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## **Exploring Social Entrepreneurship among Disabled Entrepreneurs: A model for empowering people with disabilities**

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### **Abstract**

Employment challenges for People with Disabilities (PWD) persist globally, including in Malaysia. This study investigates the potential of social entrepreneurship as a solution, focusing on the contributions of disabled entrepreneurs to their communities and society. A qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with ten informants, was employed, and data were analyzed using Atlas. Ti. Findings reveal that social entrepreneurship positively impacts both PWDs and their broader social environments. The study emphasizes the importance of promoting social entrepreneurship among PWDs and introduces the Social Entrepreneur with Disability Model as a framework to enhance empowerment and inclusion.

**Keywords:** Unemployment, People with Disability (PWD), Social Entrepreneurship (SE), Entrepreneurship.

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Opportunities in entrepreneurship can greatly benefit people with disabilities (PWDs), helping them overcome employment barriers such as societal prejudices, physical limitations, and limited workplace access. Research made by Ashalatha (2024) through entrepreneurship, PWDs can achieve self-sufficiency and contribute to the economy and their communities. However, despite these opportunities, participation by PWDs remains low, mainly due to insufficient support, lack of awareness, and societal misconceptions (Salamzadeh, 2022). PWD entrepreneurs also have the potential to create inclusive businesses that promote diversity in the workplace. To unlock this potential, more efforts are needed to provide PWDs with access to financial resources, training, and mentorship. Targeted support can help them overcome barriers and fully engage in entrepreneurship.

Societal stigmas further limit PWDs' participation in both employment and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship provides an alternative path, enabling PWDs to create businesses suited to their abilities and break down barriers for others (Al-Massalkhi, 2024). However, data gaps, especially in countries like Malaysia, make it difficult to assess the full potential and challenges PWDs face in entrepreneurship. More detailed research is needed to understand and support this area. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) have strong potential to become entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs, creating broader societal impact. Research calls for deeper investigation into social entrepreneurship among disabled individuals, particularly in Malaysia. Despite mobility limitations, their societal contributions

remain significant. How do entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWDs) support both PWDs and the wider community through social entrepreneurship?

Table 1.1 Statistics of SBGP-OKU Scheme and Total Employed Disabled Employees For the Years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015

Years	Allocate (RM)	No. EWD assisted	No. Employment Opportunities for PWD	No. PWD workers are employed by EWD
2007	2404000.00	63	229	170
2008	4638440.00	132	-	-
2009	5510916.00	134	-	-
2010	3446736.00	184	-	-
2011	3229078.00	122	-	-
2012	2999080.00	114	204	114
2013	199899.00	75	-	83
2014	998412.00	37	-	-
2015	997801.40	30	-	-

Source: Peninsular Malaysia JTK Annual Report 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 dan 2015

The primary goal of this research is to explore the ability of disabled entrepreneurs from the perspective of contribution to disabled people and society based on perspective of social entrepreneurship. The study aims to fill these gaps by exploring how PWD entrepreneurs navigate their entrepreneurial journeys, focusing particularly in the support mechanisms needed for their success and the social contribution they make within their communities. The objective is to explore the ability of EWD to contribute to PWD and the community from the perspective of SE.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Social Entrepreneurship for Persons with Disabilities (PWD)

Persons with Disabilities (PWD) face significant challenges when entering the entrepreneurial sector, which is often exacerbated by physical limitations, societal prejudices, and a lack of accessible resources (Gidron, 2014). Moreover, Jacock and Bell (2023), address these challenges, both government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been playing a crucial role in reducing barriers by offering financial support, capacity building, and networking opportunities. In Malaysia, social entrepreneurship has emerged as a promising solution, particularly aimed at tackling unemployment and poverty among PWDs through business ventures (Indarti et al., 2024). This approach not only creates employment opportunities but also empowers PWDs to become self-sufficient, reducing reliance on traditional forms of employment that may not cater to their specific needs (Harris et al., 2013).

Social entrepreneurship differs fundamentally from commercial entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, the latter is driven by profit maximization, and social entrepreneurship is geared towards solving societal issues, with profitability being secondary to the mission of creating social value (Saebi, 2019). In the case of PWDs, social entrepreneurship enables individuals to tackle employment barriers such as discrimination or inadequate infrastructure, thus helping them to find meaningful work or even employ others within their community. However, the success of social entrepreneurship initiatives heavily depends on individual entrepreneurial abilities, access to resources, and the degree of equality of opportunity provided within their socio-economic environment (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Despite the potential of social entrepreneurship to transform the livelihoods of PWDs, many remain hesitant to view it as a viable option. This hesitancy is often attributed to a lack of awareness, inadequate support structures, and the relatively nascent state of social entrepreneurship as a recognized pathway for PWDs (Harris et al., 2013). Moreover, Research has yet to explore the motivational drivers, attitudes, and long-term impact of social entrepreneurship on PWD communities fully. Meanwhile, some studies have identified it as an innovative solution for job creation (Caldwell et al., 2012), there remains a substantial gap in understanding how these entrepreneurs navigate the dual challenges of managing their disabilities and running a socially driven enterprise (Caldwell et al., 2019).

Existing Research in Malaysia predominantly focuses on groups like single mothers or community-wide development initiatives, with limited studies examining the role of PWDs in social entrepreneurship. This underrepresentation highlights the need for more empirical Research that investigates how successful PWD entrepreneurs contribute to both social change and economic growth (Ang, 2014). Given that social entrepreneurship is still developing in Malaysia, PWD entrepreneurs may face greater obstacles, including limited access to financial resources, insufficient training in business management, and a lack of tailored mentorship programs (Harris et al., 2014).

The potential for social entrepreneurship to break down employment barriers for PWDs is particularly promising. However, the field remains underexplored, and many PWDs are unaware of or uninterested in this pathway due to its perceived risks and the complexities of starting a business with limited support (Robinson, 2012). As the theory of Social Entrepreneurship Dimensions outlines, success in this field relies on responsiveness to social issues, the ability to navigate situational factors, and intrinsic motivations (Bonaventura & Caserta, 2012). These key traits, coupled with tailored support and societal acceptance, are critical for enabling PWD entrepreneurs to thrive in this emerging sector.

The Theory of Social Dimensions of Entrepreneurship (TSDE) posits that social and cultural factors, such as community support and inclusion, greatly influence an individual's entrepreneurial journey (Bonaventura & Caserta, 2012). For PWDs, the importance of societal

acceptance and social inclusion cannot be overstated, as stigmas related to disability often create additional challenges beyond those faced by non-disabled entrepreneurs (Al Massalkhi, 2024). The Social Model of Disability (SMD) further explains that disability is not just an individual's condition but is largely shaped by external societal and environmental barriers (Oliver, 2013). For instance, inaccessible infrastructure, societal discrimination, and economic constraints hinder PWDs from fully engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Hence, policies and interventions that remove these external barriers and foster inclusive environments are essential for promoting social entrepreneurship among PWDs (Mauksch, 2024).

In conclusion, while the potential of social entrepreneurship to empower PWDs in Malaysia is evident, significant gaps remain in understanding the full scope of its impact. This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring how PWD entrepreneurs navigate their entrepreneurial journeys, focusing particularly on the support mechanisms needed for their success and the social contributions they make within their communities. Developing robust resources and frameworks that cater to the specific needs of PWD entrepreneurs is critical for ensuring their long-term success.

## 2.2 Theory of the Research

### 2.2.1 Theory of Social Dimension of Entrepreneurship (TSDE)

The Theory of Social Dimension of Entrepreneurship (TSDE) suggests that social influences impact an individual's decision to pursue entrepreneurship (Bonaventura, 2012). For Persons with Disabilities (PWD), these social factors are crucial as they shape motivations and challenges. TSDE recognizes that entrepreneurship is not only driven by personal ambition but also by cultural norms, social networks, and community support. Social inclusion or exclusion plays a significant role in the success of PWD entrepreneurs. This theory is relevant to PWD as it connects their personal experiences with societal expectations (Bonaventura & Caserta, 2012). PWD often face stigmas that discourage them from starting businesses, but with supportive environments like family, mentors, and community, they can overcome these obstacles. TSDE highlights that PWD entrepreneurial success depends as much on societal support as on personal qualities like resilience.

### 2.2.2 Social Model of Disability (SMD)

The Social Model of Disability (SMD) views disability as a result of external barriers that prevent full participation in society, not an individual's limitation (Oliver, 2013). These barriers—environmental, social, economic, and attitudinal—restrict PWD from accessing opportunities like entrepreneurship. Environmental barriers (e.g., inaccessible infrastructure), social barriers (discrimination), economic barriers (lack of funding), and attitudinal barriers (misconceptions about PWD abilities) all hinder PWD from starting or growing businesses (Oliver, 2013). A major issue is the lack of information and support tailored to PWD entrepreneurs. Together, TSDE and SMD provide a framework to understand the challenges PWD face in entrepreneurship. TSDE emphasizes social support, while SMD focuses on removing external barriers. To help PWDs succeed, policies must provide access to resources, training, and funding while promoting greater societal acceptance of PWD entrepreneurs.

## 2.3 Conceptual Framework

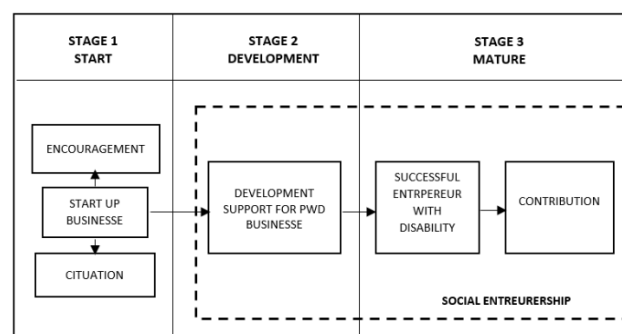


Figure: Conceptual Framework Research.

The exploration of the Theory of Social Dimension of Entrepreneurship (TSDE) and the Social Model of Disability (SMD) highlights how societal and structural factors significantly impact the entrepreneurial journeys of Persons with Disabilities (PWD). These theoretical frameworks underscore the importance of both external support and the dismantling of barriers to create an inclusive entrepreneurial environment for PWD. However, while these theories provide a strong foundation for understanding the factors influencing PWD entrepreneurship, there remains a lack of empirical data specifically focused on the lived experiences of disabled entrepreneurs, particularly in the context of social entrepreneurship.

To address this gap, the present study aims to explore the characteristics and contributions of successful PWD entrepreneurs through the lens of social entrepreneurship. By employing a qualitative approach, this Research will seek to capture the nuanced experiences of disabled entrepreneurs, investigating how they navigate the challenges outlined by TSDE and SMD and how they contribute to both their communities and society at large. The following Methodology section outlines the research design, participant selection, data

collection, and analytical methods employed in this study. This approach ensures that the study is grounded in rigorous qualitative inquiry, allowing for an in-depth exploration of PWD entrepreneurs' motivations, challenges, and successes in social entrepreneurship.

### 3.0 Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study utilizes a qualitative research approach, explicitly employing a phenomenological design. This approach is selected to deeply explore and understand the lived experiences of entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWD) within social entrepreneurship (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology is particularly suited for capturing the essence of participants' experiences, as it focuses on how individuals perceive and make sense of their realities.

#### 3.2 Participant Selection

The study involves ten informants purposefully selected to provide diverse perspectives. Eight of these informants are entrepreneurs with disabilities (EWD) actively engaged in social entrepreneurship, ensuring a rich dataset reflective of the research focus. The remaining two informants are experts from government departments related to EWD, providing a broader context and expert insights into the support mechanisms and policies impacting these entrepreneurs.

#### 3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for consistency across interviews and the flexibility to explore emerging themes in depth. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to let participants express their experiences and perspectives freely while addressing the key research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were conducted in a manner that ensured participants felt comfortable and able to share their authentic experiences. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a standard method in phenomenological Research. This process involved coding the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights that reflect the experiences of EWD in social entrepreneurship. The thematic analysis helped categorize the data into key themes that are central to understanding the challenges and successes experienced by these entrepreneurs. The methodology used in this Research is qualitative Research, a phenomenology research design. This Research was conducted by ten informants using interviews of semi-structured questions. From this interview, 8 of them are EWD, and 2 are experts from the government servant department related to EWD.

#### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

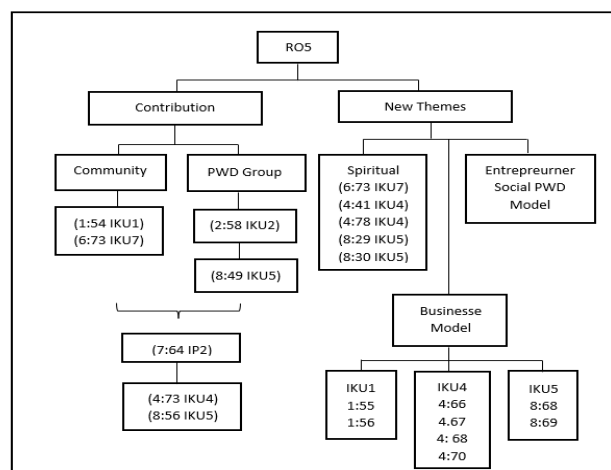
Reliability is a measuring tool that helps the researcher see the extent to which the consistency and accuracy of the Research conducted is consistent and accurate (Othman, 2015). On the other hand, validity is a medium that ensures that the study provides an accurate picture of what is being studied (Othman, 2015). However, this study chose to use several approaches to the trustworthiness procedure proposed by Shenton (2004), who stated that, 'according to Guba (1981) there are four main criteria that must be present to achieve trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability' (p. 65).

### 4.0 Findings

#### 4.1 Contribution of Successful EWD towards PWD and Community Based on Social Entrepreneurship

Contribution is a part of the objective of this Research, which is to explore the ability of EWD to contribute to PWD and the community from the perspective of SE. The data collected through the interviews shows a very positive outcome when discussing helping and contributing to PWD. Although, based on the predetermined theme, we suggest seeing contributions in PWD and community, analysis results show that most informant prefer to contribute more specifically to their own PWD community. Using Atlas ti. Give the network results based on the figure below.

Graf 1: Analysis Network Based on Research Objective Five (RO5).



Results also show that most EWDs deeply understand their friends' PWD, especially in getting a job; because of that, the focus of this group of EWDs is a contribution to job opportunities. Table 1 counted most of the informants in this Research as the workers of PWD. The number of PWD workers might be small, but still, they hired friends among them with the same difficulty.

Table 1: Comparison Frequency Informant Statement Related to Contribution.

Category Informant	IKU1	IKU2	IKU3	IKU4	IKU5	IKU6	IKU7	IKU8
Contribution to community		3						1
Contribution to PWD	10	9	3	16	9	5	15	2

Based on Table 1, evidence shows that all informants prefer to contribute to the PWD community compared to the community itself. These results show that only PWD understands PWD, and providing jobs among them will be the best solution to the barriers faced by PWD in getting job opportunities.

## 4.2 New Theme in the Third Phase

### 4.2.1 Spiritual

The findings indicate that the disabled entrepreneurs (OKU) in this study, who are Muslims, integrate religious and spiritual values into their business practices. Their faith plays a significant role in guiding their actions, decision-making, and goals. One informant highlighted the connection between business success and religious contributions, such as paying zakat (charitable giving). Another informant shared how repentance and faith transformed their approach to business. Additionally, several informants emphasized religious principles like charity and ethical practices (e.g., producing halal and beneficial products). Overall, the study suggests that religious beliefs deeply influence these entrepreneurs' lives and business strategies, and this element should be considered in future Research on disabled entrepreneurs.

## 5. Discussion

The research results clearly show that there are models that can be produced to elaborate on how SE can have a big impact on PWD in different ways of practice. By creating a new model based on this model, Social Entrepreneurs are more focused on PWD as an EWD.

Table 2: Results on Research at Stage Three Mature Outcomes.

Research Question	Pre-Determinate themes	Sub Theme outcomes	Research Results	Conclusion
Explore characteristic successful EWD based on characteristic of successful social entrepreneur	1. Hired PWD 2. Develop businesses. 3. High motivation	Successful EWD	Characteristic successful entrepreneur is attitude, skills knowledge dan	The attitude of disabled entrepreneurs needs to be changed to succeed
		Successful social entrepreneurs with disabilities	Change Agent	PWDs need to wisely explore the potential of their own skills that can be highlighted to succeed.  OKU entrepreneurs always strive to ensure that people of similar circumstances can change and become successful entrepreneurs, not just employ other OKU friends.
Exploring the ability of disabled entrepreneurs from the point of view of contribution to disabled people and society based on the perspective of social entrepreneurship	a. Contribution to the disabled - create job opportunities	-acting as a mentor to the disabled - training center for the disabled - knowledge sharing -tendency to understand the disabled and help the disabled -hope	Disabled entrepreneurs are more inclined towards the development of disabled people from the point of view of the contribution that will be channeled.  More business development and studying the disabled	Encourage more people with disabilities to get involved in business
	b. Contribution to society - create job opportunities	- zakat -social responsibility	Spiritual/religious practices Islamic social entrepreneurship practice  Business Model There is a desire to help other disabled people in terms of entrepreneurship and not just provide employment. Various business capitals are designed to help other disabled people	There is a religious element that is the basis of Islamic entrepreneurs  There are several entrepreneurial models that have been implemented by these OKU entrepreneurs, and have elements that are based on social entrepreneurship without being realized by the OKU entrepreneurs.
		Social Entrepreneurship Model		

Overall, the results of this study have successfully explored the experiences of the informants in this study, from the phase of starting a business to becoming a social entrepreneur. The formation of the model in Figure 2 is the result of the findings of this study. This study

identified some important elements that influence a disabled entrepreneur to be successful and the important characteristics that make the disabled entrepreneur a disabled social entrepreneur.

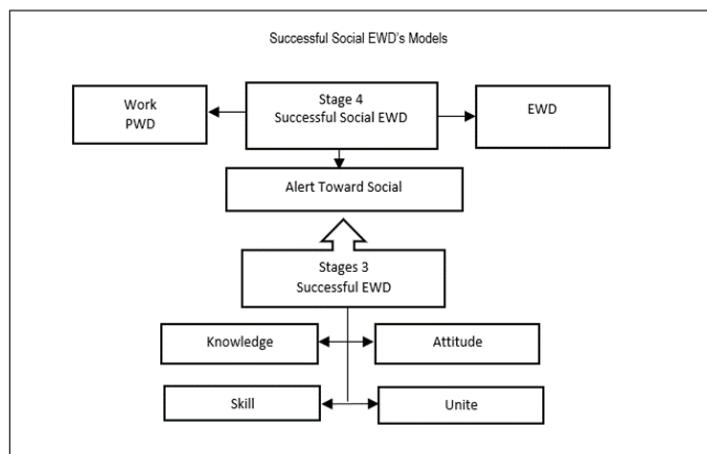


Figure 2: Part of "Successful Social EWD's Models."

Achieving success as a disabled entrepreneur requires strong self-determination. Meanwhile, this study benchmarks success as expanding the business and employing other disabled individuals, which is often difficult to define. Traditional employment metrics do not always apply to disabled entrepreneurs (Cadwell, 2019). Here, success is assessed based on JTKSM's criteria, focusing on key elements like knowledge, skills, attitude, and association. Knowledge and skills were identified as critical, aligning with Renko (2015), who stresses inclusive education. Attitude is equally important, with confidence and persistence highlighted by Haugh (2005) as traits that should be fostered among disabled entrepreneurs. This study also uncovered the importance of association, showing that group support is vital for entrepreneurial success, supported by Cadwell (2019), who emphasizes the role of collective support.

Contrary to Caldwell's (2019) study, which focused on different traits due to cultural and geographical differences, this Research highlights the informants' willingness to help others, which led to the proposal of a Successful OKU Social Entrepreneur Model. This model focuses on providing employment and mentorship through a social mission, differing from Caldwell's focus on innovation and growth. The study concludes by stressing the collective support from families, educational institutions, government agencies, and NGOs in fostering OKU entrepreneurship.

## 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study highlights the positive response of EWD in Malaysia towards social entrepreneurship, which presents a valuable opportunity to foster the growth of successful EWD. PWDs should be encouraged to view economic uncertainty as a chance to create and expand business opportunities, thereby contributing to job creation and economic empowerment. Developing a strong social entrepreneurship culture among disabled individuals can have far-reaching benefits, not only within Malaysia but globally, by challenging outdated perceptions and promoting a more inclusive society. This shift is crucial in transforming the view of PWDs from passive recipients of aid to active contributors to the economy. Policymakers and practitioners should prioritize strategies that remove barriers and provide targeted support to disabled entrepreneurs, ensuring they can access resources, mentorship, and networks needed to thrive. Future Research should explore additional factors influencing the success of EWD, focusing on identifying barriers and facilitators within various sectors. Expanding the scope of Research to include diverse geographic regions and industries could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social entrepreneurship can empower disabled communities. Further studies could also broaden perspective will also help policymakers and practitioners refine the social entrepreneurship model for disabled individuals, ensuring its adaptability to different cultural and economic contexts.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study examines the contributions of disabled entrepreneurs in social entrepreneurship, especially in Malaysia. Social entrepreneurship combines business with a social mission, providing PWDs with opportunities to address unemployment and poverty while benefiting their communities. In Malaysia, where social entrepreneurship is still developing, this study fills a gap by exploring how PWD entrepreneurs contribute to economic and social growth. Research on their specific impact is limited, making this study crucial in understanding how they create jobs, promote inclusion, and advocate for accessibility.

Entrepreneurship offers PWDs a path to overcome employment barriers, but participation remains low due to stigmas, accessibility challenges, and limited support. This study explores social entrepreneurship's potential for PWDs, especially in Malaysia, and explores its implementation and effectiveness. Existing Research on social entrepreneurship and PWDs will be reviewed to build a foundation for this study. The Literature Review will highlight relevant theories, past studies, and trends, identifying gaps and supporting the study's objectives and methodology.

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