

# Challenges in Integrating Visually Impaired Persons into Employment in Malaysia: An Exploratory Analysis

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**Abstract:** *Malaysia has performed dismally in the 1% job placement quota policy for persons with disabilities (PWDs). As visually impaired persons (VIPs) show a higher degree of unemployment than other disability types, this study investigates how to integrate VIPs into the Malaysian labour market. In-depth personal interviews were conducted among VIPs in Klang Valley. The research sample consists of VIPs aged between 25 years to 50 years with tertiary education. Six VIPs were employed (four in the public sector, two in the private sector) and two were unemployed. The qualitative data obtained was analysed using thematic analysis. While employers are reluctant to hire VIPs considering the costs in the form of facility provision and lost productivity, they need to value the strengths VIPs possess. This requires raising employers' awareness regarding the value of VIPs to their organisations. The main challenges VIPs face include access to information and infrastructure. Access to information can be improved through assistive technology to perform tasks efficiently. Adopting inclusive recruitment and hiring practices, raising awareness and educating employers on the importance of inclusivity in the organisation and implementing accessibility standards can better integrate VIPs into the labour market.*

**Keywords:** Visually impaired persons, Discrimination, Unemployment, Assistive technology, Malaysia

**JEL Classification:** J60, J71, J81

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## 1. Introduction

There are approximately 674,548 persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Malaysia from a total population of about 32.7 million (as of 2022), with the physical disability category being the highest (36.3%) followed by learning disability (35.1%), visually impaired (8.8%) and mental disability (8.2%) (DOSM, 2023). These figures are based on the total number of PWDs registered with Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (JKM) and given a PWD registration card. According to the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, PWDs include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society. Currently, JKM lists disabilities into seven categories: hearing impairment, visual impairment or blindness, speaking disability, physical disability, learning disability, mental disorder and multiple disabilities. PWDs, like other citizens, have the right to a quality life, earn a living, pursue education and contribute to nation-building. They are also entitled to have equal rights to enter the labour market without any discrimination and have access to all facilities, including job opportunities.

In 2008, the Malaysian government decided that the civil service must allocate 1% of jobs to PWDs, amounting to approximately 14,000 government sector jobs opportunities (Disability:IN, 2023). After five years, however, the 1% quota has not been met, with the country's performance being rather dismal. In the public sector, only 581 PWDs have been employed since 2008 (Disability:IN, 2023). The main perception is that PWDs would affect the productivity of an organisation. Such myths can result in losses to the country. The failure to integrate PWDs into the Malaysian workforce is estimated to result in losses between USD1.68 and USD2.38 million to the GDP (Disability:IN, 2023), dispelling the myth that the disabled are less productive.

Even if the 1% public sector job quota policy is implemented, there exist substantial barriers to employment which hinder the labour market participation of PWDs. Barriers may emerge in three forms: self-encountered barriers, organisational barriers and situational barriers. Self-encountered barriers comprise PWDs' own disabilities and a lack of education and training (BLS, 2020) leading to inadequate skills, an inability to overcome technological barriers, and a lack of logistical and mental preparedness.

Organisational barriers may involve company policies and hiring practices that do not favour PWDs. This may take the form of discrimination, negative attitudes from employers, and a lack of social support from the government (Morwane et al., 2021). Situational barriers may include built environment inequality (Hwang, 2022), unfair treatment, and a lower level of support from supervisors and coworkers (Qiu et al., 2023) due to negative perception that PWDs reduce productivity.

Visually impaired persons (VIP) face even greater challenges to enter the workforce upon completing tertiary education. The greatest challenge they face is obtaining the trust and confidence of employers that they are just as capable as other employees. These dynamics are explained by the social model of disability based on three main principles (Hosking, 2008): that disability is social construct and not the consequence of impairment; the interrelationship between impairment, how individuals respond to impairment and the social environment; and the social disadvantages disabled people experience are due to the failure of physical, institutional and attitudinal environment to meet the needs of those considered ‘abnormal’.

In this study, the challenges encountered by VIPs in pre-employment and employment in the public and private sectors are analysed. We also investigate challenges encountered by unemployed VIPs as they engage in the job search process. Through this investigation, solutions and strategies to effectively integrate VIPs into the Malaysian labour market are suggested. This will help ensure that their employability increases, and more importantly, eradicate poverty among PWDs and reduce their dependency on others.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Perception of employers towards PWDs**

The unemployment rate among PWDs is significantly higher in Malaysia (Lee et al., 2011; Ang, 2017) and globally (Olsen et al., 2022; Morwane et al., 2021) when compared to the general population. Some employers have negative perceptions of PWDs, believing that they are less productive (Nagtegaal et al., 2023; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2007), less reliable, and more costly to employ. These negative perceptions lead to discrimination (Narayanan, 2018), making it difficult for them to find and maintain

employment. A growing body of literature suggests otherwise. Studies have shown that PWDs are just as productive, reliable and trustworthy as non-disabled workers (ILO, 2016). Some studies show that PWDs can even be more productive and dedicated (Pulrang, 2019) than non-disabled workers due to higher levels of motivation (Aichner, 2021). Despite all this evidence, negative perceptions towards PWDs persist, which can be a barrier to employment (Zamalia & Rosli, 2009; Gasper et al., 2020). Employers' negative perceptions towards PWDs are due to lack of awareness (Kaye et al., 2011) about their actual ability and the fear of the unknown. This leads to stereotyping and eventually discrimination (ILO, 2012), which limits employment opportunities. These negative perceptions need to be addressed so as to create a more inclusive labour market.

According to Yusof et al., (2015), employers that hire youth workers with disabilities in Malaysia identified certain strengths, such as them being hardworking, responsible, compliant, honest, and sociable. Hennigusnia (2017) finds the same in Indonesia but adds that workers with disabilities also have low self-confidence, high sensitivity, and are easily influenced by negative elements. Tiun et al., (2011) highlight that in the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia, most employers favour employing PWDs. However, few of these employers have enabling policies or mechanism to handle PWD issues or an accessible built environment. Several concerns raised by the authors include PWDs' ability to comprehend and follow orders, and the costs involved to employ and train them. The cost factor involved may also include increased health insurance or worker's compensation premiums (Kaye et al., 2011; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2007).

Different kind of disabilities have different limitations and capabilities, and the perception of employers towards PWDs may differ depending on disability. Boman et al., (2015) show that the highest probability of employment is among respondents with hearing disabilities, while those with psychological disabilities are least likely to be employed. The hearing impaired are more easily employed compared to VIPs (Crudden et al., 1998). This indicates that severity of the disability may determine the chances of securing employment. La Grow and Daye (2005) identify five main categories of barriers to employment among VIPs. These are factors arising from the vision impairment itself, access to jobs and environments, discrimination from employers or co-workers, personal characteristics, as well as ignorance on the part of employers as to the potential capabilities of

blind and/or vision-impaired workers. Wolffe and Candela (2002) also point out that employers are also concerned about the perceived expenses that are associated with workplace accommodations, delays that VIPs workers may experience in reaching full productivity, and potential difficulties in terminating subpar disabled workers.

## ***2.2 Obstacles and challenges faced by PWDs in the labour market***

Despite the progress made in recent years, PWDs continue to face significant obstacles. Moore and Wolffe (1997) identify several reasons that explain the underrepresentation of VIPs in the labour force, including the negative attitudes of employers toward VIPs; lack of employment and employment-related skills; lack of motivation for employment; government-generated work disincentives, such as entitlement programs that provide welfare or disability benefits; lack of housing and family support; lack of transportation; and lack of access to information. These obstacles and challenges appear at three stages: the human capital investment stage, pre-employment stage and employment stage.

In the first stage (human capital investment), the lack of access to education and training is one of the main challenges faced by PWDs, including by VIPs in Malaysia (Amin et al., 2021). Lamichhane (2013) also points out that participants in Nepal with hearing impairment were found to be more vulnerable to barriers to education, and they had fewer years of schooling than their counterparts with visual and physical impairments. In the second stage (pre-employment), challenges encountered include access to information on employment opportunities and communicating with others (Donaldson, 2017), employer bias or discrimination during interviews (Bonaccio et al., 2019; Dammeyer & Chapman, 2018); discrimination during the hiring process (Vedeler, 2023), and familiarising with their surroundings. In the third stage (employment), PWDs face challenges such as familiarity with new surroundings, physical barriers like disabled-unfriendly workplaces and difficulties commuting to the workplace (Crudden et al., 1998; Moore & Wolffe, 1997), use of assistive technology (Crudden et al., 2005), workplace discrimination (Jones et al., 2008), unfriendly co-workers (Santilli, 2023), and the negative perceptions of employers and colleagues (Crudden et al., 1998; Moore & Wolffe, 1997).

According to Narayanan (2018), disabled people are still being

discriminated against in the workplace in various forms. Inaccessible physical environments, lack of relevant assistive technology, and negative attitudes towards disability are the challenges they face. Similarly, Manaf et al. (2019) indicate that among the crucial issues affecting the employability of PWDs are the negative perceptions of employers and peers, accessibility, lack of training, lack of family support and personal attributes. With regards to the labour market participation of VIPs, Salminen and Karhula (2014) find that young VIPs face challenges regarding mobility, domestic life, interpersonal interaction and relationships, major life areas, and leisure activities.

Even though assistive technologies are very important in the workplace, better integration of PWDs and their connectedness to the use of and access to specialised devices is needed. Nierling et al., (2018) state that in the case of visual impairment, access to IT applications is crucial; in the case of hearing impairment, web-based sign language interpretation is a vital support tool; and for autism spectrum disorders (ASD), augmented reality applications are needed to train for real-life situations in the workplace.

Raja (2016) points out that digital technologies have the power to break traditional barriers to communication, interaction, and access to information for PWDs and accelerate employment opportunities. However, many of the managers surveyed by Nasir et al., (2019) are not aware of assistive devices and software, related laws, return-to-work programmes and incentives provided by the government to VIPs. While the benefits of digital technologies for PWDs are unquestionable, those in low- and middle-income countries face significant challenges to acquire assistive devices due to the cost and availability of standalone specialised equipment (WHO & World Bank, 2011).

### ***2.3 Strategies to integrate disabled people into the Malaysian labour market***

Barriers such as individual abilities, employer and social attitude, and the availability of support services affect the employment of disabled people. Despite such barriers, the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2016) recognises that PWDs can have positive impact on a company's bottom line, because they make good, dependable employees, who have often been found to perform on par with non-disabled coworkers, represent an untapped source of employees who have many skills and traits employers desire, have comparable or better safety records, have better retention rates reducing costs

related to recruitment and retraining of replacements, and have comparable to better attendance records compared to their non-disabled peers.

Yusof et al., (2015) assert that employers should be educated about the capabilities and competencies of disabled youth workers, as well as their benefits, such as their ability to contribute to productivity and national development through tax payments. Kaye et al., (2011) also recommend that the government should provide incentives to employers who hire youth workers with disabilities through tax breaks or subsidies for accommodation.

Narayanan (2018) suggests several potential solutions to improve the situation of disabled workers in Malaysia. These include establishing internal policies such as prioritising hiring PWDs in line with government policy, appointing a diversity specialist who deals with disability issues to avoid mishandling by other non-experienced staff, establish a written company policy or guidelines of non-discrimination which includes disability, and providing training to organisations intending to hire PWDs. Additionally, the government can play a role in supporting disabled workers by providing financial incentives for employers who hire them (Kaye et al., 2011; Yusof et al., 2015) and implement policies that promote equal opportunities in the workplace through inclusive workplaces (UNDP, 2022). Countries with more success in disability-inclusive employment have also combined quota systems with employment support services to address some of the difficulties faced by the private sector in employing PWDs (UNDP, 2022). The present study as such focuses on integrating VIPs into the labour market, as they remain among the most vulnerable groups, compared to other PWDs, such as the physically disabled and the hearing impaired.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1 Respondent selection and questionnaire design**

The present research is a qualitative inquiry. The research sample consists of VIPs aged 25 to 50 years old with tertiary education. The respondents are classified into three groups. Group 1 comprises four VIPs employed in public sector (respondents A, B, C, D); group 2 consists of two VIPs employed in the private sector (respondents E, F) and group 3, two unemployed VIPs (respondents I, J). A total of two women and six men were interviewed. Table 1 details the respondents' demographic profile.

**Table 1:** Respondents' Demographic Profile

Respondent	Age	Gender	Highest educational attainment	Sector	Occupation
<b>Group 1: Visually impaired employees</b>					
A	34	Male	Master's	Public	Administrative officer
B	38	Female	Bachelor's	Public	Social development officer
C	34	Male	Bachelor's	Public	Administrative officer
D	45	Male	Master's	Public	Psychology officer
<b>Group 2: Visually impaired employees</b>					
E	28	Male	Bachelor's	Private	Section manager
F	33	Female	Bachelor's	Private	Teacher
<b>Group 3: Unemployed visually impaired respondents</b>					
I	38	Male	Doctorate	–	–
J	33	Male	Bachelor's	–	–

Questions pertaining to integrating disabled people into the Malaysian labour market via semi-structured interviews were administered. These include issues VIPs face during the pre-employment and employment stages, perceptions of and treatment received from employers and colleagues, and the strategies to integrate them into the Malaysian labour market. Impromptu questions were asked when necessary to probe further. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for data processing.

### 3.2 *Data analysis*

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six steps in conducting thematic analysis: familiarising oneself with the data, generation of initial codes, searching themes, reviewing themes, defining themes defining, and integrating these themes into a coherent and meaningful narrative to represent the data. For the present study, the thematic analysis was done manually, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest. The themes were extracted based on the frequency of occurrence in the transcripts given by interviewees. The themes are searched based on the narratives available in the account of data sets, which involves careful reading and rereading of the transcribed data through the identification of themes (King, 2004; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Some of the advantages of thematic analysis include flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and allowing examination of various perspectives of different

research participants, by highlighting similarities and differences, as well as generating unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Challenges encountered and solutions - public sector

Visually impaired jobseekers prefer public sector employment as it is perceived to be more secure and permanent than the private sector. For the public sector, the jobseekers register themselves on an online platform known as the Public Service Commission (SPA) under the Public Service Department (JPA). Based on the data obtained through in-depth personal interviews with four visually impaired respondents, the challenges were commonly faced by VIPs in two stages—pre-employment (job search, application and interview) and employment—were explored.

#### 4.1.1 Pre-employment stage

For public sector employment, VIPs must go through several stages of assessments and interview sessions before being shortlisted by SPA. VIPs encountered several challenges during this stage. According to Respondent A:

*Firstly, I faced difficulties to access certain job portals or websites, since they are incompatible with the screen reader software I am using. Secondly, some of the job advertisements are on printed paper, posters or signboards that cannot be accessed easily by VIPs. Besides that, I discovered that there was lack of awareness amongst interviewers on the capability of VIPs.*

To overcome such challenges, Respondent A proposes that visually impaired jobseekers prepare themselves mentally and emotionally, as most private sector employers are profit-driven and expect their employees to be very productive.

Meanwhile, Respondent B encountered several challenges as a visually impaired jobseeker. According to her:

*Firstly, when I was applying for jobs manually by sending letter or forms along with my resumé, I often did not receive any response or feedback from the employers who interviewed me, even though I waited for quite some time. Secondly, when I was called for an interview, I often encountered negative perception from the interviewers. Thirdly, when it comes to deciding whether to hire VIPs, there was no answer given and, in the end, we are not hired.*

Respondent B also stresses that she would inform the employers about her needs and demonstrate her ability to do certain tasks with the help of screen reader software. To overcome those challenges, she suggests the following:

*Firstly, we must be prepared physically and mentally. Most employers are not ready or confident to employ VIPs, due to lack of understanding or awareness. Secondly, as jobseekers or VIPs, we must think positively whenever we face pressure and challenges. Then, we must not be too choosy of jobs we want to take. Lastly, we must be able to convince the employers that we are as capable as the non-disabled ones.*

Respondent C, who works in a government agency, also encountered several challenges at the pre-employment stage. These challenges were related to mobility and accommodation, especially when the interviews were held in unfamiliar places.

*I was also rejected during phone interviews as the organisation only employs certain category of disabled persons and not blind persons.*

Respondent C also laments that he was rejected despite explaining his ability to perform given tasks with assistive technology.

*I was not given even an opportunity to demonstrate my capabilities in doing certain tasks, especially the tasks related to computer operations through the skills I learned.*

He says this situation is unfair to all jobseekers who face similar disability as his. According to him:

*The employers should give me a chance to prove my capabilities, at least by offering a short period of trial.*

To overcome those challenges, Respondent C says that he limits his prospects to companies that are more accessible via public transport and closer to his place of residence. He added that he filtered openings and only applied for positions he thought may be suitable. Respondent C also attempts to explain his condition and prepare himself to answer doubts from the interviewer by focusing on how he could perform tasks. In dealing with obstacles and challenges pertaining to job searches, applications and job interviews, Respondent C says:

*Firstly, we have to widen our job search through online and offline platforms. Some companies advertise on newspapers and accept applications manually. If possible, apply for positions that are suitable to one's qualification, or what one can do. It is fine to start with a job not requiring a degree qualification although you are a university graduate.*

Respondent D, who is employed as an administrative officer, encountered several challenges at the pre-employment stage. One was the negative perception of employers toward VIPs.

*Some of the employers often doubt the capability of blind people like whether they are able contribute to the organisation.*

Respondent D considers that to be normal, adding that it is difficult to expect employers to think positively toward VIPs. He further added that as optimistic VIPs, they must prove to employers their ability to work like their non-disabled colleagues. Another large challenge encountered by Respondent D was infrastructural barriers, in terms of accessibility of the workplace. Nevertheless, despite such challenges, he believes that VIPs must remain positive and optimistic.

*For me, I overcame it by having positive thinking, patience and develop my communication skills. Besides that, I also did personal grooming and polished my skills. Sometimes the obstacles can*

*be our own negative thoughts. For instance, we often create the mindset that most employers have negative perception towards VIPs, but it may not be true.*

Several challenges were raised by the VIPs interviewed. The main challenges are access to information or infrastructure (Respondents A and D). The second challenge emerged is negative perception of employers (Respondents B and D). Other challenges raised include lack of awareness (Respondent A), non-response (Respondent B) and rejection, and mobility (Respondent C). Raising awareness seems crucial as employers need to be equipped with knowledge about disability and the needs of VIPs, so that in the future employers can better understand their conditions and challenges. Employers also look for jobseekers with communication skills (Monogaran & Subramaniam, 2023). As such, developing this skill is essential as pointed out by Respondent D.

#### *4.1.2 Employment stage*

VIPs also encountered challenges at the employment stage. Normally, at this stage, they have to go through the process of onboarding, or adjusting and adapting themselves to the working environment and job scope. In-depth personal interviews with Respondents A, B, C and D reveal that there are several challenges they encounter at the employment stage. According to Respondent A:

*I sometimes face difficulties or challenges when travelling to and from home to the workplace. At the beginning, I had difficulty adapting with the outside environment while travelling to and from the workplace. Since I am a fully blind person, I have to mobilise myself with the help of a white cane, which is used to navigate the surrounding environment.*

To overcome the obstacles and challenges encountered by VIPs, Respondent A suggests the following:

*Firstly, all the jobseekers or employees with disabilities, especially VIPs, must always prepare themselves physically and mentally, in*

*case if they face challenges in their workplace and working life. They must be able to do any tasks given by their employer and should not give up easily.*

Respondent B was also met with some challenges at the employment stage. One of these is the lack of confidence amongst her superiors on her capabilities. She sometimes moved from one department to another, as her superiors thought that she was not capable of doing certain tasks. This discouraged her and made her want to resign from her job. In dealing with challenges faced by VIPs at the employment stage, Respondent B suggests the following:

*Firstly, they must be strong mentally and emotionally. They must constantly cultivate noble qualities, such as, patience, perseverance, self-control and positive thinking. Without those qualities, one might fall into despair or perhaps in worst situation decide to quit their job.*

Besides that, Respondent B also advised VIPs who face challenges to not give up easily and always be keen to learn new things. If given the chance to enhance skills and abilities by attending courses, she suggested that VIPs should not hesitate. Finally, if VIPs are given any tasks, she advises them to perform it to the best of their ability and seek guidance from their superiors or colleagues when they are unsure.

Respondent C also encountered certain challenges at the employment stage. According to him:

*As most of the public sector is still dealing with pen and paper, it is inconvenient having to deal with letters and written notes. Fortunately, some of my colleagues which I seek help from are quite understanding.*

To overcome this challenge, Respondent C offers several suggestions.

*Firstly, it is advisable to ask for help whenever needed, for example, asking someone to snap a photo of a letter and email the soft copy so that it can be read with assistive devices. Secondly, it is good to*

*let one's immediate superior know things you cannot do. However, just be reasonable and not to put it in such a way that we can do very little things that has no impact to the organisation, because it may give bad impression as the employer may think that the organisation can still function without hiring VIPs.*

Respondent D also faced various challenges in his job. Occasionally he had to go to certain places far away from his workplace. He was sometimes given the task to deal with other agencies or ministries or go to different states and countries like Japan for job purposes. Since he is a person with visual impairment under the B1 (totally blind) category, it was quite challenging for him to travel alone. He still must perform all tasks assigned and thankful that he has managed to do so successfully. In response to such challenges, he proffers a few recommendations to disabled jobseekers or VIPs.

*Firstly, to overcome the challenge of going far for job purposes, they must be able to do so even though they have certain limitations like blindness. Secondly, they must act proactively. They should inform their bosses or colleagues if they need certain assistance or assistive tools in order to ease their job.*

In summary, some of the challenges raised during the employment stage include mobility problems (Respondents A and D), accessibility to information (Respondent C), difficulty to adapt (Respondent A) and lack of confidence (Respondent B).

#### **4.2 Challenges encountered and solutions: Private sector**

While public sector employment is preferred, some of the VIPs found opportunities in the private sector. There are many job application platforms such as Jobstreet, MyFutureJobs and Indeed offering permanent, part-time and freelance jobs accessible to VIPs. Employment opportunities provided by the private sector also enable them to enhance their economic status leading to better social status and self-esteem.

#### 4.2.1 Pre-employment stage

VIPs employed in the private sector face challenges like their counterparts in public sector. Suitable job opportunities provided by private sector, unfortunately, are limited. This is mainly due to their sensory disability and lack of confidence and awareness about their capabilities in doing certain tasks without assistive technology. Two respondents employed in the private sector explained the challenges faced at pre-employment stage. According to Respondent E:

*I had difficulty finding a suitable job. I noticed that suitable jobs for the blind are very limited. At that time, I often felt afraid that the jobs which I applied may not be suitable and I only looked for companies that had blind employees or employed blind people before.*

Respondent E added that even though he submitted many job applications, none of the employers gave a positive response. He also noted that he wanted to look for jobs that were not synonymous with VIPs, like working in customer service and call centres. In order to deal with these challenges, Respondent E advised the following:

*Do not be too conservative and selective when comes to searching and applying for jobs. Besides that, do not be passive. Instead, be courageous and always be prepared to face obstacles or challenges related to employment.*

Respondent F also faced several challenges when she was at the job search and application stage. One of the challenges she faced was the inaccessibility of certain job websites, noting that some of the website interfaces are not accessible because they are not VIP-friendly. Due to that, she says she faced difficulty applying jobs by herself. In one interview session, she said she was not well prepared and not able to answer the questions asked by the interviewers. She was rejected and she felt she failed to convince her interviewers of her capabilities.

To overcome the challenges Respondent F faced, she suggests that during a job hunt, one must search and think carefully before applying. She

admits that searching and applying for jobs is not easy for VIPs, noting that they are “victims of misconception and discrimination.” As for VIPs attending job interviews, she agrees that they have to be well-prepared and learn how to manage time well. She added that they must also prepare themselves by doing personal grooming, researching the organisation that has called them for an interview, and trying to figure out the potential questions the interviewers may ask. This is to ensure that they are able to convince the interviewers of their abilities.

During pre-employment, challenges encountered include limited jobs opportunities (Respondent E) and inaccessibility of certain websites (Respondent F). Visual impairment causes them not to be able to do many jobs done by non-disabled workers causing them to have limited job opportunities. However, technological advancement to a certain extent has minimised information inaccessibility.

#### 4.2.2 Employment stage

VIPs in the private sector also encountered challenges at the employment stage. At the initial stage, most employees, including those with visual impairment, are in the learning phase and have to adapt themselves to new working environment and job scopes. They have to acquire new knowledge and skills from their superiors and along the way, they may face job-related obstacles and challenges.

According to Respondent E, he was sometimes unsure how to carry out certain assigned tasks. He adds that this is normal for most VIPs at the initial stage of employment. To deal with that kind of challenge, he suggests the following:

*VIPs who are still at the initial stage of employment require the spirit of learning, patience and endurance, and continue to learn new things. They must always be humble and not hesitate to request for guidance from their superiors or seniors. By doing so, they will be able to improve themselves and be more useful and productive employees.*

Respondent F said that she had difficulty adapting to a new job scope as a telemarketer at the initial employment stage. She had to get used to the work

which required her to make several phone calls and managing the database with the assistance of screen reader software installed in her computer. She added that she also received rude clients when making phone calls. Initially, she found it quite challenging which caused her to feel frustrated and want to quit. As a category B1 person, it was challenging for her to move around and get use to the workplace. As she says:

*I received help from sighted person to assist me to move around the office and other essential places like washroom and cafeteria.*

To overcome those challenges, Respondent F says:

*One must always be strong and courageous and do not easily give into negative thoughts which emerges from challenging circumstances.*

Instead, she contends that one must remain calm and try to deal with all those obstacles or challenges with patience and endurance.

Some of the challenges that emerged include being unsure how tasks are done (Respondent E) and adaptation to the new job scope (Respondent F). Different job scopes can be challenging to VIPs, but assistance can be obtained from people in their surroundings. Usage of assistive technology enables them to perform their tasks efficiently compared to when they are dependent on braille machines.

#### **4.3 Challenges encountered by unemployed VIPs**

VIPs remain as the most marginalised group among PWDs. In-depth personal interviews with two currently unemployed VIPs reveal that there are several challenges they face during job search and application. According to Respondent I:

*One of the main challenges is not knowing how to find or search for jobs. However, to search for jobs, as a VIP nowadays, most of us are already IT literate. We can search and apply for jobs but the challenge is that how sure that we can get the job. Another challenge we face is how to remain in an organisation.*

Respondent I further added that:

*Employers in the private sector especially have no confidence in VIPs due to their lack of awareness of our capabilities even with the assistance of technology.*

He further contended that lack of skills especially in IT amongst VIPs can be a hindrance. He agrees that although quite a few VIPs are equipped with such knowledge and skills, there are some who are not quite talented or interested in acquiring such skills, especially those who are in the category of adult blind, or those who become blind in adulthood.

According to Respondent J:

*One of the major challenges I encountered when it comes to job search and application is not having the skill set required by employers.*

As a 30-year-old graduate, he says he no longer qualifies for graduate associate programmes, which is limited to people aged 28 and below. He further added that he prefers to widen his job experience and is planning to apply for internships.

Two main challenges encountered include how to search for jobs (Respondent I) and not having the required skills (Respondent J). Like non-disabled people, those who are visually impaired do face limitations such as age limit (Respondent J) to enter certain fields of employment. There is also a lack of awareness among employers (Respondent I) on the capabilities of VIPs.

## **5. Discussion**

VIPs must not expect the non-disabled, including employers, to understand them and their needs, as some are unfamiliar with VIPs. Instead, they must inform the potential employers about their needs and challenges. This enables employers to be equipped with such knowledge. Raising the awareness of the employers is essential (Kaye et al., 2011; Narayanan, 2018) in the public as well as private sectors.

The challenges faced by VIPs at the employment stage in public sector include mobility (Respondents A and D), lack of confidence (Respondent B) and accessibility of materials (Respondent C) and location. The solutions suggested include physical and mental preparation (Respondents A and B), inculcating positive life qualities (Respondents B and D) and lastly seeking help when needed (Respondent C). The problem of accessibility in terms of information (Moore & Wolffe, 1997) and mobility limited by physical barriers (Narayanan, 2018; Crudden et al., 1998; Moore & Wolffe, 1997) remain as one of the main challenges faced by VIPs. As such they require assistance from public while travelling (Salminen & Karhula, 2014) or colleagues while at workplace.

The challenges faced by VIPs at the employment stage in the private sector are like those in the public sector. These challenges are mainly related to mobility and accessibility. The solutions suggested include seeking guidance from superiors and asking for assistance from sighted colleagues. In addition, VIPs also need to build their confidence and endurance to weather the challenges at their workplaces. The role of technology through assistive tools remains significant (Nierling et al., 2018; Narayanan, 2018).

Unemployed VIPs also highlighted that awareness regarding their ability is relatively low among employers. Many employers also seem to be unaware of the role of assistive technologies, which can enhance the performance of VIPs at the workplace (see Nierling et al., 2018; Nasir et al., 2019). As such, creating and raising awareness among stakeholders is very important to ensure that visually impaired jobseekers can be easily integrated into the labour market.

The accessibility (information and location) limitations and lack of awareness highlighted in this study are in line with social model of disability, which asserts that disabled people experience social disadvantage due to failure of physical, institutional and attitudinal environment to meet their needs. As such, raising awareness of the potential employers in public and private sectors on the capabilities of PWDs, especially VIPs, will enable the realisation the targeted 1% employment of PWDs in Malaysia. The expectation is that if there any visually impaired job applicants in the future, employers are better able to understand and interact with their conditions and challenges.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has uncovered various challenges VIPs face in their employment journey. The main findings from this study can be summarised as follows. Firstly, at the pre-employment stage in public sector, the main challenges faced are access to information or infrastructure and negative perception of employers. Others include lack of awareness, non-response, rejection and mobility. Secondly, at the employment stage in the public sector, challenges raised include mobility issues, accessibility to information, difficulty adapting and a lack of confidence. Thirdly, at the pre-employment stage in the private sector, the challenges encountered include inaccessibility of certain websites and limited jobs opportunities. Fourthly, at the employment stage in the private sector, some of the challenges that emerged include being unsure how tasks are done and adaptation to new job scopes. Finally, three main challenges encountered by unemployed VIPs include how to search for jobs without ICT knowledge, not having the required skills, and lack of awareness among employers on the capabilities of VIPs.

For VIPs who are employed and unemployed, the main challenges are access to information and infrastructure. The former can be overcome using assistive technology, which enables VIPs to perform tasks efficiently compared to when they are dependent on braille machines. Access to infrastructure can be improved when more disabled-friendly facilities are provided. While employers may be reluctant to hire VIPs considering the costs that may emerge in form of facility provision and lost productivity, employers should value the strengths VIPs possess. More importantly, this requires raising awareness among employers about the needs of VIPs and their potential value to the organisations. The mindset of able-bodied people towards VIPs need to change. Policy implications proposed include adopting inclusive recruitment and hiring practices, raising awareness and educating employers on the importance of inclusivity in the organisation, as well as implementing accessibility standards.

### **Ethics Approval**

This study obtained ethics approval from the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) with the following reference number: UM.TNC2/UMREC\_1060

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