

EMPLOYABILITY SKILL MODEL DEVELOPMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY (PWD): A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

A disability of a human being does not define their identity and capabilities, the skillset does. Employability skills are one of the skills which are highly valued by employers and essential for effective workforce performance. The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2019 report stated that 11.1% of Malaysians above 18 years old who have disabilities in Malaysia are ready for working in industry. However, employers frequently disregard PWD chances due to 'red tape' and challenges in hiring PWDs to work in their company. Thus, this study aims to develop an employability skill model for PWD to enhance PWDs opportunity entering employment markets and also determine employability skills that synchronize with the capability of PWDs from the planned employability program organized in this research. A mixed method design was employed to collect, analyze and interpret qualitative and quantitative data in a series of studies conducted sequentially. Data integration was the final step utilized in this research design. The model was developed based on the quantitative data analysis and triangulation of the qualitative documents where both findings were carefully studied and integrated. The model will be applied as a guideline for curriculum development for PWD which hopefully increases the likelihood of employers hiring competent PWD in the workforce.

Keywords: People with Disabilities (PWDs), employability skills, employment factors, employment challenges and barriers, model of employability

INTRODUCTION

A person with disabilities (PWDs) is part of the grassroots society of one nation. Therefore, they should perceive the equalities of human rights and opportunities to lead their lives as other members of society. A consensus on defining PWDs are hypothetically differenced among nations. In Malaysia, PWDs is regarded as people who are physically, mentally, intellectually or emotionally disabled; they are unable to fully and effectively engaged in society. Hence, one of the salient measures undertaken by the Malaysian government is to introduce 2016-2022 strategic plan on developing PWDs in Malaysia. One of the strategic plans is to empower PWDs economic well-being (Strategic Plan No. 2). To respond to this call, the objective of this research is to determine factors that marginalized PWDs from enlisting themselves in the employment market. Besides, an employability model for PWDs

will be developed to enhance PWDs opportunity in entering employment markets and also determine employability skills that synchronize with the capability of PWDs from the planned employability program provided by the researchers. The research will be conducted in two different settings: industries and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) related to PWDs in Klang Valley. A mixed-methods study, to be specific, an embedded design will be employed in this study. The quantitative data from industries perspectives will be triangulated with qualitative data derived from a semi-structured interview with PWDs. The findings of the study will be derived from the triangulation procedures will become the primary methodology to develop the employability model. The model of employability will become the major framework for institutions to integrate the employability in PWDs-related curriculum and structure the marketability impact of PWDs. Ultimately, the findings from this research will bring consensus on employability of PWDs in Malaysia that eventually will increase more likely the marketability of PWDs in the job market.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Statistic reported that there were 365,677 registered PWDs in 2015. This number represents 13% in increase from registered PWDs in Malaysia in 2014. The trend has shown significant growth in number of PWDs in over the last three years. Based on this statistic, the Malaysian Department of Social Welfare has categorized types of disability into seven: learning disabilities, physical, hearing, vision impair, mental speech, and other-related disabilities (Malaysian Department of Social Welfare, 2015). The knowledge of understanding types of disability is operationalized by the definition of PWDs as to those who suffer long-term physical growth, mental, intellectual or senses that downturn their capability to interact with people and obstructing their full participation and effectiveness in joining community-related activities (Akta Orang Kurang Upaya, 2008). One of the strategic plans in the Malaysian 2016-2022 PWDs Action Plan Blueprint PWDs is to ensure sustainability in economic and society-well-being of PWDs. The strategy is to enhance the participation of PWDs in an open, inclusive and accessible job market to enable them to live independently and contribute to national development; embarks the serious concern of government in ensuring the welfare of PWDs in Malaysia. Aligning with this strategy, three objectives were aimed to guarantee the plan is simultaneously succeed: (1) to increase employment opportunities in all sectors of employment whether public or private; (2) to enhance the opportunity for self-employed persons by participating in entrepreneurship and economic empowerment programs, and (3) to promote disability involvement in vocational training and other employment support programs provided by the government, private sector and NGOs (Pelan Tindakan OKU, 2016). Strategizing the growth of PWDs especially in fulfilling their basic needs as human being, it is called the upon the important to highlight the upbringing issue of unemployment among this group. Noting the imperative factors of ensuring economic and society wellbeing of PWDs, the problem of unemployment of PWDs often 'fall into deaf ears. This group of people frequently being excluded in community to enjoy the wealth and advancement of this country. Through exhaustive studies on PWDs in other countries, Malaysia somehow left behind in flourishing the role of PWDs nationally. As we are in the 21st century, the creations of positive values toward human beings are essential. The paradoxes and negative mind set towards PWDs must be changed so this group will not be disrespectful and segregated. No nation can claim to be totally developed if unequal employment opportunities still persist amongst minority groups.

The relationship between employers' perceptions and the hiring of PWDs is a critical factor in promoting workplace inclusion. Research indicates that employers' attitudes and biases significantly influence their willingness to hire PWDs (Lindsay et al., 2018). Negative perceptions, such as assumptions about lower productivity or higher accommodation costs, often hinder the employment of PWDs, despite evidence that they perform equally well when provided with appropriate support (Hernandez et al., 2008). Conversely, employers with positive perceptions of PWDs are more likely to recognize their potential contributions and invest in inclusive hiring practices. Addressing these perceptions through awareness campaigns and success stories can help bridge the gap between employer attitudes and hiring practices, thereby fostering a more inclusive workforce.

Job criteria and the consideration of hiring PWDs are also closely linked. Many organizations have stringent job requirements that may inadvertently exclude PWDs, even when they possess the necessary skills and qualifications (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). For instance, physical or sensory job criteria may not always be essential for job performance but can act as barriers to employment for PWDs. Flexible job criteria, such as focusing on core competencies and providing reasonable accommodations, can enhance the employability of PWDs. Additionally, structured employability programs that align job criteria with the skills and abilities of PWDs can create more equitable hiring practices. These programs often include tailored training, mentorship, and workplace adjustments, which not only benefit PWDs but also contribute to organizational diversity and innovation.

The employability skills of PWDs and their participation in structured employability programs are pivotal in improving their employment outcomes. Studies have shown that PWDs who undergo targeted skill development programs are better equipped to meet job demands and demonstrate higher levels of confidence and competence (Lindsay et al., 2018). Structured programs that focus on soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, are particularly effective in enhancing the employability of PWDs (Mpofu & Harley, 2006). Furthermore, these programs often include partnerships with employers, ensuring that the training aligns with industry needs and increases the likelihood of successful job placements. By investing in such programs, organizations can not only address the skills gap but also create a more inclusive and diverse workforce, ultimately benefiting both PWDs and the broader economy.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for the study is as follows:

1. There is a significant relationship between employers' perception and hiring PWDs for their organisations (H1)
2. There is a significant relationship between job criterion and consideration of hiring PWDs as employees (H1)
3. There is a significant relationship between employability skills of PWDs and consideration of hiring them as employees (H1)
4. There is a significant relationship between PWDs employability skills and structured employability program (H1)

Research Objectives

Three research objectives were formulated:

1. To uncover the hindrance factors of hiring person with disabilities (PWDs) among industries in Malaysia
2. To develop an employability model in providing PWDs better opportunities when entering employment markets and
3. To construct employability skills traits of PWDs from the planned employability program organized by the researchers.

Research Questions

1. What are the reasons pertaining to lack of person with disabilities (PWDs) numbers in employment sector?
2. To what extent the employability model will suffice industry requirement when hiring person with disabilities (PWDs)?
3. What are the skills required by industries when hiring person with disabilities (PWDs) in their organization?
4. How to compromise industries requirement on employability skills among person with disabilities (PWDs)?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employability skills among people with disabilities (PWDs) present unique challenges and opportunities that vary significantly across countries. In developed nations such as the United States and Canada, legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) has been instrumental in promoting workplace inclusion and accessibility (Hernandez et al., 2008). However, despite these legal frameworks, PWDs often face barriers in acquiring and demonstrating employability skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, due to persistent stigma and inadequate support systems (Lindsay et al., 2018). In contrast, developing countries like India and South Africa struggle with systemic issues such as limited access to education, vocational training, and assistive technologies, which further exacerbate the employability skills gap among PWDs (Mpfu & Harley, 2006). These disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions to address both structural and attitudinal barriers to skill development.

Cultural attitudes and economic conditions also play a significant role in shaping the employability of PWDs. In countries like Japan and South Korea, where societal norms often emphasize conformity and productivity, PWDs may face challenges in securing employment due to perceptions of lower productivity (Nakamura et al., 2011). However, recent initiatives in these countries, such as Japan's Act on Employment Promotion of Persons with Disabilities, aim to improve workplace inclusion and skill development. On the other hand, Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Norway have made significant strides in integrating PWDs into the workforce through comprehensive social welfare systems and inclusive education policies (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014). Despite these advancements, PWDs in these countries still encounter challenges in transitioning from education to employment, underscoring the need for continuous support and skill-building programs. These global variations emphasize the importance of context-specific strategies to enhance employability skills among PWDs.

Skills has been studied over the few decades because it is essentially important in the current job placement. Employability is a must have skills as prerequisite before entering employment. One of the most significant current discussions in employability is the involvement of PWDs in the job market. Concern arises focusing on PWDs issue in struggling to get employed due to stigma and perception of their capability and capacity to fulfilling the job tasks. The interminable issue of PWDs struggle to place themselves in the employment often missing in the research arena.

In order to fulfil market demands and economic changes while the supply of graduates is enormous and employers are criticizing the absent of employability skills among graduates, which is deteriorating (Jollands et al., 2015). Employers are seeking graduates who thoroughly ready for job and well-prepared for calamity of economic recession. There have been several studies in the literature reporting graduate deficiencies of employability skills when entering their first year-job placement (see Ausman, 2008; Carnevale & Smith, 2013; & Klimplová, 2012). However, the literature placed so far too little attention has been paid to PWDs in regards to their employability skills development.

The recommendation concerning Vocational Rehabilitation of the Disabled Act 1955 as cited in International Labour Office (2013), stated "whenever possible, disabled persons should receive training with and under the same conditions as non-disabled persons" (p. 99). Words like inclusion or mainstreaming capture the perception of people towards PWDs. International Labour Office (2013) provides important distinction of what defining PWDs, disability can be something visible, such as seeing a person walking with a cane. A disability can be something you cannot see, such as a person who cannot hear or has a learning disability. Disabilities have labels, for example, blindness, deafness, learning disability, autism, psychosocial disability, or intellectual disability. The definition must be heightened as to cater misconception of PWDs that badgering PWDs opportunities to get into employment.

While most studies in employability skills have only been carried out by focusing on employer perspectives and employability skills attributes among graduates, limited evidences were found to investigate graduates especially PWDs capabilities and characteristic that make them get hired after graduated from educational institutions. One important finding originated from Abdullah, Mey, Eng, Othman, & Omar (2013) discusses the challenges of PWDs in Malaysia indicate that the organisations surveyed were aware of the lack of transition support and call attention to the importance of instituting a national policy on school-to-work transition services and supported employment systems for students with disabilities. On the other hand, a study by Baird (2011) found the important of having cross-functional skills as ground breaking to get hired by industries. He listed basic communications, problem solving, leadership, self-management, time management, teamwork, and adaptability as necessary skills before entering employment. These skills were primarily demanded by business leaders, educators, researchers and administrators in today's job market (Baird, 2011). The mismatch of school-to-work transition program and skills-needed by the employers frequently left PWDs in an urgently for aid and mercy when it comes to employment.

Industries development is unpredictable. With layoffs and low employment intake contributed to unemployment among job seekers. Employees are demanded to learn the future job skills and be prepared for the current job scope due to rapidly changing in employment landscape (Ausman, 2008). For example, in the 21st century employment market, degrees and diplomas have been

overshadowed by skills credential (Ausman, 2008; Hartman et al., 2005; Lenka, 2012). Educational institutions, especially PWDs vocational oriented program have been squandered by industries to produce skills-driven employees. Often, employers and educational providers disconnected from having meaningful conversation and consensus what define a skilled-employee is. Therefore, it is rhetoric to mention about the quality of graduates create by the educational institutions where at the same point, employers lack of participation in meaningful dialogue with educational stakeholders in fulfilling what possession of skills they require.

More recent studies have confirmed that knowledge based-economy, skills profound to be the pillar of current employment settings (Baird, 2011; Carnevale & Smith, 2013; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013; Hartman et al., 2005) and the development of human capital (Klimplová, 2010). In 2013, Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl published a report in which they described the precedent of job readiness skills for individuals' occupation. They agreed upon three criteria: (a) Work values (individual preferences for work outcomes), (b) Work interest (individual preferences for work environment). Interests include artistic, conventional, enterprising, investigative, realistic, and social, and (c) Personal qualities (characteristics that affect how well someone does a job). Some are agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotionality, and extroversion (p. 30).

These findings are consistent with findings of past studies by Hartman et al. (2005) which described competent employees possessed accumulation of knowledge, skills, habits, experience of professionalism which highly-demanded by employers. They agreed that academic qualifications do not guarantee for job placement due to over changing of educational policy which is not translated to workforce environment. The profligate educational policy which either improve or degrade curriculum at the educational level does not tally with industry requirement.

Industry players are referring to economic production and their organizational conditions as well as complexity of turnover of global market demands (Lenka, 2012). This condition ultimately disconnects educational institutions and industry in generating skilled employees. Ausman (2008) offered a comprehensive review based upon empirical findings through ACT Work Key System via website in the US. The discussion of the results begins with graduates' lack of reading skills. He found that graduates lack of reading and comprehend work related reading materials such as memos and policy guidelines contributed to problems in most occupational sectors. The second problems are related to graduates' capabilities in solving problem related to work by applying mathematical reasoning. Ausman (2008) espoused this notion due to the fact that most graduates are struggling to calculate basic mathematical skills for example tax redemption for certain goods purchased. Finally, graduates; deficiencies in seeking for information produced to lack of employability skills among graduates. Retrieval and handling information skills are highly relevant especially in the 21st century (Ausman, 2008; Fallows & Steven, 2000).

Educational institutions have been requested to embed employability traits in their curriculum content through teaching and learning procedures. Along with the implementations of employability through program such as internship, practicum, and training at the industry level. It is essentially important for students to grasp the skills while participating in such programs. It is important to highlight Benson, Morgan, and Filippaios (2014) findings on type of employability training students should possess throughout their academic year at undergraduate level. According to the researcher it is suggested within the three years program, students should be able to develop skills on how to create an online profile through students' social networking activities. Such as internship, industrial placements, and volunteering. Students are also requested to gain better understanding of researching activities and online job applications of social networking platforms such as LinkedIn, Research Gate, and Facebook. It is interesting to note that, the fact students spend more time on social networking website, students somehow unconscious about the potential of marketing themselves to prospective employers.

The human capital throughput nation has been tested by the rapid demands on employability skills resulted in socio economic changes and unemployment issues. Research finding by De Guzman and Choi (2013) espoused the notion of flexibility of individual entering employment depends upon organizational changes and service-related businesses. They added that team work is necessary skills when adapting to career, prosper individual leadership skills. It is often encouraging to solve an organizational problem through team work activities.

A survey of literature on employability skills deficiencies is reported by Lenka (2012). In his exploratory study described employers' perceptions related to workforce human capital that includes skills and qualification. Insufficient skills and abilities in specific job specializations for example the use of machines and computer applications leave entry-level employees contribute to unemployment issue. Lenka (2012) reported that most employees are demotivated due to extravagant demand by the employers which coerce and jeopardize their career. Motivation is proven to be signification factor to retain employee in organization (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Retaining employees in business-oriented organization ensures continuity in success and lower the risk of employee leaving such organizations.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a mixed-methods design, which involves "collecting, analyzing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006, p. 474). Specifically, an embedded design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011) was utilized to address distinct research questions requiring different types of data. This design was chosen to address potential gaps in information that may arise from relying on a single method. As the study began with a quantitative approach, it incorporated a qualitative intervention during the process and a follow-up qualitative phase afterward. To fulfill this design, quantitative data were first collected from employers' perspectives. This was followed by a qualitative intervention, where a structured employability program was organized and implemented by the researchers. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to gather qualitative data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to develop an employability skills model that aligns with the needs of both employers and people with disabilities (PWDs) within the study's specific timeframe and parameters, including the study population and location.

Population and Sample of the Study

The target population for this study comprised PWDs aged between 18 and 40 who were registered with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. In this context, PWDs were defined as individuals who had completed tertiary education at vocational institutions, whether government-funded or private. Prior participation in specific educational programs was not a prerequisite for inclusion in the study. The sample was drawn from a sampling frame consisting of a current list of PWDs registered with relevant NGOs. A total of 30 PWDs were selected as participants for this study. This sample size was deemed sufficient to provide meaningful insights while ensuring the feasibility of data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify participants for the study. The NGOs involved included the Kiwanis Disability Information and Support Centre (KDISF), which serves as a one-stop center for disability-related information and resources, and other organizations such as Malaysian Care, Cheshire Home, CareHeart, Taman Sinar Harapan, and various religious groups. These NGOs provide essential services and support to PWDs in Malaysia. Since there was no centralized database of PWDs registered with specific NGOs in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, the study relied on data from the Department of Social Welfare (DSW). Potential participants were filtered based on demographic criteria, including age (18–40 years), employment status, and locality. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to eligible PWDs, and consent letters were obtained from their parents or caregivers to conduct the employability program and subsequent interviews.

For the employer perspective, a random sampling approach was used to gather quantitative data from employers in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Employers from various industries, including services and manufacturing, were invited to participate in an online survey administered via Qualtrics. Approval letters from the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia were attached to the survey to enhance credibility. Human resource departments of participating organizations were contacted to complete the survey, and responses were automatically recorded in Qualtrics. Two reminders were sent at two-week intervals, and the data collection process spanned one month before analysis commenced.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved coding and employing constant comparative methods to develop themes from open-ended responses. This approach ensured the reliability and validity of the data representation. Quantitative data, including demographic information and Likert-scale responses, were stored and analyzed using Qualtrics software. The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns. Triangulation of both data types allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research questions and facilitated the development of a robust employability skills model.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were utilized in this study. The first was adapted from the *Survey of Employer Perspectives on the Employment of People with Disabilities*, a technical report published by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) in 2008. This nationally representative survey aimed to inform policy and practice by examining employer perspectives across various industries and company sizes. The survey focused on employer attitudes and practices in 12 industry sectors, including high-growth industries identified by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). A pilot study was conducted to ensure the instrument's validity and reliability. All questions were mandatory, and participants were expected to complete the survey in approximately 30 minutes.

The second instrument consisted of semi-structured interview questions designed to explore the emergence of employability skills among PWDs following their participation in the structured employability program. Professional sign language interpreters were engaged to assist with data collection for participants with hearing impairments. Caregivers and parents were also invited to participate in the face-to-face interviews to provide additional insights. This approach ensured that the data collection process was inclusive and accessible to all participants.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Analysis

Based on the earliest study conducted to 2759 employers registered under the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) using a quantitative survey, the results of this study showed the employers' feedback on the standards and variables that affected their choice while selecting PWDs for their organisations. Employers look for specific, observable employability skills in PWDs to ensure that they can fit in and succeed in the workplace. The presence of these employability skills will assist PWDs in valuing their work and earning the respect of their coworkers. Employers are looking forward to the same employability skills as normal worker normally does. Aligning with the feedbacks obtained from this survey, a structured module of employability skills intervention programs among PWDs was implemented and organized.

Qualitative Analysis

A focus group discussion (FGD) of 30 PWDs was selected based on purposive sampling technique. They were enrolled in three days program with employability skill trainers and certified image consultants. Along with the program, they were engaged in FGD sessions to gather narratives and sharing personal experiences. The validated and established open-ended questions were

asked using asynchronous conversation using WhatsApp group application, an instant messaging software via mobile device. A thematic analysis was performed with the recorded texts and audios were transcribed in Atlas.ti software. The constant comparative analysis by the color-coded technique was employed to develop the themes. The process of triangulation involves module, fieldnotes, and observation prior, during and after the program completion.

Following the analysis, the interview transcripts generated a total of four themes and five sub-themes pertaining to employability skills obtained from employers and PWDs. The themes consist of (1) communication; (2) leadership; (3) adaptability; and (4) flexibility. The themes are explained in the following subtopics, along with a few quotation examples.

Theme 1: Communication Skill

Above all, the PWDs participants has listed communication skills as one of the new skills they gained through the intervention program. Total of 26.19% quotation were extracted from the transcript. Additionally, it was stated by informant that language style plays an important role while communicating with coworkers or employers.

[“...and also having good communication skills.”] (Item 14 - 1:06)

[“...know how to communicate with superiors.”] (Item 20 - 0:45)

[“...and also the type of language I use when dealing with superiors, and how... how the language I use when interacting with the public.”] (Item 21 - 0:13)

[“...we will use a different method of communication... when communicating with superiors. When dealing with owners or external parties, we use a different approach, which is a more friendly communication style with external parties.”] (Item 36 - 1:15)

[“...the skill I gained is the ability to communicate effectively at all levels and in all situations.”] (Item 41 - 1:07)

Theme 2: Leadership Skill

Secondly, leadership is a skill found in themselves through direct and indirect participation in the organized programs. An informer stated that the best work environment is when they work in group, which has a spirit of camaraderie, and also trains them about leadership. There were the same number of quotations as communication skill were extracted to leadership skill.

[“...have experience in leadership within an organization, specifically experience in administration.”] (Item 25 - 1:55)

[“...I was able to venture into leadership, for example, I had the courage to step forward and voice the needs of students with disabilities at UPM during the PWD Malay Workshop Project in Nilai that day.”] (Item 25 - 1:55)

[“...I was entrusted with the responsibility to become a representative for people with disabilities or special needs across the state of Perak, encouraging them to pursue fields like mine.”] (Item 25 - 1:55)

[“...The skills I gained include leadership skills, personal development skills, time management, self-discipline, and organizational management skills.”] (Item 37 - 0:19)

[“...an excellent job is one that involves teamwork, fosters camaraderie, and also trains us in leadership.”] (Item 41 - 1:07)

[“...skills in leadership, teamwork, and collaborative work.”] (Item 41 - 1:07)

[“...it emphasizes discipline and sincerity in serving the community.”] (Item 49 - 11:07)

[“...I can... do many things, right? I can... lead... guide people. For example, becoming an imam or conducting activities through the mosque.”] (Item 52 - 1:00)

[“...One aspect of myself that I am proud of so far is my passion for helping others.”] (Item 55 - 0:48)

[“...I am motivated, disciplined, and also possess leadership qualities.”] (Item 91 - 1:22)

Theme 3: Adaptability Skill

Next, the highest number of quotation (28.57%) related to adaptability skills were extracted. The sentences below shows that they (the PWDs) were most likely can adapt to many situations, environments or peoples. For example, Item 61 - 0:48 was narrated from informant where he/she agreed that the adaptability skill can create a harmonious atmosphere, can strengthen relationships, and can achieve a goal in the workplace.

[“...dressing in a way that shows we are ready to take on responsibilities and prepared for any possibilities that may come our way.”] (Item 95 - 1:49)

[“...we must dress more neatly.”] (Item 94 - 2:05)

["...it helps to build the self-identity of people with disabilities, encouraging them to confidently voice their issues and opinions to be heard by society."] (Item 89 - 2:34)

["...despite coming from different backgrounds, whether local students or international students, we were able to foster connections across different worlds."] (Item 86 - 2:06)

["...From there, we can adapt to the surrounding environment."] (Item 80 - 1:55)

["...I learned how to live in a new place, a place we are not familiar with."] (Item 79 - 0:33)

["...This means we need to adapt ourselves. We need to try to immerse ourselves in the world of others."] (Item 78 - 1:25)

["...I enjoy meeting strangers... yes, like that. People I don't know, I like to meet."] (Item 72 - 1:32)

["...I feel more confident to live independently, and I feel more motivated to work."] (Item 63 - 0:36)

["...we need to adapt ourselves to others' situations so that we can create a harmonious environment, strengthen relationships, and achieve a common goal within our group or company."] (Item 61 - 0:48)

["...I became more confident that I can work and interact with people like me, people with disabilities."] (Item 59 - 1:14)

["...So we need to adapt ourselves to the people we will work with and the people who will employ us."] (Item 53 - 1:09)

Theme 4: Flexibility Skill

As a final theme, flexibility skills is the skill founded by PWDs after participating in the intervention program. The total of eight quotations (19.05%) were extracted for flexibility skills among participant. To illustrate, the informant reveal they did not have confidence in themselves to face people with their physical deficiency however, after they change the paradigm and way of thinking to navigate the complexities and overcome challenge, they will strive the success in employment.

["...how we interact with everyone in the workplace, and also how we handle specific people in specific situations."] (Item 36 - 1:15)

["...I was able to build my confidence and change my mindset, especially when facing any kind of problem."] (Item 62 - 1:14)

["...So from there, I tried to change, and eventually, it became normal once I started going to school regularly."] (Item 69 - 1:44)

["...I enjoy things that involve personality development, as it helps us to change ourselves and evaluate others."] (Item 94 - 2:05)

["...I learned how to interact with everyone in the workplace and how to handle specific people in specific situations."] (Item 75 - 1:15)

["...it's not only when working with outsiders that we learn these things. Even when spending time with family, friends, or in discussion groups, these qualities are also necessary within us."] (Item 78 - 1:25)

In addition, the informants conveyed the additional skills and flexibility of PWDs in any situation required by employers, which can help them secure employment.

["...every person with a disability must be proficient in using technology, as it greatly assists them in finding jobs nowadays, in addition to the skills they have learned at university or school."] (Item 92 - 2:02)

["...Furthermore, our approach as employees or business owners toward customers must be friendly, rational, and not arrogant."] (Item 73 - 1:41)

["...I have the skills and experience to interact with superiors when working in the government or private sectors, and I have knowledge about personal presentation in the workplace."] (Item 66 - 0:39)

["...the ability to assess situations when we are in a particular environment."] (Item 94 - 2:05)

["...our responses and actions must align with the goals, motto, or vision of the company or employer."] (Item 95 - 1:49)

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research is to develop an employability skills model for PWDs who are ready to enter work placement. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2019 data, 11.1% of Malaysians over 18 with disabilities are prepared to work in industry. However, employers regularly neglect PWDs opportunities to work for their organisation because of some hindrance factors found by the employers. To be specific, employers are worry about PWDs with employability skills as a means of preparing for competition in the labour market (Husain et al., 2010; Al-Najar et al., 2019). Referring to Sarfraz et al. (2018),

employability skills are the personal qualities and skills that a person demonstrates and exhibits in their area of professional specialisation. These qualities and skills enable a person to get a job, keep it, advance in their career, and achieve their full potential while also achieving the goals of their employer. For people with disabilities (PWDs) to successfully enter and thrive in the workforce, employability skills are very important. These abilities not only improve their chances of getting hired but also provide them the capacity to make significant impacts in competing the ordinary job candidates. Previous research by (Yamaki & Fujiura, 2002; Smith et al., 2004; Samian et al., 2013) indicates that employers are less delighted with the work performance of PWDs because most of them fails to meet industrial needs. Since soft skills are those that relate to interpersonal communication and interaction, most employers believe they are more important than hard skills. Lack of soft skills could hinder one's potential, which lessens one's efficiency. This study has been done to discover the hindrance factors of hiring person with disabilities (PWDs) among industries in Malaysia and also to construct employability skills traits of PWDs from the intervention employability program.

At first, the quantitative survey questions were distributed to 2759 employers registered under the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) to discover the issues that prevent Malaysian industries from recruiting PWDs. The result shows that the employers look for certain, observable employability skills to ensure that PWDs may succeed and fit in at work. The availability of these employable skills will help PWDs respect their peers and value their work. Employers were expected the same employability skills that ordinary employees would. As a result, the industrial are require PWDs candidates to have a good time management, be collaborative in work, play its role specific, creative job and persuasive personalities.

Following these quantitative findings, a three-days intervention program was planned and organized in Universiti Putra Malaysia. Subsequently, a semi-structured questions related to their experience in the structured program were used to interview the PWDs participants through Whatsapp application, a centralized instant-messaging platform. Based on the transcribe data from the interviews, a total of 42 quotation were extracted where four themes emerged from the thematic analysis. 8 quotations related to communication skill (19.05%), both leadership skill and flexibility skill has total 11 quotation each (28.57%), and 12 number of quotations for adaptability skill (26.19%).

In any work, effective communication is fundamental whether to an ordinary or special need worker. Strong communication skills require PWDs to speak bravely and clearly to peers, superiors or customers. A good written and verbal communication, along with active learning are necessary for following instructions and working with others on a team. When it comes to supporting people with disabilities to pursue and achieve success in a variety of employment possibilities, leadership and managerial skills are vital. These abilities not only boost their own personal and professional development, but also help create workplaces more diverse and inclusive. PWDs frequently encounter prejudices and stereotypes from society, which may destroy their self-confidence. A respondent said, "golongan ini kadang-kala agak malu untuk berhadapan dengan masyarakat kerana kekurangan pada diri. Saya dulu uhh, merupakan seorang yang agak malu untuk berdepan dengan masyarakat." This study indicated changes in their leadership knowledge and abilities. According to the quotation extracted from transcripts, PWDs participants reported enhanced the leadership skill development in daily life and growth a confidence in themselves after the intervention program. They can approach job interviews, networking occasions, and workplace contacts with a positive attitude and showcase their talents and abilities by building their self-confidence. In the employment, adaptability refers to the ability to build up new skills, self-grooming, resilience and tolerance to adapt to unpredictable situations. Being adaptable is especially important for people with disabilities because of particular challenges they could experience. Theme 3 shows the adaptability skills gained by PWDs participant in the intervention program. They conveyed on the readiness of physical appearance to enter employment and adaptability skill to facing peoples from various field and level. Lastly, flexibility is the ability to respond to changing situations, roles, and tasks while retaining a positive and effective attitude. At work, unanticipated situations like emergencies or urgent duties may arise. Flexibility enables PWDs to manage these circumstances without getting overwhelmed, so that they can contribute professionally even in stressful environments.

The findings from the research project reveal a notable alignment and divergence between the employability skills demanded by the industry and those offered by PWDs. From the industry perspective, employers emphasized the importance of time management, collaborative skills, role-specific expertise, creativity, and persuasive abilities. These skills are critical for maintaining productivity, fostering teamwork, and driving innovation within organizations (Lindsay et al., 2018). Employers also highlighted the need for PWDs to demonstrate adaptability and effective communication, as these skills are essential for navigating dynamic work environments and ensuring seamless integration into diverse teams (Hernandez et al., 2008). These findings underscore the industry's focus on both technical and soft skills, which are seen as integral to achieving organizational goals and maintaining competitive advantage.

On the other hand, PWDs identified leadership and managerial skills, active learning, self-grooming, resilience, and tolerance as their key strengths. These skills reflect their ability to overcome challenges, adapt to new situations, and contribute meaningfully to organizational success (Mpofu & Harley, 2006). PWDs also emphasized the importance of communication and adaptability, aligning with the industry's expectations. This mutual recognition of communication and adaptability as crucial employability skills highlights their universal relevance in the workplace. However, the divergence in other skill sets suggests a potential gap between what employers seek and what PWDs are prepared to offer. Bridging this gap requires targeted training programs that address the specific needs of both parties while leveraging the unique strengths of PWDs.

The research findings suggest that a comprehensive employability skills development model should prioritize communication and adaptability as foundational skills while addressing the specific demands of the industry and the strengths of PWDs. Structured employability programs that incorporate role-specific training, collaborative exercises, and leadership development can help PWDs meet industry expectations (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). Simultaneously, employers should recognize and value the resilience, tolerance, and active learning capabilities that PWDs bring to the table. By fostering a collaborative approach to skill development, both industry and PWDs can work together to create a more inclusive and productive workforce, ultimately benefiting individuals, organizations, and society as a whole.

Finally, all the uncovered factors of employment and employability skill traits recorded from the series of studies has developed an employability value added model as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Employability Skills Model

CONCLUSION

Society especially employers must open up higher chance for PWDs' ability to get jobs. A more inclusive mindset can be generated by seeing PWDs as potential contributors rather than focusing only on their limitations. In addition, PWDs shall be given equal access to the workforce, improving the employability of PWDs is an investment in the diversity and vibrancy of our workplaces as a whole. PWDs have a variety of skills and abilities that, when developed via the acquisition of employability skills, can make a substantial contribution to a variety of industry. The employability skills model developed in this study is expected to increase the employability rate among PWDs in Malaysia.

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