THE IMPACT OF HIRING INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY ON EMPLOYER: EXPERIENCE, PERCEPTION, MOTIVATION AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

Intellectual disability is a condition that impairs cognitive functioning, and it can deviate from typical characteristics. People with intellectual disabilities often face limited employment prospects because of unfavorable employer perceptions. This case study delves into the effects of employing an individual with intellectual disabilities on the employer. It focuses on their experiences, perceptions, motivations, and sense of social responsibility. The research methodology employed in the study encompassed interviews and observations, with a sample size of three participants. The findings demonstrate that five key themes influence the recruitment and retention of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the labor force: understanding intellectual disabilities, the recruitment process, current work arrangements, employment prospects, and compensation packages. This research study provides valuable insights for scholars to comprehend employers' perceptions and interactions with individuals with intellectual disabilities within the industrial sector. Additionally, it aids in identifying competitive human resources with intellectual disabilities that can effectively fulfill industry requirements in the coming years.

Keywords: Intellectual disability, employment, experience, perception, motivation, social responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Hiring individuals with disabilities can help address labor shortages caused by demographic changes. According to a study by Bonaccio et al. (2019), inclusive practices have been shown to increase profitability. A recent report by Disabled World for 2022 reveals that around 650 million people, or 10% of the world's population, have disabilities. This fact highlights the importance of recognizing the value and potential of this untapped talent pool and promoting inclusivity in the workplace. The Ministry of Education reported that in 2021, 30,368 students with intellectual disabilities, also known as learning disabilities, were enrolled in specialized educational programs to help them integrate into secondary school settings (Bahagian Pendidikan Khas, 2021). This group has a higher prevalence of learning difficulties than other special educational needs (SEN) groups.

Many people with disabilities face obstacles in finding and keeping employment. Despite anti-discrimination laws, Norwegian companies have not changed their recruitment procedures for individuals with disabilities, as found in a study by Kuznetsova and Yalcin (2017). According to Østerud (2023), those involved in hiring may not be familiar with disability discrimination laws. Unfortunately, employers often hold negative and stereotypical views about the job-related capabilities of people with disabilities, leading to high unemployment rates (Gold et al., 2012; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). Bonaccio et al. (2019) found that employer decisions about hiring individuals with disabilities are often based on unfounded concerns, which can occur at different stages of employment. Many

studies have identified barriers to employing people with disabilities, including a lack of awareness, a shortage of qualified candidates, recruitment and selection challenges, financial burdens, social integration difficulties, and safety concerns (Beatty et al., 2018; Bonaccio et al., 2019; Kaye et al., 2011; Vornholt et al., 2017).

The study conducted by Paušić et al. (2021) revealed that individuals with disabilities encounter substantial barriers to securing employment due to inadequate workplace accommodations and limited transportation alternatives. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of employers' viewpoints regarding the recruitment of individuals with disabilities, it is imperative to consider their direct experiences, apprehensions, and perceived limitations. The study by Nota et al. (2013) revealed that employers' positive attitudes toward recruiting individuals with disabilities are grounded in empirical evidence from their workplace experiences. According to a study conducted by Gilbride et al. (2003), employers with previous experience hiring individuals from marginalized populations are more inclined to display a positive attitude toward employment prospects for individuals with disabilities. Woodley and Metzger et al. (2012) conducted a study that revealed that employers who have personal connections, such as close friends or family members with disabilities, demonstrate a higher likelihood of hiring individuals with disabilities compared to those who lack such personal experiences. This underscores the significance of developing a greater understanding of this demographic to cultivate favorable perspectives toward individuals with disabilities.

The findings of 16 studies conducted across various countries indicate that implementing laws and regulations to foster inclusive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities poses a significant challenge for numerous nations. Despite implementing policies such as minimum quotas and incentives, empirical research consistently indicates that these measures have not yielded significant improvements in the employment rate for individuals with disabilities across developed and developing nations. This finding is substantiated by research conducted by Ababneh (2016), Huang (2014), Jetha et al. (2018), Aleksandrova and Nenakhova (2019), Caron (2020), and Suresh and Dyaram (2021). One potential approach is enhancing enforcement and monitoring initiatives to incentivize companies to proactively identify and rectify discriminatory practices. Implementing this measure would facilitate the establishment of a more methodical framework aimed at guaranteeing equitable opportunities for every individual. Individuals with intellectual disabilities frequently face challenges in pursuing employment, as employers tend to favor individuals with physical disabilities. One contributing factor to this phenomenon is a dearth of precise and reliable information about intellectual disabilities (Kocman et al., 2017). The progress in promoting diversity within the workforce has been relatively sluggish, particularly in recruiting individuals with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities. These individuals frequently encounter a more significant number of perceived obstacles and encounter disadvantages in the hiring process.

People with intellectual disabilities are a specific group among those with disabilities. They may face challenges that are not immediately obvious, such as difficulties with hearing or vision. According to Schalock et al. (2021), intellectual disability is characterized by unique limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, which include essential social and practical skills necessary for daily life. This definition is widely accepted within academic circles. Typically, this type of disability appears before age 22 and affects cognitive abilities like learning, reasoning, and problem-solving. Those with IQ scores between 70 and 75 have lower intellectual functioning compared to typical individual IQ. Although "disability" often carries negative connotations, people with intellectual disabilities can become self-sufficient by developing skills that promote independence. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct empirical research that explores the viewpoints of employers regarding individuals with intellectual disabilities. This initiative intends to promote the growth of inclusive employment opportunities for this group.

Employment for people with intellectual disability

Experiencing job insecurity, underemployment, or unemployment can harm a person's health and overall well-being. This is particularly true for individuals with disabilities, who often face unfavorable employment outcomes (Holm et al., 2022). Providing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is a fundamental component of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, as articulated in Goal 8 (United Nations, 2015). As mentioned earlier, the objectives pertain to

opportunities for sustainable employment as opposed to impermanent or uncertain positions. Despite the high aspirations, employment rates for people with disabilities remain below the desired level. The UN Global Accelerator has set a goal of providing job opportunities and social protection to 4 billion individuals by 2030. To achieve this, obtaining affordable funding to support these initiatives is crucial, which can have far-reaching positive effects. A progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals emphasizes the need for increased focus and proposes five steps to expedite implementation before the SDG Summit (Report of the Secretary-General (Special Edition), 2023).

The International Labour Organization (2019) noted that it is crucial to include people with disabilities in the workforce for moral and financial reasons. Integrating individuals with disabilities could increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of developing nations by up to 7%. This data highlights the importance of promoting competitive, integrated employment and improving support structures. Unfortunately, some employers overlook the significance of recruiting individuals with intellectual disabilities (Luecking, 2011) despite evidence showing that employment positively impacts their well-being, quality of life, and autonomy (Jahoda et al., 2007; Lysaght et al., 2012). Individuals with intellectual disabilities face significant difficulties securing employment, with estimates suggesting three to four times fewer opportunities.

Furthermore, they often have lower-quality employment prospects than individuals with other disabilities. Studies have examined various factors affecting employment outcomes, including political regulations, personal motivation, and self-esteem (Foley et al., 2012; Timmons et al., 2011). The aging phenomenon also presents additional challenges for older adults with intellectual disabilities pursuing employment (McDonald, 2019; Organization, 2015). The trend identified in a study by Siperstein et al. (2014) is likely to impact people with intellectual disabilities. It is important to note that the impact of an intellectual disability diagnosis on employment cannot be studied in isolation. The severity of the disability can affect one's functional abilities, as McGlinchey et al. (2013) noted. Previous research has found that higher functioning levels are associated with increased chances of employment (Martorell et al., 2008; McCausland et al., 2020). Additionally, the ability to manage daily activities is a reliable indicator of occupational success for people with intellectual disabilities (Eagar et al., 2006; McCausland et al., 2020). It is necessary to conduct more research to determine how much employers' prior interactions with people with disabilities have influenced their willingness to engage in employment in the Malaysian context.
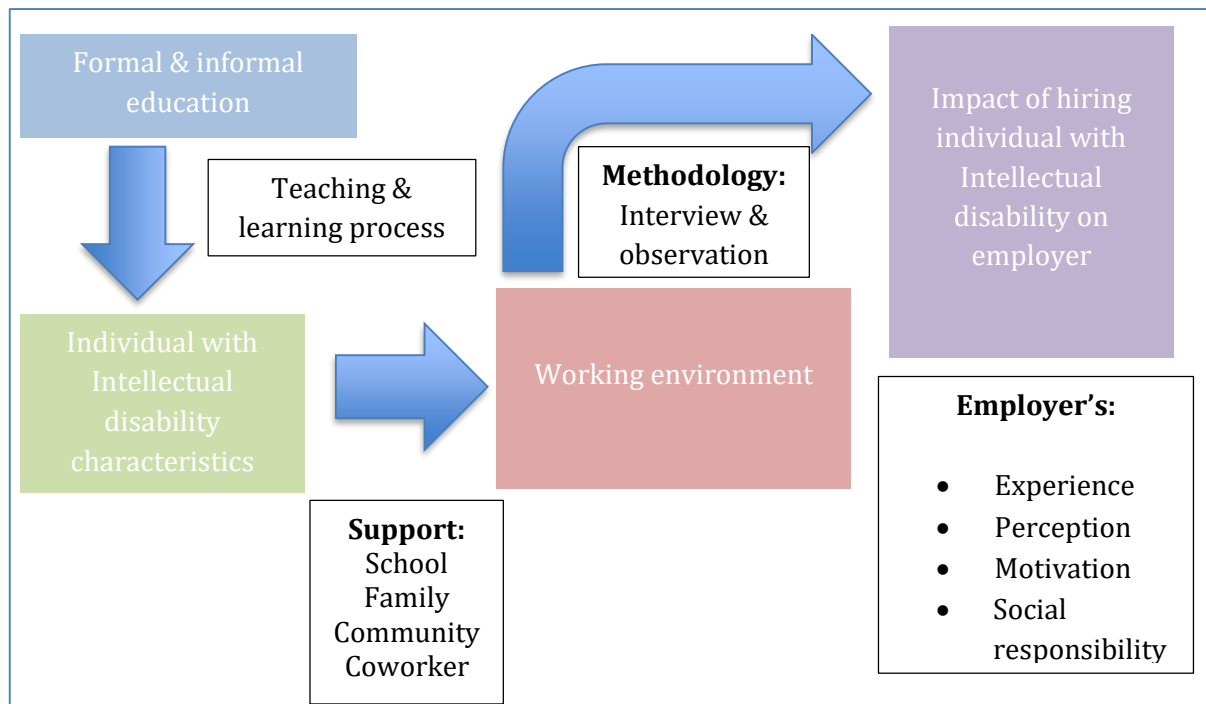
Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is developed based on the processes carried out to reflect the comprehensive study. An individual with intellectual disabilities will go through the process of teaching and learning as they grow upgrows up, either formally (at school) or informally (at home). All these teaching and learning processes will shape the character and personality of the individual. To help these intellectually disabled people get employment opportunities, they need various stakeholders' support. This study utilized interview and observation methods to answer critical questions about employers' impact on experience, perception, motivation, and social responsibility. Figure 1 below shows the conceptual framework of this study.

Many research studies have examined how employers feel about hiring people with disabilities, but there is not enough research on hiring practices for those with intellectual disabilities (ID). This study aims to understand what factors influence employers in Malaysia when hiring individuals with ID. The article explores how employers' experiences with people with ID impact their job performance evaluations. The following research questions guided this investigation:

RQ1: What impacts employer's hiring choices for individuals with intellectual disabilities?

RQ2: How do employer employ to manage individual with intellectual disabilities and promote job retention effectively?

Figure 1 Conceptual framework for the impact of hiring individual with intellectual disability on employer's experience, perception, motivation, and social responsibility.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

According to Bekele and Ago (2022), there are several crucial factors to consider when selecting a sample for a qualitative study. These factors include the diversity or similarity of the group being studied, the size and scope of the investigation, the subject matter being examined, the quality of the data, and the researcher's experience with qualitative research. In this study, a production manager, a supervisor, and a line leader were chosen to participate. They were responsible for managing employees with intellectual disabilities at a factory in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. This factory is affiliated with a well-known multinational enterprise. The study author contacted the organization's management and obtained permission to interview three employer representatives once. In the present article, the individuals under investigation have been denoted by designated aliases (P1, P2, and P3) or, alternatively, as 'the participants'. Table 1 provides additional information about the participants. The criteria for selecting employer representatives were based on their involvement in research related to individuals with intellectual disabilities, obtaining informed consent from participants, and obtaining consent from employees to participate in the study. Further details on the employers are currently unavailable to preserve their anonymity. According to Witzel and Reiter (2012), each participant must comprehend the information provided. The Personal Communication Inventory (PCI) proposes a flexible methodology that can effectively cater to the varied communicative capacities of respondents.

Table 1 Information regarding the participating employers in the interview process

Position	Pseudonym	Gander	Age	Working Experience
Manager	P1	Male	45	18 years
Supervisor	P2	Male	37	15 years
Line leader	P3	Male	33	9 years

Instrument

Semi-structured interviews are recommended as the optimal research methodology for our investigation by experts (Bowen, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Cresswell, 2012; Galletta, 2013; Kallio et al., 2016; Yin, 2016). This approach has become famous for its adaptability and versatility. The customization of the study protocol can be adapted to suit individual or group settings (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and can be aligned with the research questions and objectives (Kelly et al., 2010). This methodology facilitates the establishment of rapport with participants and enables the researcher to gain access to their subjective viewpoints. Open-ended and comprehensive questions in semi-structured interviews improve the respondent's ability to provide valuable information. This study employs a semi-structured interview format comprising five open-ended questions to gather participant data. Analyzing written documents can provide invaluable insights into the subject matter under investigation (Bowen, 2009). The primary objective of this research is to investigate how the employment of individuals with intellectual disabilities affects employers' experience, perception, motivation, and social responsibility. Through the interviews, we aim to comprehend employers' outlooks toward individuals with intellectual disabilities and the influence of their employment on the organization.

The employer interviews encompassed crucial topics such as recruitment, current work arrangements with modifications and wage subsidies, and employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. No additional interviews were conducted as no outstanding inquiries or concerns required follow-up with the employers. The interviews were conducted remotely through video conferencing and meticulously recorded before transcription. The researchers conducted qualitative content analysis following the guidelines of Graneheim and Lundman (2004), using manual and thematic methods.

Analysis

The first step is to transcribe the recorded interview when analyzing interview data. This process helps researchers familiarize themselves with the collected data and improve their understanding of the research topics (Bailey, 2008). Researchers rely on contextual knowledge of words gained from prior interview experience to ensure accurate data analysis. In this study, the researchers followed established guidelines to transcribe and review the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 2014). The transcription process involves a methodical approach to ensure accuracy.

The gathered data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which involves organizing and recognizing themes or patterns in textual data for subjective interpretation. The data was obtained via transcribed interviews and manually organized, followed by the coding process, which involved identifying primary and subcategories based on thematic criteria (Côté et al., 1993). This facilitated the segmentation of written content into distinct pieces using real-world evidence. After thoroughly analyzing all the manuscripts, the selected text excerpt was extracted, categorized through tagging, and documented under the corresponding interview recording. Reliability and data management are crucial in ensuring the trustworthiness and authenticity of qualitative research data (White et al., 2012). Effective leadership and team management are also essential for achieving organizational success.

RESULTS

RQ1: What impacts employer's hiring choices for individuals with intellectual disabilities?

The study revealed that the presence of workers with intellectual disabilities was a novel experience for the participants. The research inquiry aimed to investigate the determinants influencing the inclination to hire individuals with intellectual disabilities. The discussion will examine the understanding of intellectual disabilities, the recruitment process, and current work arrangements with adaptations for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Understanding of intellectual disabilities. During the interview, it was discovered that all three participants needed to gain experience working with employees with special educational needs (SEN).

One participant, P1, noticed that the employee they worked with required specific instructions to understand tasks clearly. P1 needs a competent supervisor to guide them in managing workers with intellectual disabilities and creating suitable work schedules. Another participant, P2, has supervised individuals with intellectual disabilities who may look physically typical but need guidance to perform simple tasks. P3 emphasizes the importance of providing guidance when working with individuals who have intellectual disabilities, especially in the context of technological systems. P3 has been responsible for guiding employees using the electronic system for four years, including the process for applying for leave. The consensus among the three was that failure to identify the distinct attributes of individuals with intellectual disabilities would render employers unable to bear the cost of hiring workers who are perceived to be excessively reliant on guidance.

The recruitment processes. The process of employing this individual with an intellectual disability began initially when a school teacher contacted a factory to inquire about job opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities, which led to the individual's initial employment. The Department of Human Resources conducted the interview process, and the individual was ultimately hired in 2015 as the first staff member with a SEN card. Currently, the factory has five registered workers with ID status.

Current work arrangements with adaptations for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Managers have organized support groups and assigned suitable teammates to help individuals with intellectual disabilities adjust to the work environment. The manager has instructed the supervisor to monitor the allocation of tasks to prevent incidents of workplace harassment.

> *"Ever since he joined, I've been in charge of making sure he's in a team that's comfortable for him. Our supervisors are keeping a close eye on him. This is to stop him from getting swamped with work by his buddies." (P1)*

RQ2: *How do employer employ to manage individual with intellectual disabilities and promote job retention effectively?*

The study findings indicate that employers utilize compensation packages, including salary increments and medical benefits, to manage and retain employees with intellectual disabilities effectively. These strategies were identified through participant interviews. Furthermore, the participants also provided insights regarding the potential job opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Compensation packages. Providing fixed salaries, annual increments, and medical benefits drives individuals with intellectual disabilities to maintain their employment within the factory. The employee had previously worked in a setting where timely payments and annual salary increments were absent.

> *"He is a dedicated employee who rarely takes medical leave. I inquired if he had enjoyed working here for eight years, to which he replied with a wide grin that he was having a great time due to the generous salary. After joining the company, he could purchase an RM8,000 car without incurring any loans or debts. As the saying goes, the early bird catches the worm, and hard work pays off." (P1)*

> *"He is a hardworking worker and wants to learn. He's over the moon when he gets to work on public holidays because he hits the jackpot with double pay...... He's all about burning the midnight oil and getting that sweet paycheck. He spilled the beans that he was as happy as a clam working here as he could kill two birds with one stone - earn some dough and buy his heart's desire." (P2)*

> *"Even though he's got some intellectual disabilities, he's a talented worker. When we asked him why he chose to work here, he said, "I'm determined to make some serious cash, man." He's chilled since he'll be getting paid every month. This is when he first gets paid for his work." (P3)*

Employment prospects for people with intellectual disabilities. Different employers have different opinions on job opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. Nonetheless, some participants agreed that individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities could work in manufacturing with some extra support. The level of assistance required will depend on the person's cognitive abilities. Disclosing an individual's intellectual disability to their community can help them participate more actively and enhance workplace productivity.

"Through my interactions with an individual with intellectual disabilities, I gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for the diversity in our world. It's important to recognize and celebrate each person's unique privileges and advantages. Instead of solely focusing on negative aspects, we should also see the value and worth in everyone, like how diamonds are formed from carbon black and have high value due to their lustrous appearance." (P1)

"You know, people with intellectual disabilities are totally capable of handling things on their own. They need a steady job to make a living. They can do a great job just like anyone else with the proper support and opportunities. We must stop thinking they can't work – that's not true." (P2)

"Anyway, individuals with moderate intellectual disabilities can totally rock it in the manufacturing industry with some support from their coworkers. They need a bit of help and direction to reach their full potential. They can make it independently and crush it in their career with some help and good chances."

Figure 2 provides a summary of the thematic analysis based on the findings of the present study. These five interrelated themes contribute to a better understanding of the determinants that impact the recruitment and retention of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the workforce. Additional information is elaborated upon in the section designated for discussion.

Figure 2 Theme for employers' hiring choices for individuals with intellectual disabilities

DISCUSSION

Collaboration among all stakeholders, including individuals with intellectual disabilities, their families, workforce support providers, employers, and other relevant parties, is crucial to effectively enhancing employment opportunities for people with ID (Shogren et al., 2020). The research findings indicate that employers tend to recruit individuals with intellectual disabilities because they acknowledge the distinctive personal characteristics commonly linked with this demographic. People with intellectual disabilities may not show noticeable physical abnormalities, and only those who interact with them in social situations can identify their disability. The presence of a social network among coworkers is a crucial factor for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Previous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between social networks and participation in the labor force.

According to Aguilera (2002) research, individuals who are not currently employed or are employed in positions that do not fully utilize their skills and qualifications can utilize their social networks to improve their chances of finding suitable employment opportunities. Studies have consistently shown that people with intellectual disabilities have a better quality of life and job satisfaction when they have positive relationships with their colleagues. To further explore this correlation, researchers conducted several studies examining the link between career adaptability, positive psychological characteristics, and life satisfaction among individuals with intellectual disabilities. Results from these studies, conducted by Santilli et al. in 2014 and 2020, and by Ginevra and colleagues in 2018, all support the finding that positive relationships with colleagues lead to improved quality of life and job satisfaction for people with intellectual disabilities. Remunerative work is seen as a way for individuals with intellectual disabilities to gain citizenship, but this has historically been unattainable due to the focus on paid employment. To achieve citizenship and social inclusion, individuals must actively participate, show usefulness, and exhibit self-reliance. It can be a challenge for people with intellectual disabilities to find and keep jobs (MacIntyre, 2008; Parr, 2008). Research has shown that this group faces numerous obstacles in the job market, including negative attitudes from colleagues and managers who may need more expertise to support them (Feuerstein et al., 2009). However, our research has found that social responsibility motivates colleagues and managers to support those with intellectual disabilities. These individuals can fully contribute to society through their employment, and with appropriate accommodations such as customized equipment, facility modifications, and adjusted work schedules and duties, they can succeed in the workplace. Companies must prioritize inclusion and accessibility in their hiring practices to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Special education services are vital in helping individuals with intellectual disabilities integrate successfully into the workforce (Joshi et al., 2012). However, in Japan, only 34.9% of high school graduates from schools catering to individuals with intellectual disabilities find employment (Maebara, 2022). To improve job prospects, individual and social interventions are necessary to address challenges in social situations (Martorell et al., 2008). While the manufacturing sector has the highest employment rate, there is a growing trend in the wholesale/retail, medical care, and welfare sectors (Maebara, 2022). Our research shows that teachers' engagement with the external community is critical to the employment prospects of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Hosshan, 2022). Therefore, educators must establish relationships with the industry to improve the employability of students with special needs, especially those with intellectual disabilities.

Our study indicates that having a job and earning a fair salary correlate positively. This is especially important for individuals with intellectual disabilities, including those who can live independently, as they should have access to job opportunities that are customized and fair. Additional research to confirm this connection would reinforce this recommendation. Other recent studies conducted by (Cameron & Townend, (2021); Dreaver et al. (2020); Hayward et al. (2019); and Scott et al. (2019) have examined the support needs of individuals with autism in the workplace and identified fac have also examined the support needs of individuals with autism in the workplace and identified factors that can improve their chances of success, such as mentoring. Our study further highlights the importance of a fair compensation package in supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities in their professional endeavors.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present investigation thoroughly analyzes the opinions expressed by three interviewees concerning the employment prospects of individuals with intellectual disabilities, solely relying on their accounts. It is important to note that the participants' individual experiences and perceptions may lead to divergent outcomes. While the author's insights on enhancing employment opportunities for this demographic are highly informative, the conclusions rest on a single case study and do not extensively examine the conditions necessary to broaden job prospects for people with intellectual disabilities. The researcher intends to address these issues in future academic research.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of hiring people with intellectual disabilities on three participants' personal experiences, attitudes, motivation, and sense of social responsibility. The higher-ups agreed that fair salaries and social responsibility towards employees with disabilities are substantial. It is essential to educate both the employer and employee with disabilities on understanding and working with each other's perspectives to create a harmonious working environment. This approach can improve job retention beyond the compensation package. Our research recommends educational interventions for various stakeholder groups, but further studies must refine and expand on these results. The community should work together to promote sustainable employment for people with intellectual disabilities, which can significantly improve their social and economic independence.

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