant TVET courses	11 (61.1%)	2 (11.1%)	3 (16.7%)

Unfortunately, the majority of them state disagree and strongly disagree on those proposals. Results in Table 7 above echo back the negative responses presented in Table 3 and 4. From these findings, it is abundantly clear that we are facing a serious engagement and knowledge crisis. We are also aware that different companies may have different needs and looking for different forms of benefit or support. Therefore, specialized engagement strategies must be carried out for the different type of businesses. Respondents are also asked about the attractive characteristics of employees who are blind or with visual impairment. The results, taking into account both groups of respondents, are as follows:

Table 8: Attractive characteristics of employees who are blind or with visual impairment

Characteristics	Number of Respondents (% out of 32 respondents)
Punctuality	18 (56.3%)

Hardworking	20 (62.5%)
Teamwork	21 (65.6%)
Networking	6 (18.8%)
Problem-solving	7 (21.9%)
Communication	13 (40.6%)
Loyalty	13 (40.6%)
Independent	17 (53.1%)

The top four attractive attributes of employees who are blind or with visual impairment are teamwork, hardworking, punctuality, and independent. In addition, two respondents give two additional comments on this matter. One writes ‘commitment and appreciation’, while another writes ‘obedient’.

Finally, we ask our respondents on necessary skills that persons who are blind or with visual impairment must have in the employment sector. This subsection also draws from responses by the two respondent groups. Table 9 below shows the results:

Table 9: Important skillset needed by employees who are blind or with visual impairment

Skillset	Number of Respondents (% out of 32 respondents)
English communication skill	23 (71.9%)
Teamwork	19 (59.4%)
IT Knowledge	8 (25%)
Project management	6 (18.8%)

English communication skill, unsurprisingly is the most important skill that employees who are blind or with visual impairment should have. However, we do not expect IT knowledge and project management skills receive the least response from our respondents. We hypothesize this situation happens due to a low expectation among our respondents toward persons who are blind or with visual impairment. They may view these skills rely heavily on sight, thus persons who are blind or with visual impairment may have difficulties to successfully perform such tasks. Another hypothesis is that they expect these individuals only able to do low-level menial jobs, not requiring advanced skills.

Two respondents write additional comments on this matter. One respondent writes ‘attitude’, whereas the other writes ‘hard work’. These two relate to the psychosocial capacity of a person. Having a positive attitude towards one’s job and surrounding will enable him or her to perform diligently and may survive better in the workplace. Hard work may make one earns more social acceptance and trust from his or her employers.

PROPOSING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF INCLUSIVE LABOR MARKET IN MALAYSIA

Looking at the findings above, we yearn for a more proactive, theoretically and empirically informed measures to elevate the situation of persons who are blind or have a visual impairment in the local employment sector. For this purpose, we integrate three theoretical proposals: (1) The neo-biopsychosocial model of disability (Nasir & Efendi, 2018); (2) The theory of plan behavior (Ang, Ramayah, & Teong, 2013); and, (3) The theoretical framework of career success for disabled people (Wahat, 2011). As a foundation, we adopt the definition of disability as proposed by Nasir and Efendi (2018, p. 29) as follows:

“Disability is a lifelong process of having to face or not to face barriers and risks of barriers by persons with impairment and/or chronic illness, caused by negative relationships between the dimension of self, society, and environment based on inaccurate episteme which then leads to material and abstract inequalities in their lives.”

In the neo-biopsychosocial model of disability, it is no longer about the interaction between one’s impairment or chronic illness with attitudinal and environmental factors, instead disability occurs due to negative interaction between the components within oneself, society, and environment, thus shifting to multi-relational paradigm (Nasir & Efendi, 2018, p. 31). To put in the context of employment, persons who are blind or have a visual impairment with all of their traits (i.e. impairment, gender, race, age, education level, skills, motivation, and personality) are located on overlapping fields of different institutions (i.e. family institution, labor market, political institution, and cultural institution). This means that in order to increase the employment rate of persons who are blind or have a visual impairment, we must identify the actors, locations, and linkages of social, cultural, political, economic, legal, environmental, and geographical dimensions.

Besides that, these institutions also interact with each other and produce tools such as labor laws, recruitment and retention policies, job search websites, job placement services, money, and merit to regulate actors within the institutions. The relationships between the self, society, and environment start with episteme held by individuals within these institutions. When inaccurate episteme constructs and enforces negative relationships between these three domains, then it leads to the production of barriers and risks of barriers, hence the disability. For example, when an employer perceives blindness as deficit trait to a person as perceived by the majority of other individuals in his or her own society, he will then act in certain ways toward job seekers who are blind or have a visual impairment. Such actions may include denying their application, putting the phrase such as ‘possess healthy body and mind’ or other subtle conditions in the job advertisement, refuse to pay equal salary, and so on. From another angle, inaccurate episteme may hinder employers to seek a better way and utilize technologies to support persons who are blind or visually impaired in the workplace. Employers are only one of the actors in this issue. Inaccurate episteme among other actors such as policymakers, parents, service providers, and the community of blind and visually impaired persons themselves contribute to the unemployment rate of individuals with visual impairment. With this understanding, we can now

discuss the solutions. The theoretical proposals made by Ang, Ramayah, and Teong (2013), and Wahat (2011) offer possible solutions in this matter.

Wahat (2011) proposes four factors to measure career success of disabled persons based on the sponsored mobility model of career success and person-environment perspective. Those four factors are:

1. Person-fit job perception;
2. Needs-supplies fit perception;
3. Core self-evaluation; and,
4. Universal work environment.

She posits three main areas which contribute to the career success of disabled persons; individual-related factors, person-environment fit, and organizational factors (Wahat, 2011, p. 65). In her theoretical framework, besides looking at the individual-related factors and the person-environment interaction, she argues the organizations have the duty to ensure their employees have the necessary support to thrive in their job, thus proposing the adoption of the universal work environment. We believe the theory of plan behavior fits well and extend Wahat's fourth factor. Ang and her colleagues (2013) suggests employer attributes, organizational characteristics, legislation, attitudes toward hiring disabled people, subjective norms, and perceived control in hiring disabled people as factors that may influence the managerial intention to hire disabled persons.

From the integration of these three theoretical frameworks, we believe that government and the organizations for and of the blind in Malaysia must tackle all angles and use all channels to create a favorable ecosystem for hiring persons who are blind or have a visual impairment. These include using all forms of media, laws and regulation, guidelines, capacity training, and technological utilization and innovation. The government with the active involvement from disabled persons and their organizations must take a hard look in reforming the tax policies and other labor- and business-related programs. All of these measures must work in tandem.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results show an alarmingly negative response from our respondents with regards to their perception, knowledge, and actions relating to the employment of workers who are blind or with visual impairment. Shockingly, even when if the suggested schemes and support are provided, the majority of our respondents from the management group are not ready to hire persons who are blind or with visual impairment as permanent workers and carry out other proactive measures. Our findings raise several questions on the enforcement of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, the effectiveness of government-related awareness-raising programs and other initiatives, and the inability of the government to provide relevant data. This study ultimately echoes the same frustration inherited long ago which we initially hoped is slowly improving.

This research calls for the organizations for and of the blind to reflect on their position, as well as their networking with and influences on the private sector in order to revitalize advocacy effort for the inclusive labor market in Malaysia. Organizations for and of the blind must also examine their programs and services relating to job placement. In addition, there is a need for the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia to develop a comprehensive guideline on job matching and job modification suitable for persons who are blind or visually impaired. The guideline should also include proper communication etiquette, related assistive equipment, and other relevant aspects of an inclusive workplace for individuals with visual impairment.

The organizations for and of the blind, alongside relevant government agencies must strategize for better communication and awareness-raising approaches, including promotion of individual, organizational and societal benefits of hiring people who are blind or with visual impairment, as well to nurture consciousness on related legislation, incentives and support system. Aspired from the initiative by the Gamuda Foundation, we feel that the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia and its member organizations must start engaging and working together with companies that can become champions for the inclusive workplace for persons who are blind or visually impaired.

We realize this study is frustratingly superficial. An in-depth exploration of the attitudes, barriers, and reasonings are very much needed through mixed-method research design and participatory action methodology. Through mixed-method and participatory action research, we can test and enhance programs and initiatives based on the theoretical framework suggested by local researchers such as the application of the theory of plan behavior (Ang, Ramayah, & Teong, 2013) and career success (Wahat, 2011). Although we possess a lot of potential data sources and continue to hear many troubling facts, we still face with lack of documented evidence. Future research should investigate the wider political and economic climate of disabled persons' participation in the local labor market. There is also a rare exigency to extract historical, cultural, and geographical data on the employment situation of the blind and visually impaired individuals, thus proposing a new research agenda on the political economy of blind people's inclusion in Malaysia.

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