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Assessing Employer Preparedness in Hiring PwCD: Evidence from trade, manufacturing, services and hospitality sectors in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper examines employer readiness to hire Persons with Cognitive Disabilities (PwCD) across trade, manufacturing, services, and hospitality sectors in Malaysia's Klang Valley. Despite national disability employment programs, significant barriers persist, including misconceptions about PWCD capabilities, insufficient workplace modifications, and limited knowledge of support systems. Using quantitative methodology with simple random sampling, data were collected from 238 organizations (including enterprise and cooperative societies) to assess employer preparedness and identify implementation gaps. Findings reveal substantial sectoral disparities, highlighting critical areas for intervention. The research offers actionable strategies to enhance inclusive hiring practices, improve employer awareness, and optimize government support utilization.

Keywords: Cognitive Disabilities; employer readiness; inclusive employment; workplace accommodation

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1.0 Introduction

Despite government programmes and subsidies provided to employers hiring Persons with Cognitive Disabilities (PwCD), current statistics reveal that only 3,186 persons with disabilities were employed in Malaysia's private sector in 2022 (Sallehuddin, 2024), falling short of targeted goals. There are challenges and barriers (Karellas, 2024; Page, 2024; Zapella, 2015) contributing to disproportionately high unemployment rates among individuals with disabilities, affecting their economic independence and social integration (Nehru, 2023), while hindering Malaysia's progress toward UN Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Berie et al., 2024). This research investigates the factors that influence inclusive employment practices for people with disabilities in the Klang Valley region of Malaysia.

The study aimed to:

- (1) Investigate employer readiness levels in hiring PwCD,
- (2) identify factors influencing inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations,
- (3) examine employer perceptions and attitudes regarding PwCD workplace integration, and
- (4) assess employers' awareness and utilization of government support programs for PwCD.

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2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Employer readiness in hiring PwCD

Employer readiness is crucial in hiring PwCD employees, as employers determine company direction, objectives, and organizational culture. By measuring employer readiness levels, organizations can assess their preparedness for hiring PwCD, considering necessary facilities, welfare provisions, policy compliance, human resources training, and openness to inclusive workplace culture changes. PwCD has the right to suitable, fair, and comfortable workplace environments.

Studies of Fortune 500 companies have demonstrated positive employer reactions to hiring people with severe disabilities, including autism, cognitive impairments, and psychiatric disabilities, though very few respondents had hired members of this group despite expressing positive attitudes (Levy et al., 1992). Despite legislation on diversity in the workplace, people with disabilities still do not experience the same access to work opportunities as their counterparts without disabilities, with many employers harboring sincere yet ill-founded views about the work-related abilities of people with disabilities (Shankar et al., 2018). Employers with previous experience of people with disabilities are more likely to perceive them as more employable than those with little or no experience (*ibid.*), suggesting that exposure and familiarity enhance employer readiness.

The persistent assumption that PwCD are less productive, more dependent on others, and require excessive supervision remains a significant barrier among reluctant employers. Although this notion lacks solid evidence, societal perspectives make it seem realistic, creating substantial barriers to actual employment opportunities for PwCD. By identifying and understanding employers' willingness to hire PwCD workers, it becomes possible to increase workforce participation among PwCD (Omar et al., 2021).

2.2 Inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodation

Employers' willingness to implement inclusive hiring practices for PwCD represents a critical determinant of workplace equality and social integration. Research demonstrates that positive employer attitudes stem from corporate social responsibility commitments and recognition of diversity as a catalyst for innovative problem-solving (Brodzik et al., 2023).

Government support mechanisms play a pivotal role in encouraging inclusive hiring through financial, legal, and structural interventions. Countries with comprehensive support systems demonstrate significantly higher accommodation implementation rates compared to nations with limited assistance (New Straits Times, 2022). Malaysia's Daya Kerjaya Program provides monthly incentives up to RM600 for employers hiring PWDs, effectively reducing implementation barriers (Daya Kerjaya Programme For Vulnerable Groups and TVET Graduates Targeted Hiring Incentives, 2023).

Workplace accommodations significantly enhance an employer's willingness to hire People with Disabilities by demonstrating organizational commitment to inclusion. Essential accommodations include accessible workspace design, flexible scheduling, and assistive technologies enabling effective performance (Chris Simler et al., 2023). Research indicates that 94% of respondents reported improved mental well-being through workplace flexibility arrangements (Deloitte, 2020). Organizational culture and leadership commitment substantially influence accommodation success. Companies like Accenture integrate disability inclusion into their core leadership objectives, resulting in comprehensive workplace accommodations (Disability Inclusion Driving Innovation and Growth, 2018).

2.3 Employers perception, attitudes, and concerns

Employment serves as a fundamental pathway for PwCD to achieve economic stability and social integration; however, employer perceptions and attitudes significantly determine employment opportunity availability (Schur, 2002; Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2019). Literature synthesis demonstrates that employer attitudes constitute a critical determinant in establishing and sustaining employment prospects for people with disabilities (Heera & Devi, 2016). Multiple factors influence these attitudes, including disability nature and severity, coworker acceptance, previous experiences, workplace accessibility, accommodation costs, and sector characteristics. The Theory of Planned Behaviour encompasses three main aspects that govern human conduct: perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and attitude toward behavior. These factors jointly influence an individual's behavioral intention, which determines their actual behavior, whether positive or negative (Ajzen, 1991). However, organizational policies play a crucial role in shaping these attitudes, underscoring the need for comprehensive and inclusive policies (Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020).

Research identifies three primary categories of employer concerns regarding PwCD employment: financial considerations, knowledge gaps, and legal and performance anxieties (Kaye et al., 2011). Financial concerns center on accommodation costs, though studies reveal that many modifications require minimal investment and provide substantial returns through improved productivity and organizational culture (Fraser et al., 2009). Knowledge gaps represent barriers among small enterprises that have limited understanding of disability management and restricted access to external support resources (Nagtegaal et al., 2023). Employers frequently lack awareness of PwCD capabilities, underscoring the urgency of dispelling prevailing stereotypes that emphasize limitations rather than strengths (Muslim et al., 2023). Legal concerns manifest as fears regarding disciplinary actions and potential litigation, while performance anxieties involve doubts about PWDs' ability to execute essential job functions effectively (Nagtegaal et al., 2023). These concerns intensify regarding customer service roles, where employers balance service excellence with diversity sensitivity. Despite legislative frameworks like the Persons with Disability Act (PWD Act 2008) providing comprehensive protection and requiring reasonable accommodations, employer misconceptions about PWD productivity and attendance persist, contributing to continued employment barriers (Ayub & Babar, 2022).

2.4 Employers' awareness and utilization of government support

Government support initiatives serve as crucial mechanisms for promoting employment among PwCD, yet limited awareness and implementation challenges frequently undermine their effectiveness. The International Labour Organization (2015) identified insufficient knowledge about available programs, including wage subsidies and workplace adaptation grants, as a primary obstacle in developing effective partnerships between enterprises and policymakers. Many private sector employers remain unaware of financial incentives and advisory services designed to mitigate perceived risks and costs associated with hiring PwCD, perpetuating misconceptions about accommodation feasibility and deepening labor market marginalization.

Malaysia has implemented targeted initiatives to encourage PwCD employment, including the OKU Talent Enhancement Program (OTEP) and Madani Training Program. OTEP provides technical and vocational skills training to enhance PwCD employability while supporting independence, social inclusion, and sustainable livelihoods (Human Resource Development Corporation, 2022). Despite comprehensive offerings, the Ministry of Human Resources (2024) identifies significant implementation challenges, particularly inadequate information dissemination to private sector employers who remain unaware of available incentives, including salary subsidies and job matching services.

Malaysia offers substantial financial incentives, including monthly salary subsidies of RM750 for employers hiring PWDs, alongside extensive job placement programs facilitating skill-employer matching (New Straits Times, 2022). Organizations participating in these schemes benefit from increased workplace diversity, innovation, enhanced problem-solving capabilities, and improved employee retention (New Straits Times, 2024). However, administrative complexities, detailed application procedures, unclear eligibility conditions, and extensive paperwork continue to discourage organizational participation (Holt et al., 2024). These barriers underscore the critical need for streamlined administrative processes and enhanced organizational capacity-building to maximize government initiatives effectiveness.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Sample and data collection

While the 238 companies may not precisely match Sekaran and Bougie's (2016) recommendation for a population of 600, it aligns with Roscoe's (1975) guideline of 30-500 samples for most research. Inclusion criteria included registered businesses in trade, manufacturing, services, or hospitality sectors within Klang Valley, with minimum 2 years' operation and decision-makers knowledgeable about disability employment. Exclusion criteria included organizations with fewer than 5 employees, respondents without hiring authority, disability-focused non-profits, and incomplete questionnaires (>20% missing data). The questionnaire's content validity was established through expert review by 3 academics specializing in disability employment, while face validity was assessed via pilot testing with 30 respondents. Internal consistency reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.758 to 0.898, exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.6 (Mat Daud et al., 2018). The questionnaire use a 5-point Likert Scale and respondents from business owners, HR professionals, managers, and supervisors from public, private, and cooperative sectors.

3.2 Development of the conceptual framework on the assessing employer preparedness in hiring PwCD

A summary of the list of items under each research objective in the questionnaire is listed below:

Table 1. Summary of list of items for research objective 1

RO 1	Questions
Employer Readiness in Hiring PwCD	1. Our organization is well-prepared to hire PWCD employees. 2. We have the necessary infrastructure to support PWCD employees. 3. Our HR team is trained in inclusive hiring practices for PwCD 4. We have clear protocols for addressing PWCD employee's needs. 5. Our workplace environment is suitable for PWCD employees.

Table 2. Summary of list of items for research objective 2

RO 2	Questions
Willingness to Implement Inclusive Hiring Practices and Workplace Accommodations	1. Our organization has established clear policies and procedures for hiring persons with cognitive disabilities (PWCD). 2. We actively provide workplace accommodations (e.g., flexible schedules, modified workstations) for PwCD. 3. Our recruitment process is designed to be accessible for candidates with cognitive disabilities. 4. We have allocated sufficient budget for workplace modifications to accommodate PwCD. 5. Our organization provides disability awareness training to all employees. 6. We have implemented mentoring programs to support PwCD in the workplace. 7. Our performance evaluation systems are adapted to fairly assess PwCD employees. 8. We regularly review and update our accommodation policies based on employee feedback 9. Our organization has dedicated staff trained in supporting PWCD employees 10. We actively seek input from disability advocacy groups to improve our inclusive practices.

Table 3. Summary of list of items for research objective 3

RO 3	Questions
Employer Perceptions, Attitudes, and Concerns	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> PwCD employees can be as productive as other employees when properly supported. Hiring PwCD enhances workplace diversity and innovation. The cost of accommodating PWCD is a significant concern for our organization. We are confident in managing workplace interactions between PwCD and other employees. Our customers respond positively to PwCD employees in customer-facing roles. We believe PwCD can handle complex job responsibilities with appropriate support. Legal compliance requirements for hiring PwCD are overly burdensome. PwCD employees demonstrate strong loyalty and commitment to their work. We are concerned about potential communication challenges with PwCD employees. The presence of PwCD positively impacts our organizational culture.

Table 4. Summary of list of items for research objective 4

RO 4	Questions
Employers' Awareness and Utilization of Government Support Programs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> We are familiar with government incentives for hiring PwCD. Our organization actively utilizes available tax benefits for employing PwCD. We regularly participate in government-sponsored training programs for PwCD employment. We are aware of the OKU Talent Enhancement Program (OTEP). Our HR team stays updated on policy changes regarding PwCD employment. We effectively utilize job matching services for PwCD recruitment. We understand the process for accessing workplace modification grants. Our organization networks with other employers who hire PwCD. We maintain regular communication with disability support agencies. We are knowledgeable about available resources for PWCD workplace integration

The authors conducted a pilot study of the questionnaires, and the survey form contains 35 questions.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the demographic profile of the employers

No.	Profile	Frequency	Percentage
1. Organization type	Cooperative society	38	16
	Private - Business Enterprise	81	34
	Private – companies	50	21
	Public company listed or non-listed	69	29
	Retail & wholesale	28	11.7
2. Industry	Manufacturing	90	37.8
	Services (kindergarten, parking attendance, laundry, security guard, etc.)	79	33.2
	Restaurant & Hotel	41	17.2
	Less than 50	75	31.5
	50-200	92	38.7
3. Number of employees	201-500	51	21.4
	More than 500	20	8.4
	None	53	22.3
	1-5	78	32.8
	6-10	6-10	30.3
4. Current number of PwCD as employees of the organization	More than 10	35	14.7
	HR Manager	65	27.3
	Department Manager	118	49.6
	Senior Executive	55	23.1
	None	68	28.6
5. Position of respondent	Customer Service	25	10.5
	Chef or Assistance	48	20.2
	Factory Worker	31	13
	Supervisor	31	13
	Cleaner	35	14.7
6. Position offer for PwCD employee			

4.2 Test of normality

The study uses the normality test to examine the shape of the distribution and the suitability of the interval scale. The skewness and kurtosis values can help determine whether a distribution is standard, falling within the range of -2 and +2. Table 5 indicates that the kurtosis and skewness values for all variables are between ± 0 and ± 1 . The conclusion is that the shape of the distribution is standard.

Table 6. Test of normality analysis

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis	Decision
Employers' Readiness in Hiring Persons with cognitive disabilities (PWCD)	-1.072	-0.509	Normal
Willingness to implement inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations	-1.071	-0.530	Normal
Perceptions, attitudes, and concerns	-1.179	-0.241	Normal
Awareness and utilization of government support	-1.072	-0.546	Normal

4.3 Mean analysis

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for the employer readiness level in hiring PwCD. The results indicate that the current level of employer readiness achieved a mean score of 3.7336 ($SD = 1.19413$) on a five-point Likert scale. According to the interpretation guidelines by Frost (2017), this mean value falls within the range of 3.51 – 5.00, which is classified as a high level of readiness. The findings suggest that employers demonstrate a relatively strong readiness to hire PwCD, indicating positive attitudes and preparedness toward inclusive employment practices. The standard deviation of 1.19413 reveals moderate variability in responses among participants, suggesting that while the overall readiness level is high, there exists some diversity in employer perspectives regarding their preparedness to hire individuals with cognitive disabilities.

Table 7. Mean Analysis on the employer readiness level (RO1)

Variable	The current level of employer readiness
Mean	3.7336
Standard Deviation	1.19413

4.4 Regression analysis

The multiple regression analysis reveals that both independent variables significantly predict employer readiness to hire PwCD. "Willingness to implement inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations" (RO2) demonstrates the strongest predictive power with a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.345$ ($p < 0.001$), while "Employer perceptions, attitudes and concerns" (RO3) shows a moderate but significant contribution with $\beta = 0.233$ ($p < 0.001$). The model exhibits exceptionally high explanatory power, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.989, indicating that these two predictors can explain 98.9% of the variance in employer readiness. The ANOVA results confirm the model's overall statistical significance ($F = 6958.075$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating a robust model fit.

However, the results reveal a serious multicollinearity problem that undermines the reliability of these findings. The tolerance value of 0.025 (well below the acceptable threshold of 0.10) and the variance inflation factor (VIF) of 39.705 (far exceeding the acceptable limit of 10.0) indicate severe overlap between the independent variables. This multicollinearity suggests that the two predictors are measuring essentially the same construct rather than distinct factors.

Table 8. Summary regression analysis for RO2 and RO3

Variables	Beta	Significant
Willingness to implement inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations (RO2)	0.345	0.000
Employer Perceptions, attitudes, and concerns	0.233	0.000

4.5 Correlation analysis

The Pearson correlation analysis reveals a powerful positive relationship between employers' awareness and utilization of government support programs and their readiness to hire persons with cognitive disabilities (PwCD) ($r = 0.991$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 238$). This correlation coefficient of 0.991 indicates that approximately 98.2% of the variance in employer readiness can be associated with their level of awareness and utilization of government support initiatives. The correlation strength can be classified as extremely high according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, where correlations above 0.70 are considered significant effects. The statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) confirms that this relationship is improbable to have occurred by chance, providing strong evidence for a meaningful association between these variables.

Table 9. Summary correlation between employers' awareness and utilization of government support programs (RO4) with employer readiness level

Variable	The current level of employer readiness
Employers' awareness and utilization of government support programs and policies	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N
	0.991** 0.000 238

5.0 Discussion

The research findings for the first research objective (RO1) regarding employer readiness level indicated a mean score of 3.7336, which is considered high according to established interpretation guidelines. This high level of employer readiness provides an encouraging

foundation for promoting inclusive hiring practices, suggesting that employers possess the necessary willingness and preparation to accommodate PWD in their organizations. However, the moderate standard deviation of 1.19413 indicates considerable variability in responses, suggesting that targeted interventions may still be needed to address varying levels of readiness across different employers or organizational contexts. Employers may not only be cognizant of the significance of diversity but also have the necessary infrastructure and policies in place, or at least be considering implementing enabling systems. This demonstrates a growing willingness to make workplaces more inclusive and accessible to everyone, including PwCD. These findings align with Omar et al. (2021), whose study of 136 Malaysian employers revealed that organizations with open and supportive internal cultures show higher readiness indicators.

Regarding the second research objective (RO2), findings indicated that employers demonstrate openness to adopting inclusive hiring practices and making workplace adjustments to hire PwCD, supporting previous studies by Kaye et al. (2011). However, the VIF value of 39.705, which significantly exceeds the acceptable threshold of 10, indicates severe multicollinearity with overlapping factors that cannot be adequately separated through statistical analysis. This necessitates variable screening or alternative analytical techniques to address this methodological concern. While this variable appears to be a significant predictor of employer readiness ($\beta = 0.345$, $p < 0.001$), the severe multicollinearity makes it difficult to determine individual contributions accurately. The exceptionally high R^2 value of 0.989, while statistically impressive, may be artificially inflated due to this multicollinearity issue. These findings suggest that the research model requires refinement to address the conceptual overlap between independent variables, possibly through factor analysis or reconceptualization of constructs to ensure they represent distinct dimensions of employer behavior toward PwCD employment.

Regarding the third research objective (RO3), findings demonstrate that as employers develop more positive perceptions and attitudes while expressing fewer concerns, their readiness to hire PwCD increases correspondingly ($\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that employer readiness to hire PwCD rises in parallel with the development of more favorable attitudes and perceptions, as well as decreased concerns. This relationship supports Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that attitude is a primary factor in predicting behavioral intention across different cultural contexts. Enhanced employment rates for PwCD will likely correlate positively with improved employer attitudes and their sustainable, inclusive participation in the labor market. However, similar to RO2, this variable also suffers from severe multicollinearity issues that compromise the accuracy of individual contribution assessments, underscoring the need for model refinement.

Regarding the fourth research objective (RO4), findings reveal a robust positive correlation ($r = 0.991$, $p < 0.001$) between employer awareness and utilization of government support programs and their readiness to hire PwCD. This suggests that employers who are more knowledgeable about and actively engage with government support programs demonstrate substantially higher readiness levels for hiring PwCD. This finding highlights the potential of these programs to significantly enhance employer confidence and increase their willingness to implement inclusive hiring practices. The success of MYFutureJobs in placing over 3,600 people with disabilities into employment between 2020 and 2022 exemplifies how targeted awareness and engagement efforts can facilitate more inclusive hiring practices (Social Security Organization Malaysia, 2023).

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reveals high employer readiness (mean = 3.73) for hiring PwCD in the Klang Valley, with strong correlations between inclusive practices, positive attitudes, and awareness of government support. The findings demonstrate that employers' willingness to implement accommodations and favorable perceptions significantly predict hiring readiness, while awareness of government programs strongly correlates with employer preparedness.

Limitations: Several methodological concerns limit the study's interpretability. Severe multicollinearity issues (VIF = 39.705) between independent variables compromise the accuracy of individual predictor contributions and may indicate construct overlap requiring model refinement. The exceptionally high correlation coefficient ($r = 0.991$) for government support awareness suggests potential measurement validity concerns. Additionally, the study did not explore why 68 employers (28.6%) employ no PwCD, potentially missing critical barriers. Social desirability bias may have influenced responses, thereby limiting the authenticity of the data.

Recommendations: Future research should employ factor analysis to address construct distinctiveness and utilize mixed-methods approaches, including follow-up interviews, to identify specific hiring barriers. Organizations should implement regular inclusivity training, adapt recruitment practices through applicant tracking systems, and establish partnerships with government agencies and NGOs for tailored support programs. Policymakers should streamline administrative processes and enhance program promotion to maximize participation in disability employment initiatives while addressing the methodological challenges identified for more robust future investigations.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This paper is especially targeted to policymakers, organizations, and advocacy groups as they provide a basis for them to create effective support policies, rewards, and training for both PwCD and employers.

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