



Acceptance of Disability: A perspective from people with disability

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Abstract

Perceptions of people with disability (PWDs) is pertinent to enable PWDs to integrate into the mainstream society. This study examines the perception of PWDs on acceptance of disability by PWDs themselves and by the public and its association with the demographic factors. The findings show besides inadequate infrastructure and support system, PWDs with lower qualification perceives a low acceptance of disability by the public. Given this, a well-structured inclusive special education together with an adequate infrastructure is essential to have a higher perception of acceptance of disability and for PWDs to participate in the economy.

Keywords: people with disability; acceptance; perception; disability.

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21834/ajbes.v3i10.75>

1.0 Introduction

Worldwide interest in disability was intensified after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared 1981 as the International Year of Disabled People. WHO estimates 10% of the population is experiencing some form of disability and the number of people with disability (PWDs) is expected to increase over time as the population ages, increases and with medical advancement. In Malaysia, the number of registered PWDs increased by 17.5% from 2010 to 2011. With the growing number of registered PWDs, the government has implemented policies to tap into their resources to integrate them into the growing Malaysian economy. Policies lay the foundation for PWDs to be involved in the economy, however, to realize their involvement the acceptance of disability from the perspective of PWDs is pertinent. The perception of PWDs on the acceptance of disability provides an insight into the psychological aspect which influences the overall life situation, adaptation process, the level of confidence and the socialization process. PWDs are often marginalized, stigmatized as pitiful and the poorest group. They are given little opportunity in the labor market to be contributors to the economy. Exploring the acceptance of disability from the perspective of PWDs will enable PWDs to be involved in the economic activities.

Acceptance of disability can be categorized as self-acceptance of disability and public acceptance of disability. Self-acceptance of disability is related to a better adjustment to disability, enabling them to control, connect, and integrate disability into their lifestyle to improve the quality of life. On the other hand, public acceptance of disability together with acceptance of disability at work is related to developing a friendship, social inclusion, breaking down stereotypes, developing a sense of belonging and creating relationships of equal status that can reduce stigma and prejudice.

Acceptance of disability can be related to demographic factors; self-esteem and social support as these factors have an important implication on incorporating PWDs into the mainstream society. By recognizing the association between demographic variables and PWDs perception of acceptances of disability, policies can be formulated to bridge their barriers with society.

Studies on PWDs in the academic field are normally related to the physical barriers and the acceptance of PWDs by the public. However, not much has been explored on the perception of PWDs on self and by the public. In line with this, the objective of this study is to examine the acceptance of disability from the perspective of PWDs with respect to self, at the workplace and by the public. This study also investigates the association between perception of acceptance of disability and demographic factors.

2.0 Literature Review

Disability

The definition of disability is multidimensional and complex. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) define disability as the difficulties encountered in any one or all three areas: human function impairments, activity limitation, and participation. In Malaysia, the PWDs Act 2008 (Sec 2) defines PWDs as individuals with long-term physical,

mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various obstacles may prevent their full and effective participation in the economy. A disabled person registered at the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) is given a colored disabled identity card. The color of PWD cards identifies different types of disability. Blue represents vision impairment, purple hearing impairment, green physical impairment, yellow learning disability, red cerebral palsy and orange, other disability.

Acceptance of Disability

Acceptance is defined as the willingness to experience thoughts and feelings without letting them determine one's action. In the context of disability, the theory emphasizes the importance of accepting oneself as a capable person despite having a disability in psychological adjustment (Dembo, Leviton, & Wright, 1956). As acceptance of disability is related to psychological adjustment. Studies on acceptance of disability are often explored in the medical and psychological field for developing successful rehabilitation strategy. A few studies have related to self-acceptance of disability to demographic factors. Li & Moore (1998) found that there is a significant association between self-acceptance of disability, and selected demographic variables: age, income, marital status, congenital disability, and self-esteem. Woodrich and Patterson (1983) findings on spinal cord injuries PWDs showed that gender, education, and age had a significant association with the level of self-acceptance of disability and education. As such made them more versatile, motivated and be able to control and integrate their disability into their life.

Public acceptance defined as accepting the relationship between PWDs and 'able-bodied' has shown that public has a low acceptance of disability. A study by Hosain, Atkinson and Underwood (2002) showed that the public viewed PWDs disapprovingly or was overly-sympathetic. Another study by Alphen, Dijker, Bos, Borne and Curfs (2012) found that neighbors opposed to having people with severe intellectual disability living next to them for they felt they were a threat to their security. Nunkoosing & John (1997) examined developing friendship and relationship of equal status with 'able-bodied' and found that PWDs friendship was facilitated by mutuality and acceptance.

At the workplace employing PWD is seen as a challenge. A study by Shigaki, Anderson, Howald, Henson, & Gregg (2012) indicated that PWDs compared to others, are treated unfairly, harassed and discriminated at work even though there is evidence that PWDs are more committed, and their performance is comparable to 'able-bodied' co-workers. The stigma of unattractiveness has a negative impact on PWDs. Employers are also reluctant to employ PWDs for they do not want to lose employees because of lack of acceptance of PWDs. As such, many PWDs conceal their disabilities to protect their image of competency at work. This unfavorable attitude towards PWDs by co-workers and employers are being excluded from the labor market opportunities, or PWDs finds it difficult to adjust at the workplace.

3.0 Methodology

A total of 130 PWDs in Klang Valley were selected based on convenient sampling out of which 104 are working. They were interviewed using structured questionnaires. The questionnaire has two sections. The first section is on demographic factors and the second section is on acceptance of disability. The second section has three constructs with twenty-four items, adapted based on the study done by Hosain, Atkinson, and Underwood (2002) and Shigaki et al. (2012) and others from other literature. The first construct has ten items related to self-acceptance of disability and second construct consist of eight items on acceptance by the public. The third construct consist of six items on acceptance of disability at the workplace. All the items were based on Likert-type responds scales from 1 to 5 points ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics to classify and summarize numerical data. Validity and reliability test of acceptance of disability was done by calculating the Cronbach's alpha. Self-factors and acceptance of disability were tested using independent t-test and ANOVA. Table 1 shows the Cronbach's alpha for 10 items on self is 0.918, at the workplace for six items is 0.941 and by the public for eight items is 0.796. This indicates that the questionnaire items produce an acceptable measure of a construct and a good internal consistency of the scale.

Table 1: Reliability Test – Cronbach's Alpha

Perception of acceptance of disability	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Self	10	0.918
Workplace	6	0.941
Public	8	0.796

4.0 Results and Discussions

Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents in Table 2 shows that the majority are in the age of 20-30 years old (36.2 %), female (68.5%) and single (83.8%). In terms of the ethnic group the profile corresponds with ethnic distribution of Malaysia that is, Malays 60.8%, Chinese 24.6 %, and Indians 14.6%. In terms of disability, two-third of the respondents has the visual and physical impairment. More than three-quarters of them has the congenital disability (85.4%). The most of the respondents have attended a special school (66.9%), the percentage that has attended some training or workshop is 79.2%, and 80% of the respondents are working of which 52% are self-employed. Of the total respondents of 130, half of the respondents earned a monthly income of less than RM 799.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	%	N		%	N

Age			Educational Level		
20-30 years	36.2	47	No Education	9.2	12
31-40 years	33.1	43	Primary Education	8.5	11
41-60 years	30.8	40	Secondary Education	5.4	7
Gender			Higher Education	10.0	13
Male	31.5	41	Special School	66.9	87
Female	68.5	89	Type of Disability		
Marital Status			Visual Impairment	43.8	57
Single	83.8	109	Hearing Impairment	11.5	15
Married	16.2	21	Physical Impairment	33.1	43
Ethnic Group			Learning Disability	11.5	15
Malays	60.8	79	Disability Onset		
Chinese	24.6	32	Congenital Disability	85.4	111
Indian	14.6	19	Acquired Disability	14.6	19
Income			Attended Training		
RM699 and less	32.3	42	No	20.8	27
RM700-799	30.0	39	Yes	79.2	103
RM800-899	23.1	30	Work Status		
RM900 and above	14.6	19	Currently Not Working	20.0	26
Work Sector *			Currently Working	80.0	104
Private Sector	48.0	50			
Self-employed	52.0	54			

Acceptance of Disability

Table 3 shows the mean score of acceptance of disability on self, at the workplace and by public. The overall mean score for self-acceptance of disability is 3.74, (SD 0.07) indicating the acceptance of disability. All the items in this construct have a mean score of greater than 3.5. The item that ranks the highest is "acceptance of disability" followed by 'do not need psychological assistance'. The respondents perceive themselves as "independent", "able to carry out daily task", "not being a burden to the family" and are "accepted by the family". They are motivated and have a positive attitude towards life.

The mean score for the perception of acceptance of disability at the workplace is 3.14 (SD 0.08) which can be considered as marginal acceptance. The ranking for "enjoy working" is the highest, followed by "suitable working environment". However, they are indifferent when related to the facilities available and discrimination.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Perception of Self, at Workplace and by Public

Self N=130	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Perception of self	3.74	0.07
Accept Disability	4.05	0.59
Am motivated	3.73	0.86
Do not need psychological assistance	3.98	0.53
Not emotionally disturbed	3.88	0.71
Have a positive attitude.	3.65	0.76
Not depressed.	3.62	0.89
Able to carry out most of the daily task	3.52	0.92
Independent	3.81	0.83
Family accepts my disability	3.70	0.92
Not a burden to family	3.70	0.92
Workplace N=104		
Perception at workplace	3.14	0.08
Enjoy working.	3.85	0.77
Suitable working environment.	3.26	1.04
Supportive coworkers	3.26	1.04
Employers are attentive to their needs	3.13	1.06
Adequate disable facilities.	3.07	1.08
Prevalence of discrimination	3.49	0.89
Public N = 130		
Perception by public	2.78	0.06
Equal treatment as "able-bodied".	2.74	1.08
Do not have a negative attitude	2.66	.96
Not Over-sympathetic	2.98	1.17
Do not tease	2.64	1.13
Not prejudice	3.04	1.13
Non avoidance	3.06	1.08
Government assistance given	2.56	1.18
Satisfactory public transport	2.48	1.08

Table 3 also shows that the perception on public acceptance of disability is the lowest 2.78 (SD 0.06). They perceive their acceptance by the public in unsatisfactory. The public is overly sympathetic towards them. Furthermore, they are not given equal treatment as 'able-bodied' counterparts, being teased, and are viewed negatively. Besides this, they perceive public transport is not satisfactory, and government assistances are inadequate.

Associations between Perception of Acceptance of Disability and Demographic factors

Table 4 shows the association between perception of acceptance of disability and demographic variables. A statistically significant and a higher mean score is seen for

respondents below the age of thirty, with secondary education, working and higher income. Respondents with a congenital disability that is, disability at birth have a significantly higher mean score compared to respondents with acquired disability. The probable reason is that respondents with acquired disability experience changes in their former state are likely to go through traumas and require longer time and effort to adjust themselves to the environment.

With respect to the perception of acceptance of disability at the workplace, a statistically significant and a higher mean score are seen for respondents that are self-employed, single, below thirty, with secondary education, congenital disability, higher income and with hearing impairment. Interestingly respondents without training perceive higher acceptance of disability compared to respondents with some training. The plausible explanation is that the expectation by staff at the workplace from trained respondents could be higher compared to non-trained respondents, therefore, trained PWDs to perceive that the staff is less attentive or supportive of their needs. Self-employed respondents perceive a higher acceptance of disability as they have greater flexibility and can work independently according to their ability and environment compared to structured working conditions in private sectors.

Concerning the acceptance by the public, respondents who are single, with higher education, visual and hearing impairment, self-employed and higher income indicated a statistically significant relationship and a higher mean score.

In summary, the findings show that younger respondents, with higher education and earning higher income have a statistically significant higher mean score across all the three construct of acceptance of disability. With respect to the respondents attending special schools, they perceive a moderate, positive acceptance of disability in all three constructs.

Table 4: Mean Score of Perception on Self, at Workplace and by Public by Various Selected Demographic Variables

	Perception on Self		Perception on Work##		Perception on Public	
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Age@						
20-30 years	4.0***	0.6	3.7***	0.8	2.9	0.7
31-40 years	3.7***	0.5	3.3***	0.8	2.8	0.7
41-60 years	3.5***	0.7	3.0***	0.8	2.6	0.7
Gender#						
Male	3.8	0.7	3.3	0.9	2.7	0.8
Female	3.7	0.6	3.5	0.8	2.8	0.6
Marital Status#						
Single	3.8	0.7	3.5***	0.8	2.8**	0.7
Married	3.7	0.6	2.7***	0.8	2.4**	0.6
Ethnic Group@						
Malays	3.8	0.6	3.4	0.8	2.8	0.8
Chinese	3.8	0.7	3.5	0.9	2.7	0.6
Indian	3.5	0.7	3.1	0.8	2.9	0.6

Educational Level@						
Never been to school	3.4***	1.0	3.6***	1.2	2.8***	0.6
Primary School	3.1***	1.0	2.4***	0.1	2.0***	0.8
Secondary School	4.2***	0.5	4.5***	0.6	2.5***	1.2
Form /6 Diploma/ Degree	3.8***	0.8	4.0***	0.5	3.1***	0.2
Special School	3.8***	0.4	3.3***	0.8	2.8***	0.6
Type of Disability@						
Visual	3.8***	0.5	3.4***	0.8	3.2***	0.3
Hearing	4.2***	0.4	4.2***	0.4	3.2***	0.2
Physical	3.5***	0.8	2.8***	0.5	2.1***	0.7
Learning Disability	3.9***	0.7	3.4***	1.0	2.6***	0.7
Cause of Disability#						
Congenital disability	3.8***	0.6	3.5***	0.8	2.8	0.7
Acquired disability	3.2***	0.8	2.5***	0.8	2.5	0.5
Attended Training or Workshop#						
No	3.6	0.9	4.2***	0.4	3.0	0.5
Yes	3.8	0.6	3.2***	0.8	2.7	0.8
Work Status#						
Currently Not Working	3.1***	0.8			2.3***	0.8
Currently Working	3.9***	0.5			2.9***	0.6
Work Sector #						
Private Sector	3.8	0.5	3.2**	0.8	2.8**	0.6
Own Business	4.0	0.6	3.6**	0.8	3.0**	0.7
Income@						
RM600 and less	3.3***	0.7	2.5***	0.1	2.4***	0.7
RM700	3.9***	0.5	3.5***	0.8	2.9***	0.8
RM800	4.1***	0.3	4.0***	0.5	3.0***	0.4
RM900 and above	3.9***	0.5	2.8***	0.8	2.7***	0.6
Total	3.7	0.6	3.4	0.8	2.8	0.7

***Significant at 1%; **Significant at 5%; Significant at 10% ; # t-test ; @ANOVA; ## only for respondents who are currently working

5.0 Conclusion

The focus of the study is to have examined the perception of PWDs on the acceptance of disability to enable them to be actively involved in the economy. PWDs like any other minority groups are often isolated, kept at the margins of the society and their contribution to the economy goes unnoticed. In order to reduce this stigma and to include PWDs in the society, PWDs require self-empowerment and the ability to face challenges posed by the external environment. The perception of PWDs of themselves and by public will enable policy makers to align policies for them.

This study shows that PWDs have positive self-attitude, competencies, and are willing to actively participate in the mainstream society. On the contrary, they perceive that their acceptance by the public is limited. The perception of low acceptance of disability can be associated with inadequate, insufficient disabled-friendly facilities and public and government support. Related studies revealed other challenges faced by PWDs are the people-space relationship (Sawadsri, 2012; Kurniawati, 2012), physical barriers (Hashim et al., 2012), limited mobility (Soltani, Sham, Awang, & Yaman, 2012).

With reference to the second objective, respondents with special school education perceive a moderate acceptance of disability. This finding is congruent with the study done by Yasin, Toran, Tahar, and Bari (2010). They indicated that special school in Malaysia lacked skillful teachers, physical infrastructure facilities. Policies that have well-defined, structured programs, trained teachers and favorable educational environment and with an early intervention using multimedia courseware (Paris & Yussof, 2012) will increase the PWDs perception of acceptance of disability.

To ensure the success of PWDs being integrated into the society, public policies must address the needs of PWDs from their perspective. Even though, literature has shown that when development projects are carried out public opinion are seldom sought for (Kadir, Jamaludin, & Rahim, 2013; Annuar, & Saruwono, 2013). However, it is imperative with respect to PWDs, that their opinions are considered.

PWDs perception of public's acceptance of disability could be enhanced by providing better and adequate disabled-friendly facilities and social support. A study done by Zainal, Kaur, Ahmad, and Khalili (2012) had indicated a positive relationship between facilities and social support.

Although this study has reflected and highlighted some findings on the perception of PWDs on acceptance of disability, there are some limitations. The study was done on a small-scale which is restricted to Klang Valley, with a limited number of items. This limits the results from being generalized. Better finding with the higher level of statistics can be obtained with a larger sample, wider coverage and more items are included. A detailed research using triangulation method is recommended to have a better understanding of acceptance of disability. Future studies on public awareness and the assimilation of PWDs in the society will enhance the PWDs participation in the economy.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful for the financial grants received from the RMI and the Faculty of Business Management, University Technology MARA

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