

## **Factors of Successful Employment of Individuals with Disabilities**

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### **Abstract**

*Purpose: The current qualitative study aimed to explore the main factors of successful employment of individuals with disabilities. Methods: semi-structured interviews were used to explore perception of a sample of eight managers/supervisors of employees who had disabilities regarding the main factors of successful employment of individuals with disabilities. Results. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed four major themes that support successful employment of individuals with disabilities: (a) social skills, (b) experiences of work, (c) attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, and (d) transportation. Conclusion: The current study was designed to provide important information to policymakers, officials, educators and parents regarding the factors that support successful employment of individuals with disabilities. The study shows the importance of support as well as planned preparation for individuals with disabilities during high schools to be qualified and have skills that they employment environments.*

**Keywords:** *transition, employment, individuals with disabilities, social skills, experiences of work, attitudes, transportation.*

### **Introduction**

Employment is considered a vital element of success in the modern society as it provides an avenue for an individual to enhance his or her level of financial security, self-sufficiency self-confidence and worthiness (Andrews & Rose, 2010; Test et al., 2006).

The unemployment rate for individuals with disability across the globe has climbed to new heights. In an effort to reduce the level of disparity experienced among individuals with disabilities pertaining to employment, governments have sought to integrate varied policies geared towards ensuring that the individuals with disabilities gain equal opportunities for employment in the society. For instance, the U.S. government has the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Workforce Investment Act in place (Butterworth et al., 2012). Despite existing laws on individuals with disabilities, the majority of them still face numerous challenges in the process of obtaining gainful employment in the population (Black & Rojewski, 1998). The challenges and difficulties are a result of the work environment and people seeking to limit effective employment of individuals with disabilities.

social skills have been identified as the main factor supporting the employment of individuals with disabilities (Brickey et al., 1985). Most individuals with disabilities experience a hard time searching for employment due to lack of the required social skills that are considered instrumental in finding a job (Almuaqel, 2008; Hsu, 2006). According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS 2), 5% of the total youth population with disabilities secured employment upon high school graduation. In

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addition, this study determined that poor social skills with co-workers developed into an obstacle that further hindered access to decent jobs. According to Benz et al. (1997), the majority of individuals with disabilities who developed effective social skills were identified as having the capacity to maintain highly competitive jobs a year upon completion of school.

Individuals with disabilities often lack necessary training and work experience that proves vital in successfully getting employment. Several studies showed that individuals with disabilities who had training and work experience marked a substantial increase in employment rates (e.g. Fabian, 2007; 2004; Kaszyński & Cechnicki, 2011).

Development of negative attitudes in the population identifies the main barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities, thus limiting the provision of favorable employment opportunities. Most employers consider those individuals as a liability, thereby shortening their list of employment opportunities (Siperstein et al., 2003). Additionally, the negative attitudes by the public, co-workers, employers and supervisors put an increasing pressure on people with disabilities to actively seek employment (Kaszyński & Cechnicki, 2011). Furthermore, negative attitudes, especially towards individuals with disabilities, lead to discrimination, and in the case of employment, limited job opportunities coupled with poor acceptance among co-workers and lower salaries; (Braddock & Bachelder, 1994; Holzbauer, 2004).

There lacks an effective transportation method for people with, hence adding another barrier to the list of employment obstacles (Conley, 2003; West et al., 1998). A study conducted by Conley (2003) sought to analyze the employment services in Maryland for individuals with developmental disabilities. The study integrated 59 organizations as the key participants and Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), which offers services to support workers with disabilities, provided the required funding. The results derived from the study identified transportation as a key deterrent for 75% of the workforce receiving vocational support. Lack of reliable transportation system limited an individual's ability to arrive at work on time, which jeopardized the individual's level of job security (Wehman et al., 1999).

The employment process provides individuals with economic, social and psychological value (Griffin et al., 1996). Therefore, employment for individuals with disabilities remains instrumental and a major concern among the majority of stakeholders.

However, the situation may be improved by identifying the factors that support successful employment of individuals with disabilities. The study seeks to identify the factors to successful employment for employees with disabilities as experienced by their immediate supervisors and managers. The analysis answers the following research question: what are the factors of successful employment of individuals with disabilities?

## **Study Methodology**

The study adopted a quantitative methodology that utilized semi-structured interviews necessary in the provision of in-depth answers regarding the experiences of employers relating to the factors of successful employment of individuals with disabilities. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their individual experiences, (Patton, 1990).

### **Participants**

Saudi Arabia lacks a formal method of identification of employees with disabilities. Therefore, the researcher conducted the process through personal contact at the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Labor. The ministries were instrumental in the identification of employees with disabilities and their respective places of work. The researcher visited the workplaces in order to meet with the employees' supervisors and

managers. In order to develop an understanding of the existent factors of successful employment of individuals with disabilities, the researcher ensured that the participants were managers with at least two employees with disabilities and that the manager or supervisor has had at least one year of experience working with employees with disabilities.

The final group of participants comprised eight managers or supervisors. Four of the participants were involved in the private sector through the Alothim markets and have worked with individuals with intellectual disabilities for over two years. The remaining four participants worked in the government sector, with three working with children with special needs, and one working at the Alemam Mohammed bin Saud University, with all having over four years of experience with individuals with disabilities.

## **Data Collection**

### **Instrument**

The interview questions were influenced by an analysis of an existent literature. In order to enhance the validation of the process, the interview questions were analyzed by a panel of experts who included three faculty members in research methodology and two faculty members who had served as teachers for students with disabilities together with two faculty members from the special education Department in King Saud University, all having prior experience of working with individuals with disabilities. The process influenced the utilization of a test-retest interview method necessary in assessing the reliability of the interview. The interview guide was given twice to three managers/supervisors who were not directly involved in the study. The interview period lasted for 10 days, which was followed by the integration of an analysis of the interviews together with the integration of an additional analysis from a different researcher. The two analyses showed great similarities, thus maintaining the level of consistency.

### **Interview Procedures**

To ensure the credibility of the data in the interviews, the researcher adhered to the following guidelines:

- The study ensured that the participants remained well-informed of the research process prior to initiation;
- participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn from the study when deemed necessary;
- the study maintained the confidentiality and anonymity of the subjects;
- the study provided a signed letter of informed consent from the participants;
- The study requested for permission for face-to-face interviews from the subjects in advance in the event that an audio-tape recorder was going to be used.
- The interview process sought to create a relaxed atmosphere during each interview. The initial minutes comprised informal conversation necessary in the development of rapport with the participants.

The interviews were conducted upon mutually agreed upon areas, which included workplaces and coffee shops. The interviews did not incorporate any set times and lasted until the interview questions were completed. The questions to the participants were influenced by the existent protocol considered necessary in meeting the research needs based on the developed questions. The study incorporated five open-ended questions, which were considered necessary in ensuring that the respondents had provided the necessary answers and opinions.

The participants involved in the process remain instrumental in the provision of demographic information before the beginning of the interview. At the end of the interview, the tape recorder was turned off in order to start the debriefing process of the respondents. The process involved analysis of the transcript, which was necessary in incorporating any changes or additions.

#### Data analysis

The process influenced the development of codes by the researcher through the analysis of the transcripts necessary in the determination of the appropriate labels, and themes developing from the retrieved data. Upon completion of the initial coding of the data, the study sorted the data into various categories necessary in the integration of an analysis of the existent over-arching themes.

## Results and Discussion

The use of interviews helped in the identification of the existent factors influence on the employment of people with disabilities. The main themes emerging from the process that sought to support the successful employment of the individuals with disabilities included (a) work experience, (b) social skills, (c) attitudes toward employees with disabilities, and (d) transportation.

#### Attitudes toward Employees with Disabilities

The study involved five participants who indicated that individuals with disabilities have similar desires to other people in relation to seeking employment and have the capacity for gainful employment. The existence of positive attitudes from the public, employers, co-workers and supervisors towards individuals with disabilities poses a strong factor to full social and vocational participation in the workplace.

The participants provided various examples from their individual experiences that identified the existence of negative attitudes towards employees with disabilities. For instance, three of the participants maintained that their managers developed low-expectations regarding individuals with mild intellectual disabilities pertaining to ensuring that the work was completed on time. Additionally, the respondents maintained that the majority of the managers requested supervisors to give the employees less-challenging tasks. A participant in the study maintained that some of the customers also identify individuals with mild intellectual disabilities and consequently avoid cashiers with assisters' intellectual disabilities. Another participant maintained that the majority of co-workers remain uncomfortable with working with individuals with mild intellectual disabilities. Additionally, the study integrated supervisors from schools who maintained that some of visitors seek to avoid asking for various services from workers with mild intellectual disabilities. The derived responses resonate with studies conducted by Crudden Almana (1997); Kaszyński and Cechnicki (2011); Nietupski, Harme-Nietupski et al., (1996). The authors posited that the existence of negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities have developed into the main impediment limiting access to equal levels of employment.

Burke et al., (2013) maintained that the negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities not only limit their access to employment, but also affect the positions held by the individuals together with influencing the provision of the existent career advancement opportunities in organizations and in the market (Braddock & Bachelder, 1994). The negative attitudes pertaining to individuals with disabilities lead to increased workplace discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The process leads to the provision of fewer training opportunities, limited pace of promotion, dead-end positions together with negative performance appraisals that limit the level of acceptance among the colleagues, thus limiting the existent of support and mentoring activities (Holzbauer, 2004).

The existence of positive societal attitudes may support social and legislation pertaining to the employment of individuals with disabilities (Hewes & Toriello, 1998). In contrast, the existence of negative public attitudes may delimit the success derived from the existent policies as the public influences the level of importance attached to existent issue.

The existence of positive attitudes leads to an increase in the training opportunities provided to the individuals, which increase the growth of the individual's social skills.

#### Social skills

All the participants claimed that social skills develop into the key factor supporting success employment for individuals with disabilities. The participants purported that the majority of individuals with lacked the necessary social skills, which limited their level of interaction and communication with the management and peers. The process limited the level of performance experienced among individuals with disabilities from the work process. Individuals with disabilities suffer from verbal and non-verbal social interactions pertaining to the workplace. The majority of the participants stipulated that the development of a poor understanding of the provided facial expressions coupled with body language led to increased misunderstanding in the workplace, which would lead to the developed perception of the individuals as rude and uncaring. The identified behaviors were considered paramount to the weakening and consequent end of the existent social-interactions with fellow employees. Three of the participants in the study identified that employees with mild intellectual disabilities were transferred from the reception area to the warehousing area due to lack of the necessary social skills considered paramount for the reception area. The study findings resonate with findings in the area, which stipulated that having of the necessary social skills remained instrumental in supporting individuals with disabilities from career growth in the workplace environment (Yamaki & Fujiura, 2002).

The deficiency of social skills developed into the key impediment limiting the level of interaction between individuals with disabilities and their peers in the work environment (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998). In order to influence the development of favorable social skills, the youth with disabilities should remain actively involved in varied activities considered vital in the development of their social skills in the school and work environment. The skills will remain instrumental in various areas including math, literacy, and independent living. However, the developed skills in the specified areas may not guarantee successful outcomes in the absence of social skills. Holmes and Fillary (2000) sought to identify the ability of individuals with intellectual disabilities remaining actively engaged in "small talk" within the workplace. The study identified that majority of individuals with disabilities demonstrate high levels of competency regardless of task-related skill level (Holmes & Fillary, 2000).

The majority of studies maintain that children and young adults with disabilities may not necessarily develop better social skills as they grow older as the social skills deficit remain intact and consequently influence their adult and work life. Therefore, the majority of researchers placed emphasis on the provision of social skills training for students with disabilities as they influence their level of interaction and consequent access to employment (Test et al., 2009).

#### Work Experience

Seven participants (five from governmental sector and two from private sector) identified that having vocational training or work experience of individuals with disabilities support their access to successful employment. Four participants from governmental sector stipulated that the majority of individuals with disabilities were not involved in vocational training programs and the majority had part-time contracts. Lack of the required level of training led to the development of low vocational self-efficacy, which led to the

assumption that the individuals are not provided with growth opportunities in the work environment.

Studies conducted by Fabian (2007), Wehman et al. (1985), and Kaszyński, & Cechnicki (2011) identified that lack of the required level of training developed the key barrier to successful employment for individuals disabilities. However, results from Sitlington et al., (1992) did not find a significant difference from students with vocational training and those who did not have the same level of training.

Several studies place emphasis on provision of vocational training after high school to individuals with disabilities (e.g. Alshehry, 1994; Harvey, 2001; Kohler, 1993). The provision of vocational training influences the development of the student basic job skills necessary in exploring their career interests and consequent development of social skills in the workplace.

Early work experience of individuals with disabilities, especially between the ages 12-19, showed higher post-high school employment percentages and better earnings (e.g., Corbett et al., 2007; Luecking & Fabian, 2000). Therefore, the schools should partner with varied corporations and government agencies to develop employment options that remain accessible and relevant to individuals with disabilities. Work experience and vocational training create an opportunity for those individuals to enter the workforce and consequently harness basic job skills, which will influence the exploration of one's career interests as well as boost social skills.

#### Transportation

Five participants stipulated that adequate transportation support successful employment. These participants gave many stories and examples about negative impacts of lack of transportation for persons with 1 disabilities on their employment. The majority of respondents maintained that employees with prefer a specific form of transport, which may limit the transfer process to other branches. For instance, one supervisor in the Othem market was informed that one of the employees had disability and consequently denied the individual the opportunity for career advancement as the position was offered at a different branch. Additionally, the branch with the job opening was located at a different location, which provided a hindrance for the employee as the location did not ensure the employee of transport. Two managers of employees with abilities maintained that some of the employees wait for several hours after work for someone to pick them up.

The study findings resonated with studies from (Conley; 2003; Migliore et al., 2008; West et al., 1998) who maintained that lack of the desired form of transportation limited successful employment of individuals with disabilities. According to the US, National Organization on Disability (2014), 30% of the adult population with intellectual disabilities identifies transportation as a major barrier for employment. The situation is considered worse in Saudi Arabia due to lack of accessibility to transportation, especially in larger cities such as Riyadh, because disabled adults are not allowed to drive. Lack of access to transportation limits one's ability to gain employment and consequent interaction with the existent social and recreational activities (Wehman et al, 1999).

Transportation is regarded as key factor that influences successful re-integration of individuals with disabilities in the community. The provision of transportation services provide the individuals independence to co-exist with others in the community. However, lack of access to transportation denies individual with disabilities access to employment, medical services and vital community-based services necessary for enhancing individual social and recreational capacity (Wehman et al., 1999).

### Practical Implication

Although the government has integrated numerous processes geared towards enhancing special education in Saudi Arabia, additional processes are necessary to enhance the provision of employment of individuals with disabilities. Currently, Saudi Arabia lacks actual and efficient mechanism necessary for transportation of individuals with disabilities from the school environment to the workplace. In this regard, the study outcomes will provide valuable proposals for adoption by the Ministry of Education, policy makers and professionals.

The study outcomes will provide an informed understanding of the existent factors supporting successful employment of workers with disabilities. The recommendations remain vital to the process and will influence the development of effective transition programs, which will influence the creation of services that cater to the needs of children with disabilities. The study seeks to provide a viable reference point necessary in the provision of possible avenues necessary in the enhancing the transition of the student to the work environment.

The process necessitates the adoption of a curriculum that enhances the adoption of the required knowledge and skills necessary for transition (Alberto, Taber, Brozovic, & Elliot, 1997). The process necessitates training of qualified teachers in the development of the necessary skills for individual transition to employment (Almuaqel, 2008) through the existence of vocational training programs including cooperation with agencies and vocational training centers (Kohler, 1993).

The study identified the importance of work experience in ensuring that individuals with disabilities access the required employment. Therefore, the process necessitates the development of additional training and habilitation centers for individuals with disabilities in all cities of Saudi Arabia, which will enhance the individual's capacity for employment in the workplace. The training of individuals with disabilities in the training centers will ensure that the individuals develop similar skills to their counterparts in the labor market. The adopted levels of coordination and collaboration should be structured on individualized transition plans initiated from the middle school level and supervised by transition specialists. Students with disabilities should be given the opportunity to develop academic and social skills, including vocational training based on individuals' interests and abilities.

Increased cooperation between schools and private sector companies will influence the provision of the required level of training to the individuals necessary in ensuring that the individuals have equal opportunity of access to employment. The process has influenced the provision of training centers by the majority of Saudi Arabia companies, which provide the required level of training to students at summer school, which remains instrumental in developing the student's knowledge and skills vital for the work environment. This, in turn, ensures that students are provided with equal opportunities in companies as the rest of the population upon graduation from the centers.

Successful completion of transition plans necessitates the existence of transition specialists vital in influencing the coordination of the learning process for students. Lack of adequate number of specialists in Saudi Arabia necessitate the adoption of additional units at universities in Saudi Arabia geared towards influencing the provision of special education programs, which will remain instrumental in the development of additional specialists in the area.

The current study identified that lack of social skills developed numerous barriers pertaining to successful employment of individuals with disabilities. Therefore, the curriculum for disabled individuals should place emphasis on harnessing the individuals' social skills. Teachers in middle schools should place focus on the integration of learning processes that influence the development of students with disabilities social skills. The

process will develop an enhanced knowledge of the importance of social skills at the work environment.

The current study identifies that the positive attitudes pertaining to individuals with disabilities develop into the strongest predictors of successful employment of workers with disabilities. Therefore, the process necessitates the development of increased awareness in the work environment among officials, employer, supervisor, managers, co-workers and community regarding the existence strengths of individuals with disabilities. The process will identify the importance of providing the required level of education considered necessary in ensuring that the individuals remain productive in the work environment. Additionally, the media remains tasked with the opportunity to develop the level of awareness among the community necessary in influencing the identification of a change in the existent and developed perceptions pertaining to the process. Consequently, professionals should integrate varied seminars for officials, employers, and community necessary in identifying the need for the integration of individuals with disabilities in the work environment. The process will remain instrumental in the improvement of the existent attitudes pertaining to employment of individuals with disabilities.

Due to lack of transportation, officials and stakeholders should develop a program that provides appropriate transportation for individuals with disabilities. The process will limit the effect of the barrier on the employment of individuals with disabilities thus leading to increased employment. Additionally, the companies should ensure that they provide transportation for employees with disabilities.

### **Limitations**

The study identified several potential methodological limitations. For instance, the study was conducted in the Riyadh City, which was considered geographically small and unrepresentative of the entire Saudi population. Additionally, the study involved only male managers or supervisors of male workers with disabilities. The study identifies that involvement of female managers or supervisors may have influenced the identification of different results.

### **Further Research**

The study remains instrumental for the integration of future research as it influences the integration of an assessment of the existent gaps, which provide an avenue for research for future studies. Through the analysis of the existent results, future researchers should do an analysis of the topic using the method of quantitative research. The process will influence the utilization of a larger sample population necessary in the development of an intricate understanding of the factors of successful employment for workers with disabilities. The existent research placed emphasis on the analysis of the managers and supervisor of workers with disabilities regarding the factors of successful employment for workers with disabilities. The integration of a similar study on educators, parents, and individuals with disabilities will enhance the development of a wide range of avenues necessary in the development of an understanding of the process.

The current study sought to identify the existent factors of successful employment for workers with disabilities. Therefore, the study provides an opportunity for the integration of additional research in the area that seeks to identify additional factors of successful employment for workers with disabilities. Additionally, the study was conducted in Riyadh City, which identifies an individual region in Saudi. Therefore, the study may integrate additional research that may be diversified to incorporate other Saudi cities in order to influence the provision of more uniform results to the entire geographical region. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has not developed a statistical process identifying the numbers



of workers with disabilities or regarding their jobs such as type of job, work place and their salaries. Therefore, the study shows an existent gap, which may be analyzed in future studies.

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